



GLOBAL STRATEGY 2022: **THWARTING KREMLIN AGGRESSION** **TODAY FOR CONSTRUCTIVE** **RELATIONS TOMORROW**

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**Global Strategy 2022:
Thwarting Kremlin aggression
today for constructive
relations tomorrow**



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I. FOREWORD

The last time Beijing hosted the Olympics in August 2008, I was awakened in the middle of the night with a call on my secure home phone: US assets had confirmed that Moscow was beginning an attack on Georgia including with ballistic missiles and fighter planes en route to Tbilisi. As the 2022 Olympics take place in Beijing, in an eerie echo of 2008, Russian forces are poised to attack Ukraine. This time, Ukrainians and their democratic champions are in overdrive, seeking to deter Russian President Vladimir Putin and preparing for the worst.

Most, if not all, policymakers in the democratic West have learned that not sufficiently countering Russian aggression in the past taught Putin that he could get away with more Russian aggression. The authors of this report are committed to helping today's decision-makers better manage the current crisis. They argue correctly that the United States does not have the luxury of focusing only on China. They recognize that "Ukraine is at the center of Moscow's revisionist foreign policy" and that "frustrating Kremlin aggression in Ukraine" reduces the likelihood of provocations elsewhere and could "well prove the key to persuading [Moscow] to change course."

Fourteen years since 2008, a period marked by Russia's military build-up and a global authoritarian resurgence, democrats around the world recognize the stakes of today's crisis are not about Ukraine alone, but about the future of freedom. The authors of this paper make an important contribution by arguing that only with strong measures to thwart the Kremlin's aggression now will the United States and its allies be able to pursue more interest-based cooperation in the medium term. Notably, the authors underscore that these policies should be combined with outreach to the Russian people to lay the groundwork for a future, more constructive relationship with a Russia that respects the rule of law.

In the short-term, the authors endorse significant, new steps such as increasing US military aid to Ukraine to \$1 billion; bolstering the allied presence in the Black Sea and along the Suwalki Corridor, the sixty-five-mile Lithuanian-Polish border that separates the Russian exclave of Kaliningrad from Belarus; as well as increasing support for independent media, Russian civil society, and the non-systemic opposition. The authors also propose policy innovations such as creating a trust fund of ill-gotten assets to be returned to the Russian people when a Russian government that respects the rule of law is established, as well as enhanced personal sanctions and sanctions that escalate as long as Russian forces remain in Donbas.

However, given Putin's track record, deterrence today may require more than even the strong responses to Russian aggression proposed—rather it may require creative thinking and policies to disrupt Vladimir Putin's Russia, increasing the costs of his actions, while supporting the Russian people through new means of engagement.

I applaud the effort to lay out a vision for a longer-term cooperative relationship with a different, likely post-Putin Russia, to help Russians envision a different relationship with the United States and its allies. As the authors note, Levada Center polls indicate a majority of Russians would prefer improved relations with the West.

Thirty years since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the new states of Europe and Eurasia face grave challenges to their sovereignty. They are stronger, more integrated internationally, more economically stable and more durable than ever, but they are also under extraordinary duress. Putin was 39 when the Soviet Union collapsed, which he perceived as the greatest catastrophe of the twentieth century. He turns seventy this year and seeks a legacy of restoring a *de facto* empire as an exclusive sphere of influence.

The terms that were presented to the United State and NATO in December 2021 were essentially a restoration of the Cold War-era division of Europe. Putin aims for a reversal of NATO enlargement and US withdrawal from Europe. This comes in the context of continued threats to integrate Belarus, the aggression against Ukraine, creeping annexation of Georgian lands, manipulation of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, and the first-ever use of force by the Kremlin-led Collective Security Treaty Organization in Kazakhstan.

The aggression seems anachronistic, an echo of the actual catastrophes of the twentieth century. A post-Soviet generation has come of age. National identity is stronger not only in Ukraine, where Kremlin aggression has solidified its pro-Western orientation, but across all of Eurasia where people from Belarus to Armenia to Central Asia take pride in their countries and resent Russian interference and encroachment.

While it seeks to undo the sovereignty of its neighbors, elsewhere in the world Russia presents itself as a defender of state sovereignty. When it gains strategic advantages by propping up a murderous dictator in Syria or Venezuela, Russia champions state sovereignty over any humanitarian principle of international law.

Putin is exploiting perceived weakness in the West. But in so doing he is re-ordering the perceptions and priorities of the US and European publics. Putin can take the initiative regionally or on the global stage only when the United States is distracted. His overreach in Europe now is prompting a vigorous response. This important strategy paper is part of the response that will help to shape policy to deter Russia while supporting Russian civil society so that a democratic and peaceful Russia may eventually emerge as an authentic partner for the West.

Today's crisis is an entirely fabricated one. Putin recognizes that if freedom and democracy succeed in Ukraine—or Georgia or Belarus—that if they follow the wildly successful path of the Baltic states, it is only a matter of

time until the Russian people demand more for themselves. Today's conflict is therefore also about power inside of Russia. Confrontation with the West helps Putin consolidate control at home.

But it's neither Ukraine nor NATO that threatens Russia. Rather, Putin fears people, including his own people. So, as he thrusts the world into his latest crisis, we must avoid contorted efforts to meet his demands, echoing the actions of democracies in the 1930s which led to disaster. Rather, democracies today must meet this moment with democratic unity and strength—with solidarity with Ukraine as a nation, and solidarity with the people of Russia who deserve so much better.

Damon Wilson
President and CEO
National Endowment for Democracy

II. PREFACE

This paper offers a comprehensive strategy to manage and develop US relations with Russia over the next twenty years. This strategy seeks to thwart current Kremlin efforts to undermine the international system that the United States helped create after World War II and revise after the Cold War; to cooperate in the short and medium term on issues of mutual interest, in particular arms control; and to establish in the long term a broad cooperative relationship once Moscow recognizes that its own security and prosperity are best realized in partnership with the United States and the West.

While ultimate responsibility for this paper is mine, the expertise of my co-authors enriched the paper and provided necessary detail and nuance throughout. This paper reflects the advantages of teamwork. Indeed, the team goes beyond the co-authors. It also incorporates the knowledge and wisdom of additional colleagues with whom I have worked closely over the past eight years on US policy towards Russia. This broader group includes Gen. (Ret.) Philip M. Breedlove, Ambassador (Ret) Steven Pifer, Ambassador (Ret) Daniel Fried, LTG (Ret.) Ben Hodges, and Franklin D. Kramer.

My team at the Eurasia Center was also critical to this effort. Doug Klain sweated every line of this paper's multiple edits and provided key research support. My deputy, Melinda Haring, provided smart advice and superb editorial support. I would also like to thank my colleagues at the Atlantic Council's Scowcroft Center for Strategy and Security, Barry Pavel and Matthew Kroenig, who oversee the *Atlantic Council Strategy Papers* series, of which this paper is a part, and those who edited, designed, and helped to bring this paper to publication, including Susan Cavan, Adrian Hoefer, Donald Partyka, and Amanda Elliot.

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Ambassador John E. Herbst
Senior Director,
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III. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

After the end of World War II, the United States, its allies, and partners built a rules-based international system that ushered in peace, prosperity, and freedom in many parts of the world. The system has come under fire from revisionist powers, mainly China and Russia, seeking to fundamentally change the established international order. This paper seeks to address how to manage the multifaceted challenges Russia poses.

There are broadly two views of the threat posed by Russia. One maintains that Russia is a revisionist power that uses all means of state power, including military aggression, to impose its will on its neighborhood and to undermine US, NATO, and the European Union's (EU's) interests in an effort to revise the international order. The second view does not deny Kremlin misbehavior but contends that NATO and the EU have not been sensitive to traditional Russian interests, especially in the post-Soviet space, and have responded too strongly to Kremlin provocations with sanctions, military support to Ukraine, and enhancing NATO's military presence on its eastern flank.

This paper leans toward the first view but seeks to transcend the debate by laying out a vision for a long-term and mutually beneficial relationship with Russia. In brief, Russia is a historic great power with talented people and great natural resources. Unfortunately, within a decade of the fall of the Soviet Union, an authoritarian system formed in Russia with strong state control of the economy that directed resources to the leadership and privileged insiders, and its leader launched an aggressive foreign policy. In sum, for more than a decade, Kremlin policies have not been good for Russia, its neighbors, or the West.

Washington should seek to build a relationship with Russia in the long run—likely, but not necessarily, post-Putin—based on mutual respect, respect for international law, and respect for the international order that emerged after World War II and the Cold War. This is a Russia with which the United States would cooperate on many political issues, and with which there would be substantial economic cooperation. It would also be a Russia whose people would prosper.

A peaceful, prosperous Russia is a distinct possibility if we approach US policy realistically, and that starts with a clear-eyed look at the global system and Russia today.

The Russia challenge is evident in the economic, diplomatic, governance, and security domains.

The list of Kremlin provocations is long and includes military action notably in Georgia and Ukraine and changing borders by force, relentless and ongoing cyberattacks, electoral interference in the United States and numerous other democratic countries, assassinations abroad, disinformation campaigns, coup attempts, and efforts to buck up dictators.

There is also evidence that Moscow is likely behind some of the directed energy attacks on US officials that produce the Havana Syndrome. Russian President Vladimir Putin presides over these active measures and malign activities in his quest to destabilize the international order that the Kremlin calculates works against its interests.

All of this is a sign of fear of and opposition to democracy, especially in Russia's neighborhood. While the Biden administration evaluates the Chinese threat to US interests as its top priority, the Russian threat to the rules-based order, in the short term at least, has been more aggressive and persistent.¹ The United States does not have the luxury of focusing only on China.

The strategy outlines the following overarching short, medium, and long-term goals.

Short term: Thwart and deter the Kremlin's revisionist foreign policy, which seeks to weaken NATO, the EU, and their respective principal states, especially the United States, and to restore Russian hegemony in Eurasia. Push back against Kremlin repression at home.

Short and medium term: Seek areas of cooperation where US and Russian interests may overlap: arms control, counterterrorism in Taliban-controlled Afghanistan, reduced military confrontations, and an effective response to climate change. It also includes dialogue with Russian elites on possible future cooperation and outreach to the Russian people.

Longer term: Describe in clear terms the cooperative relationship that would emerge with a prosperous, powerful Russia that plays a constructive role in the rules-based international order. While this is a long-term objective, it should immediately be enshrined in US policy.



US President Joe Biden convenes a virtual summit with leaders from democratic nations at the State Department's Summit for Democracy, at the White House, in Washington, U.S. December 9, 2021. REUTERS/Leah Millis TPX IMAGES OF THE DAY

The strategy consists of four major elements.

1) WORK WITH ALLIES AND PARTNERS TO COUNTER IMMEDIATE DANGER FROM MOSCOW:

The first element of the strategy is to ensure that US allies and partners understand the danger coming from Moscow and work together to counter it. The United States should:

Maintain and strengthen NATO's defense and deterrence posture, both conventional and nuclear.

- Enhance the already significant forward presence on NATO's northeastern flank.
- Establish a comprehensive Black Sea strategy. To do this the United States should:
 - Work with NATO to establish a stronger and more regular NATO naval presence in the Black Sea.
 - Enhance cooperation with and defense support for NATO partners Georgia and Ukraine in the Black Sea.
- Establish mutual understanding with the EU on the danger from Moscow and how to meet it.
- Build on the first Summit for Democracy to highlight Moscow's aggressive policies in Ukraine and Georgia and show staunch support for the democratic movements in Belarus and Venezuela.

2) ESTABLISH CLEAR REDLINES ON MOSCOW'S BEHAVIOR: The second element of the strategy is to thwart Kremlin aggression and provocations against US interests and the international liberal order. The United States must establish clear redlines as a deterrent and be prepared to act swiftly when Moscow threatens or crosses them. Ukraine is the current center of Moscow's revisionist foreign policy and needs the self-defense capabilities to deter further aggression. Frustrating Kremlin aggression in Ukraine reduces the risk of Kremlin provocations against the United States' Eastern European NATO allies and may well prove the key to persuading it to change policy course. The US policy response should involve military, economic, and diplomatic tools, specifically to:

- Encourage Ukraine's military to become completely interoperable with NATO.
- Increase US military aid to Ukraine to \$1 billion per year and encourage additional assistance from other NATO members. Make Ukraine's defense to a NATO objective.
- Provide Ukraine with anti-ship missiles, naval drones, and air defense systems.
- Maintain and strengthen the current sanctions regime. Impose new sanctions promptly the next time that Moscow either escalates its military operation in Ukraine or commits a major new provocation there. In concert with the EU, impose progressively tighter sanctions as Moscow continues its current operation in the Donbas. The sanctions for new escalation should be stronger than those for ongoing aggression.

- Impose proportionate sanctions for Moscow's ongoing, under-the-radar aggression in Georgia, and consider sanctions on Moscow for its efforts to extort geopolitical concessions from Moldova for gas supplies.
- Focus on the most effective sanctions, financial sanctions and personal sanctions, on Kremlin oligarchs.
- Maintain public attention on Moscow's occupation of Crimea, the Donbas, and Georgia.
- Take a more active role in the Minsk peace process and consult with the parties to ensure that Ukraine is not pressured to make undue concessions to Moscow. Prepare to enter negotiations fully when Moscow is ready to negotiate its withdrawal from the Donbas.

Equally important, the United States should respond forcefully to Kremlin provocations against itself, as well as its allies and partners globally:

- Respond to Kremlin election interference, cyber operations, and assassinations abroad promptly with public diplomacy, sanctions, and, in the case of cyberattacks, counter operations.
- Support the democratic movements in Belarus and Venezuela.
- Provide strong support to the current reformist Moldovan government so that its reforms can succeed in spite of a Russian gas embargo.

Take advantage of Kremlin weaknesses in countering and deterring provocations:

- Uncover and publicize in English and Russian information about the corruption of the Russian regime and order US intelligence to establish the financial holdings of Putin, top Kremlin officials, and Putin cronies in the West. The appropriate classified information on this should be declassified, published, and publicized in English and Russian.
- Enact and enforce strong and transparent laws against money laundering and other hidden channels, including requirements for shell companies to disclose beneficial owners, that corrupt Putin cronies and Kremlin-associated actors use to further Russian state interests or their own.
- Implement the Corporate Transparency Act of 2020 rigorously.
- Significantly increase funding to Voice of America (VOA) and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) and use other means, including the use of the Russian diaspora, to provide information to the Russian people.
- Pay consistent but low-key attention to points of friction in the Russia-China relationship and particularly Chinese territorial claims in Russia.
- Support Russian political figures, civil society activists, and influencers facing repression and highlight election practices in Russia that prevent the Russian people from fairly choosing their political leaders.
- Counter the Kremlin narrative that the United States and the West seek to encircle and weaken Russia; make clear that the United States

looks forward to a closer, mutually beneficial partnership with a democratic Russia that respects the sovereignty of its neighbors.

3) WORK TOGETHER WHERE POSSIBLE. The third element of the strategy is to work with Moscow to reduce the dangers of competition and to explore cooperation in areas where interests may overlap. This starts with mitigating nuclear confrontation and reducing the risk of escalation of military incidents, but not at the expense of strong pushback against Kremlin provocations.

- Encourage NATO to maintain a mix of strategic and tactical nuclear options to dissuade the Russians from believing they can succeed with their “escalate to deescalate” strategy.
- Be open to maintaining and negotiating verifiable nuclear arms control agreements with Russia that also address nonstrategic systems and other destabilizing technologies.
- Regulate interactions between Russian and US warships and warplanes that risk escalating into confrontation. Reestablish the Open Skies Treaty.
- Cooperate with the Russian government on shared threats, including counterterrorism, counter-narcotics efforts, COVID-19, and climate change.
- Work to prevent the spread of Islamic extremism into Central Asia.

4) LAY OUT A VISION FOR CLOSE FUTURE RELATIONS WITH A PROSPEROUS RUSSIA. The fourth element of the strategy is to pursue a multiple-track policy designed to promote a significant improvement in relations with Russia once Moscow turns away from a revisionist foreign policy. While this policy is part of the long game, it should begin now because it will take time to have an impact. The purpose is to start to condition the Russian government, elites, and people that US intentions toward Russia are not hostile and that good relations with the United States and the West and an opening of the political and economic system would lead to both prosperity and security. As part of this, Washington should:

- Establish a framework for more interaction now with the Russian people and better relations with a future Russian government.
- Engage with all major segments of Russian society simultaneously, including various levels of Russian government, the general Russian public, elites, and involved members of the global Russian diaspora.
- Maintain and increase support for the “non-systemic” Russian opposition.²
- Sanction officials (and their spouses and children) who order and implement repressive measures.

- Increase the transparency of offshore funds and freeze and hold the assets of senior Kremlin officials and their associates in a trust fund for return to the Russian people when a Russian government that respects the rule of law is established. This would require new legislation to allow the transfer of funds.
- Impose strict reciprocity in the treatment of state media in Russia and the United States, respectively. If Russia expels RFE/RL, the United States should expel Sputnik and RT.
- Increase support for US-Russia educational and cultural exchange programs, especially for high school and college students.
- Propose track 1.5 or track 2 dialogues on alternative futures for the US-Russia relationship.
- Establish a similar dialogue with representatives of the non-systemic opposition and with the Russian diaspora.

IV. STRATEGIC CONTEXT

The emergence of Russia and China over the past fifteen years as major powers pursuing hegemonic revisions to the way the international community conducts its affairs is the largest challenge to global peace and prosperity since the end of the Cold War, and perhaps even the end of World War II.³ Russia and China's revisionism is the principal security challenge currently facing the United States. This paper will address how to manage the Russian side of the challenge, which is more direct.⁴

Since the end of World War II, and especially the Cold War, the world has enjoyed an unprecedented period of peace, stability, and prosperity. While there has been no shortage of conflict in this period—the United States and its allies have made mistakes, for instance, in Vietnam, Afghanistan, and Iraq—there has not been one hot war between great powers, the great destroyer of peace and prosperity. The end of the Cold War and its signature documents, the 1975 Helsinki Accords and the 1990 Paris Charter, seemed to herald a new international order, acceptable to both the West and the newly liberated Warsaw Pact members; one based on the rule of law, respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of nations, the peaceful resolution of disputes, and respect for human rights.

The United States sought to establish a place for a democratic Russia in the new security order in partnership with a transformed NATO that was open to new members. There was indeed some success in building NATO-Russia cooperation—for instance, the United Nations Security Council, of which Russia is a permanent member, authorized the first Gulf War; Russian troops deployed under NATO command in Bosnia and later Kosovo; the signing of the NATO-Russia Founding Act 1997; an adapted Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe; the expansion of the G7 to the G8; and joint counterterrorism efforts after 9/11. Even after the Kremlin's hostilities against Estonia in 2007 and Georgia in 2008, productive cooperation continued under both Dmitry Medvedev and Putin until it broke down in 2014 when Putin attacked Ukraine.

In this relatively peaceful and stable environment, the world economy has blossomed as never before. Global stability was an important factor, but so was human ingenuity. The ongoing revolutions in agricultural production, information, computer technology, social media, and artificial intelligence have reduced global poverty from affecting 70 percent of the world's population in 1945 to less than 10 percent by 2015.⁵ Countries that opened or directed their economies to participate in the global economy prospered, from China and the Four Asian Tigers—South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, and Hong Kong—to the former Warsaw Pact nations.

US security and economic interests are very much connected to this state of affairs, as are most of the major nations and economies—the EU, the United Kingdom, Japan, Canada, Australia, South Korea, India, Brazil, South Africa, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia. This community of interests and, in many cases, values, is an enormous strength as the international order grapples with the growing authoritarian challenge posed by Russia and China.

The United States and its allies need to understand the strengths and weaknesses of their Russian adversary. Russia is a nuclear superpower with a substantial conventional military force, first-rate cyber capability, a talented people, and a stagnant economy that nevertheless retains great potential.⁶ It has substantial energy reserves and financial reserves nearing \$624 billion, of which \$133 billion is in gold.⁷ It is also in demographic decline and suffering from brain drain.⁸ Its corrupt, authoritarian government uses the economy to oversee a vast political patronage system and to enrich its elite. If this does not change, the economy will continue to struggle, and Russian power will diminish over time.⁹ But for the foreseeable future, Putin's revisionist Russia remains a large and unsettling presence on the international stage.

Despite Russia's aggressive power projection, Kremlin policy makers are vulnerable internally for at least two reasons: first, Russia's stagnant economy over the past decade has led to declining living standards. The Kremlin has used diminishing resources to compensate Putin's cronies for losses due to sanctions and to empower the children of senior officials at the cost of regional elites. Second, while preaching a strong anti-Western message throughout society, Kremlin elites' assets and, in some cases, families are parked in the West.¹⁰ Also, despite repression and anti-NATO propaganda, some political restiveness and pro-Western thinking still endures among a notable portion of Russia's younger generation that is tired of having spent most of its existence living under Putinism and institutionalized corruption.

In the short term, Moscow enjoys certain leadership advantages in conducting an aggressive foreign policy despite being much weaker economically and even militarily than the United States and NATO. Tactically, the Kremlin's options are limited. Putin has clear goals that he pursues relentlessly: preserve a sphere of influence in the post-Soviet space; prevent the expansion of NATO and EU influence; weaken the EU and NATO, which includes interfering through subversion and social and official media in Western elections and referenda; and maintain himself in power. His provocations usually occur in the shadows—to have plausible deniability—and always maintain a line of retreat to limit losses when the stronger West responds. He also uses information operations to present his aggressive steps as responses to the aggression of his adversaries, and especially the United States.¹¹

The ambiguity of many Kremlin provocations enables its friends in the West to question whether Moscow has crossed any redlines. The deployment of so-called little green men to Crimea—unmarked soldiers who were obviously Russian but maintained an air of deniability—is a classic example of these ambiguous provocations. The Kremlin declared that these soldiers were not Russian even as various governments, journalists, and NGOs spent time proving that, in fact, they were.¹² Eventually, Putin acknowledged what clear-eyed observers had already known, after the annexation of Crimea from Ukraine.

Because of this extended ambiguity, Putin's acknowledgement of the Kremlin's lie has had little impact to this day on how people discuss Russian

aggression in Ukraine, both in Crimea and the Donbas. To this day, it is common for Western media to ignore that Russian soldiers have fought and are still present in the Donbas based on the fiction that they were volunteers or on vacation. That is why many media organizations often refer to “Russian-backed rebels” or “Russian-backed separatists” when describing the parties to the fighting. They do not mention that Russian officers are directing the fighting or that the weapons, financing, and strategic direction come from Moscow.¹³

V. GOALS

The immediate US and allied partners' goal is to thwart and deter the Kremlin's revisionist foreign policy, which seeks to weaken NATO, the EU, and their principal states, especially the United States. Moscow also seeks to restore Russian hegemony in Eurasia.¹⁴ This requires prompt action by the United States, usually and preferably along with allies and/or partners, to impose a cost on Moscow for its aggressions and provocations. Given the power imbalance between Moscow and the more powerful West, this should be doable in most instances. The key, of course, is a clear recognition of what Moscow is up to and the political will to use the United States' superior resources to stop Kremlin aggression. This policy would also serve as a lesson urging caution on China, which watches carefully how Washington responds to Moscow's misadventures.

To do this effectively, the United States needs to use its advantages, which include its wide network of allies and partners around the world; its conventional military superiority; its economic superiority, including its role at the center of the global financial system; its record as a supporter of human rights; and its cyber and information capacities.¹⁵

Washington should also exploit Russia's disadvantages: its economic weakness, including its dependence on hydrocarbon exports; its declining standard of living; its shrinking population; its population's opposition to the use of Russian troops in Ukraine and desire to improve relations with the West; the preference of elites to park their ill-gotten gains and families in the West; and the fact that the Putin regime has lost the major cities and young people as a voting bloc.¹⁶

In the shorter term, US goals include seeking dialogue with two distinct purposes. The first is to manage or stabilize the competition between Washington and Moscow. This includes reducing the risk of escalation in military confrontations and arms control.

The second is to explore possible areas of cooperation where US and Russian interests overlap—perhaps counterterrorism, including in Taliban-controlled Afghanistan; reducing military confrontations; nuclear diplomacy with Iran; reaching an understanding on the use of the Arctic; and dialogues with Russian elites on possible future cooperation as well as outreach to the Russian people are also key elements of US strategy.

The United States' longer-term goal is to encourage the evolution of a Russia that sees its role as a constructive power contributing to—not violating—the rules-based international order. This is not an effort at regime change. It looks to a day when Moscow recognizes that the path to continued great-power status depends on freeing the creative talents of its people who can turn Russia into a global economic power that attracts its neighbors into closer relations, rather than seeking to compel them due to an inability to exert soft power. Such a Russia would be an economic engine in Eurasia and a natural partner connecting its neighbors with the EU, for instance by permitting hydrocarbons from Central Asia and the Caucasus to use Russian pipelines—as required by the EU's third energy package. It

would also make Moscow a natural partner—like the EU—in dealing with global national security challenges, such as North Korea.¹⁷

What is driving the current relationship between Russia and China is Putin's obsession with what he sees as the threat of the United States—an obsession that has little chance of fading—and deteriorating relations with Europe. Putin's view, of course, prevails, but others in Moscow understand that China is in fact a danger to Russia's position in at least the Far East and perhaps even Siberia. Eventually though, when it is clear to Russian policy makers that US intentions do not pose a threat to the integrity of Russia, Moscow will understand the real national security threat facing it—the rising and increasingly assertive great power to its south.

The United States will not be the lever that puts an end to this historically anomalous partnership, thereby isolating China as the only major power seeking to undermine the state of the global order. But Washington should both understand the dynamic and publicly pay attention to it.¹⁸ As Dmitri Trenin, the director of the Carnegie Moscow Center, argues, both Russia and China have so many bilateral considerations toward various countries that they prefer to deal with the United States bilaterally and not in an alliance.¹⁹

VI. MAJOR ELEMENTS OF THE STRATEGY

THE FIRST ELEMENT OF THE STRATEGY is to ensure that US allies and partners understand the danger coming from Moscow and work together to counter it.

The United States' global alliances and relationships are a great advantage as it confronts Moscow (and Beijing). This network will be stronger if the United States properly activates it. Some of the United States' allies are slow to see the danger emanating from Moscow. For instance, some Southern and Western European states see mass immigration from the south as more dangerous than the Kremlin's aggression in Ukraine and its provocations against the Baltic states.²⁰ Others, like Germany, are developing economic relations with Russia through projects like the Nord Stream 2 pipeline that poses a danger to NATO and EU members in Eastern Europe, not least of all because it enhances the Kremlin's influence in Germany.²¹

The US government's work on this element starts with ensuring NATO's defenses. NATO has taken strong measures to ensure deterrence in the Baltics. The deployment of multinational battle groups to the three Baltic states and Poland serves as a tripwire to Russian military intervention. There is also US defense cooperation with non-NATO members Sweden and Finland that recognize the dangers of the Kremlin's current policy. But security measures on NATO's northeastern flank can still be improved.²²

The first step is to harden NATO's defenses in the Suwalki Corridor, the sixty-five-mile Lithuanian-Polish border that separates the Russian exclave of Kaliningrad from Belarus.²³ Keeping that corridor open ensures land continuity between Poland and the Baltic states, which is essential for the security of the Baltics. Strengthening those defenses would also make it harder for Moscow to defend Kaliningrad if it decides to raise tensions with the Baltic states. While it may not be the West's intention to seize Kaliningrad, that danger would complicate the Kremlin's military planning. The threats facing NATO in this region have increased as a result of Moscow's growing military presence in Belarus since the fraudulent 2020 Belarusian presidential election and the rise of a viable Belarusian opposition.²⁴

NATO needs to do much more work to strengthen deterrence in the Black Sea region.²⁵ Romania is realistic about the dangers coming from Moscow; Bulgaria and Turkey less so. The United States needs to work with its NATO allies, and with Georgia and Ukraine—two partner nations directly facing Russian occupation.

But Washington and NATO should clearly signal that these measures are a response to Russia's more threatening presence in the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov and that, were the Russian military to adopt a different course, NATO's measures could be reversed.

Washington should also take advantage of its bedrock democratic principles and oppose the challenge of the Kremlin's foreign policy in the context of the battle between democracy and rising authoritarians. Since

Moscow began its war in Ukraine, the West has expelled Russia from the G8, and has since used the G7 to take steps against Moscow—for instance, with sanctions for its occupation of Crimea.

The United States should rally the world's democracies to work together against the world's authoritarians, particularly when they pursue a revanchist foreign policy. The Biden administration's convening of a virtual Summit for Democracy in December of 2021 was a strong step in this direction. Washington should use this forum to highlight Moscow's aggressive policies in Ukraine and Georgia, as well as to show staunch support for the democratic movements in Belarus and Venezuela—both of which are struggling against Russian-backed regimes.



U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman and Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov attend security talks at the United States Mission in Geneva, Switzerland January 10, 2022. REUTERS/Denis Balibouse TPX IMAGES OF THE DAY

SECOND ELEMENT: Thwart Kremlin aggression and provocations against US interests and the international liberal order.

The Russian threat is global and US policy must be prepared to meet it everywhere. Moscow's priorities center on its neighbors, especially Ukraine, and then Europe and the United States. Washington's strategy must reflect that reality.

To meet the Russian threat effectively, the United States must establish clear redlines as a deterrent and be prepared to act quickly when Moscow threatens or crosses them. Corresponding responses may involve military, economic, and diplomatic tools, depending on the violation.

Successful US pushback starts with helping Ukraine withstand Kremlin aggression in the Donbas, the Sea of Azov, and the Black Sea. Ukraine

is at the center of Moscow's revisionist foreign policy. Frustrating Kremlin aggression in Ukraine reduces the risk of Kremlin provocations against Eastern European NATO allies and may well prove the key to persuading it to change course. Washington's objective should be to get the Russians out of eastern Ukraine, but even a Moscow bogged down in the Donbas has fewer resources and lower expectations for the success of any provocation against, for example, the Baltic states.

Pushback on the military side should include encouraging Ukraine's military to become interoperable with NATO. This can be facilitated, for instance, by building port facilities in Odesa where Alliance ships could be serviced. This would also enhance the NATO presence in the region. NATO should be looking actively at doing the same with Georgia.

US policy toward Ukraine should also increase US military aid and encourage additional assistance from other NATO members. During Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's 2021 visit to Washington, the United States announced a \$60 million increase in military aid to Ukraine.²⁶ This was a nice gesture, but given Ukrainian needs, and US interests in stopping Kremlin aggression, US assistance should rise from over \$275 million to \$1 billion annually. This would not only greatly enhance Ukraine's ability to deter further aggression, it would also send a clear message to Moscow that military victory is increasingly unrealistic.

An increase in Western military assistance would make it easier to provide Ukraine with weapons systems that make Kremlin aggression riskier. Washington's supply of counter-battery radar for missiles in 2015 and of Javelins in 2018 had a positive impact on Ukraine's defense posture.²⁷ Numerous Levada Center polls show that the Russian people have mixed opinions about conflict in Ukraine. They appreciate that Crimea became Russian almost without bloodletting, while they do not like the long and bloody war in the Donbas. The issue is no longer the great patriotic unifier Putin found it was back in 2014.²⁸ Javelins and counter-battery radars made Kremlin policy more cautious. Responding to Kremlin provocations in the Sea of Azov and the Black Sea, the United States approved the sale of up to 16 Mark 6 fast patrol boats to Ukraine in 2020, followed up by the contracting of another six boats in September of 2021.²⁹ Washington should now be looking at providing Ukraine with anti-ship missiles, naval drones, and air defense systems.

In response to Moscow's massing of troops near Ukraine's borders in the fall and winter of 2021, the Biden administration has said that it would send additional military equipment to Ukraine, if and after those troops are sent into Ukraine. While this is a good step, the timing is off. Those weapons should have been sent once the massing of troops occurred. Providing Ukraine with such weapons before an invasion enhances the deterrence of Kremlin aggression.³⁰

We note above the importance of strengthening NATO defenses among the eastern members. The Biden administration also understands the value of doing this, which is why in response to the Russian buildup on Ukraine's borders in the fall and winter of 2021 it said that a Kremlin conventional military invasion of Ukraine would lead to a strengthening of NATO's force

posture in the east. But the administration takes the same half-step here that it has done with weapons supplies to Ukraine. These force posture changes would follow an invasion. But the deterrence value of such a force strengthening among the eastern members of NATO would be greater if done immediately. Moscow's military planners would then have to take those changes into account as they plot a major new offensive against Ukraine.

While military aid to Ukraine targets Putin's aversion to casualties, sanctions target a second weakness, which is the slowing Russian economy. Sanctions have been essential for the defense of Ukraine.

Moscow was surprised by the stiff US sanctions and even more so by those enacted by the EU in the summer of 2014 for its aggression in the Donbas. Sanctions have been regularly renewed ever since. The threat of additional sanctions may well have dissuaded the Kremlin from further aggression in 2014–15.

For seven years, Moscow has been energetically seeking sanctions relief, even while arguing that sanctions do not damage the Russian economy and have no influence on Kremlin policy in Ukraine.³¹ Similar arguments have been made by Westerners with an interest in trade with and investment in Russia.³²

Moscow repeatedly states that sanctions do not impact Russian policy, yet it devotes substantial energy to trying to persuade the West to remove or at least ease them. In the crisis created by the Kremlin's 2021–2022 buildup along Ukraine's border, the Biden administration has properly threatened major, punishing sanctions. Putin demonstrated his concern about this in the December 30, 2021 phone call with Biden when he threatened a major disruption in relations if the US imposes such sanctions.³³

Sanctions have not persuaded Moscow to cease its aggression in Ukraine. But according to the International Monetary Fund in 2015, sanctions cost Russia's gross national product 1 percent to 1.5 percent of growth yearly.³⁴ Another study estimates that since 2014 sanctions may have reduced Russia's economic growth by 2.5 percent to 3 percent per year.³⁵ The authors put the impact of sanctions starkly: "The Russian economy is not likely to grow significantly until the Kremlin has persuaded the West to ease the sanctions."³⁶ With Moscow's current aggressive foreign policy seeking to reshape the global order counter to US interests, this type of serious sanctions impact is useful for limiting the Kremlin's options. Ultimately, military power depends on economic growth—so weakening the Russian economy over time will reduce Moscow's military capability and capacity for harm. There is also evidence that the perception of a worsening economic situation makes Russians themselves less supportive of the Kremlin's militaristic propaganda narrative. This, too, would constrain policy options available to the Kremlin.³⁷

Therefore, the West has a great stake in maintaining the current sanctions regime, and indeed an interest in strengthening it. There are two ways to do this. First, the United States and its partners should be prepared to impose new sanctions when Moscow either escalates its military operations in Ukraine or commits a major new provocation there. It took the United States months to respond—and the response was weak—after Russia seized



Secretary of State of U.S. Antony Blinken speaks as he greets embassy staff at the U.S. embassy, in Kyiv, Ukraine, January 19, 2022. Alex Brandon/Pool via REUTERS

Ukrainian ships in the Kerch Strait in November 2018 and began to harass shipping to and from Ukrainian ports in the Sea of Azov.³⁸ The United States should prepare new sanctions and it should reinforce its coordination with Brussels, the UK, and Canada for joint Western action, anticipating a need to respond quickly to new provocations. With prepared sanctions, the United States and/or the EU would be able to communicate privately to Moscow in order to deter aggression. While the United States already has in place punishing sanctions, there are still sectors of the Russian economy and people close to Kremlin officials who could be targeted with substantial impact.

Second, new thinking is needed to persuade Moscow to leave the Donbas. Without greater pressure, the Kremlin is unlikely in the short term to reconsider. Therefore, Washington should prepare new sanctions to be imposed every year until Moscow ceases its operation in the Donbas. For instance, Washington should announce that unless all Russian troops and military equipment are out of the Donbas by December 31, 2022, one additional Russian state bank will be sanctioned. If the EU is not willing to coordinate on this, the United States should seek ways to proceed alone, but after close consultation with Brussels. Because of the dominance of the US dollar in the world economy, it is primarily US financial sanctions that are effective. This approach would be more persuasive if rolled out as part of a diplomatic effort that also calls on Ukraine to meet its Minsk commitments. But it is critical in this case that the order of implementing Minsk start with the withdrawal of Russian soldiers and weapons from the Donbas.

Washington should also impose sanctions for Moscow's ongoing, under-the-radar aggression in Georgia. Since the 2008 war, Russian troops in occupied Georgia have been moving the internal demarcation

line between the occupied areas and the rest of Georgia a few meters at a time to expand the occupied zone.³⁹ Imposing proportionate sanctions for each encroachment might help persuade Moscow that such expansion is too expensive. Sanctions should be accompanied or even preceded by active diplomacy and information operations. The information operations would detail how far the internal demarcation line has moved to Georgia's advantage since the 2008 cease-fire. That should be accompanied by a US-led diplomatic effort at the UN General Assembly to focus on ongoing Kremlin aggression in Georgia.

Diplomacy is also an important part of the United States' efforts to contain and foil Kremlin aggression across Eurasia. This starts with constant efforts to maintain public attention on Moscow's occupation of Crimea, the Donbas, and Georgia; public diplomacy on the Kremlin's human rights abuses in these occupied territories; regular votes at the UN General Assembly and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on Russian violations of international law in these territories; and support for the Crimea Platform, Ukraine's new vehicle for maintaining international focus on Crimea.

At the same time, diplomacy is an essential mechanism for containing and ending Moscow's war in the Donbas. The current platform for negotiations on the Donbas is the Normandy Format, which includes Ukraine, Russia, France, and Germany. While not formally part of this negotiating framework, the United States has closely monitored the talks; consulted frequently with France, Germany, and Ukraine; and even at times engaged Moscow.⁴⁰ Critics correctly point out that there has been no progress in the formal Donbas negotiations since the two Minsk agreements were signed in September 2014 and February 2015.⁴¹ The reason is simple: Moscow has no interest in ending its aggression, and recent documents indicate that it plans to spend \$12.4 billion over the next three years in social spending in the Russian separatist-held parts of eastern Ukraine.⁴² It also spends \$34 billion a year on Crimea.⁴³

The United States should maintain an active interest in the Minsk process and continue to consult with the parties to ensure that France and Germany do not pressure Ukraine to make undue concessions to Moscow. US diplomacy, however, should take care not to displace France and Germany. They took on this responsibility, and their involvement could be key to sustaining EU sanctions.

The United States should designate a senior diplomat responsible for US policy on the war, and that figure should be in regular contact with all parties.⁴⁴ The negotiations will be important to end the war when Moscow decides that it wants to pull out of the Donbas. At that point, the Kremlin will negotiate seriously, and Washington will be its preferred negotiating partner.

Keeping Ukraine and the "near abroad" under its thumb are the top priorities of Moscow's aggressive foreign policy, but its mischief-making is global, and much of that is aimed squarely at US interests. Therefore, US policy must be prepared to meet this challenge. The list of Kremlin provocations is long: cyberattacks, electoral interference, disinformation campaigns, poisoning dissidents in foreign countries, coup attempts, bucking up dictators, and more.⁴⁵

The most direct Kremlin challenges to the United States come from election interference and cyber operations. Washington must respond to these challenges promptly and with strength. As it did before the 2018 and 2020 US congressional and presidential elections, Washington should let Moscow know that interference in its 2022 midterm elections will provoke a major US response.⁴⁶ Essential to remember though is that Washington's loud complaints about Kremlin interference in 2016 only gratified the Russian leadership about their ability to rattle the United States.⁴⁷ Future warnings to Moscow should be low-key but clear.

PLAYING ON THE KREMLIN'S WEAKNESSES

Washington's low-key warning must be accompanied by a firm response. Here, the United States should play on the Russian leadership's vulnerabilities. Russian citizens know that their leadership is corrupt, and viral investigations like Alexei Navalny's "Putin's Palace" exposé show there's a real appetite in Russia for understanding the extent of this corruption.⁴⁸ Amplifying the amount of credible, publicly available information of this nature would be highly embarrassing to Putin, his cronies, and other senior officials. The United States should also utilize personal sanctions against both senior officials and their families to magnify the pressure, especially when linked to this corruption. The US sanctions on seven oligarchs close to the Kremlin in April 2018 shocked the Russian financial markets, but since then no more Kremlin-associated oligarchs have been sanctioned. The Russian elite may weaponize anti-Western rhetoric, but they place their assets in the West and many of their family members live and are educated there.⁴⁹ This is still an underexploited vulnerability.

Western countries should also commit to passing and enforcing strong and transparent laws against money laundering. The United States and the UK are principal places for foreigners to silently stash their ill-gotten gains.⁵⁰ Those funds can then be used to build networks in the United States (and elsewhere) to discredit Western democracies and to promote the Kremlin's influence. The United States took an important step in adopting the Corporate Transparency Act of 2020 on January 1, 2021, and it is important that it is strictly enforced.⁵¹ Exposure of the beneficial owners holding properties through shell companies or blind trusts in places such as London, southern France, New York, and Miami could prove highly embarrassing to the Kremlin.

Cyber operations also demand a strong response. Here, too, public complaints are of limited value. Over the past several years, official and criminal hackers in Russia have launched numerous cyberattacks on the United States. Microsoft found that the largest number of cyberattacks originated in Russia between July 2020 and June 2021 and the United States was the number one country target.⁵²

Even still, US President Joseph R. Biden, Jr.'s June Geneva summit warning to Putin was quickly followed by a series of cyberattacks emanating from Russia. After Biden complained to Putin in early July, the Russian hacker group responsible for those attacks, REvil, disappeared from the web. But

REvil was back online in September 2021.⁵³ Jen Easterly, director of the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency at the Department of Homeland Security, recently said that she had not seen “any significant, material changes” that suggest that the Russians have taken action in a meaningful way to follow through on their reassurances.⁵⁴ Despite the resumed offensive, Washington was busy working with Moscow on a joint cyber approach at the UN. Even worse, Washington gave Moscow a major gift. It deported back to Russia Aleksei Burkov, a Russian hacker sentenced to nine years in US prison for cybercrimes.⁵⁵ All of this was a serious error conveying American weakness to the Kremlin with possible impact on Russian calculations in other areas of confrontation with the United States, such as Ukraine.

It is necessary that the United States respond in kind to cyberattacks to establish deterrence. To prevent major Russian cyber intervention in the 2018 US midterm elections, US Cyber Command took scores of individual Russian hackers offline for several days.⁵⁶ It worked before and can work again.

There is a distinction between Russian government hacking—by the FSB or the GRU—and hacking by criminal groups. The United States certainly must respond to cyberattacks by Russian government agents, but it should also not be lulled into inaction when attacks are carried out by “private” Russian groups. Just as centuries ago European countries commissioned “privateers” to raid the shipping of their opponents to avoid responsibility, the Russian special services have a great deal of influence and even control over criminal hackers.⁵⁷

The Kremlin’s propensity to support dictators, even when they are committing atrocities or destabilizing their own countries and their neighbors, merits a response as well. Each situation is unique and must be dealt with individually. US policy makers must carefully consider the likelihood that these dictators could fall from power and the nature of their likely replacements. In Belarus and Venezuela, we know that the current opposition leaders—Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya and Juan Guaidó, respectively—likely won a majority in their respective presidential elections and are in fact democratic politicians.⁵⁸ In these cases, US support is warranted. The United States can consider a combination of diplomatic support for the opposition and sanctions on Moscow.⁵⁹

ASSASSINATION, COUPS, ELECTIONS, AND OTHER FORMS OF POLITICAL INTERFERENCE

Moscow has amassed an infamous record of mischief-making over the past decade: interference in elections in Germany, France, and in the UK’s Brexit referendum; the blowing up of a weapons depot in the Czech Republic in 2014; the poisoning of Sergei Skripal and his daughter in the UK in 2018; the assassination of Zelimkhan Khangoshvili in Berlin in 2019; the attempted coup in Montenegro in 2016; the covert support for Catalan independence in 2017; and the efforts to derail the Prespa Agreement between Greece and the Republic of North Macedonia in 2018.⁶⁰

Here, too, there is a need to handle each matter individually. But the United States should be in close contact with each aggrieved country to show support and a willingness to consider countermeasures, if any, sought by the victim. The principal approach here should be diplomatic, although in some cases sanctions might be considered, but only on a multilateral basis.

It is also important that public and private US diplomacy use these cases to drive home the case, especially for some allies slow to recognize the problem of Moscow's aggressive foreign policy. It is well known that Europe's south and west were slow to see the danger posed by Moscow's war in Ukraine. But Moscow's misstep on Catalan proved persuasive in Spain about the dangers of Kremlin policy; the same in Greece with Moscow's failed sabotage of the Prespa Agreement. US public diplomacy should aggregate and amplify the Kremlin's misdeeds.

To help with this, the United States should greatly expand the capacity of its public diplomacy. Over the past decade, Moscow has lavished substantial resources on its international arm and truly mastered disinformation operations. The US response should include a significant increase of resources to VOA, RFE/RL, and the State Department's Global Engagement Center, and US public diplomacy should aggregate and amplify Kremlin misdeeds. US efforts here should include support for diaspora and émigré Russian media platforms and target Russian social media too. While bureaucrats in Washington have long been cautious—perhaps overly so—to turn up the pressure on Russia in this way, Moscow's warping of the global information space warrants this escalation. The intended audience is Russian—partly as a direct response to Kremlin disinformation operations in the West—but also global.



People stand under a giant screen broadcasting news footage of Chinese President Xi Jinping attending a video conference call with Russian President Vladimir Putin, in Beijing, China June 28, 2021. REUTERS/Tingshu Wang

THE RUSSIA-CHINA PROBLEM

US policy toward Russia must also consider Russia's growing closeness with China. There is increasing talk within the foreign policy community of seeking to decouple Moscow from Beijing by "parking the relationship" with the Kremlin.⁶¹ For some this means reducing tensions with Russia by allowing it to flex its muscles in the "near abroad" with little Western objection. In the minds of these observers, this dynamic would mean less emphasis on tensions between the West and Russia and a greater emphasis on the tensions between Russia and China, potentially lowering the odds of a strengthened partnership between Moscow and Beijing.⁶²

This is a false assumption. Putin and the Russian security state have identified the United States as their main foe and deliberately ignore the problems in Russia's relationship with China. They would interpret US concessions, for instance on Georgia or Ukraine, as weakness. Equally important, so would Beijing.⁶³ Next, many experts have exaggerated the depth of the China-Russia entente.⁶⁴ Both Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping stress their solidarity, and there is a growing record of coordinated diplomatic action against the United States and military exercises. But the warm words have not been matched by close interaction of the bureaucracies and major Chinese support for Russian priorities, such as recognizing Moscow's aggression in Crimea, ignoring Western sanctions, or even providing significant financing for joint projects.⁶⁵ What is more, while Russia eagerly participates in joint exercises with China in the Far East and the Pacific, China only sent observers to Moscow's Zapad exercise in Belarus in the summer of 2021.⁶⁶

Finally, as neighboring great powers, there is a long historical record of enmity between Russia and China. This is the norm to which their relationship will revert. We have a significant recent example of how this works. When Mao Zedong seized Beijing in 1949, China joined the Soviet Union as a major, but junior, partner against the United States and the "imperialist camp." Less than a decade later, the two great communist powers were exchanging hard words. Less than a decade after that, they were exchanging bullets along their long-contested border. In the late 1950s, Western experts had little idea that the rift was coming.⁶⁷

We can already see the first signs of the coming rift. While Xi and Putin embrace, Chinese journalists, historians, and even junior diplomats are laying claims on Russian territory, particularly Vladivostok.⁶⁸ In the long run, a rising, expansive China poses a greater threat to the economically stagnant Russia than it does to the distant United States.⁶⁹

The strong measures we advocate to meet Kremlin provocations are also important as warnings to the Chinese leadership. US interaction with Moscow and public diplomacy should also bring attention to Chinese territorial claims in the Russian Far East and Siberia. The United States should highlight that Beijing is laying the ground now, during its period of "close relations" with Moscow, for the claims that it will make officially in the future. The United States might also note that the very principles it cites in opposing Kremlin aggression in Georgia and Ukraine—sovereignty, territorial

integrity, and the inadmissibility of changing borders by force—would protect Russia against Chinese recidivism.

Washington should also pay due attention to Central Asia in its foreign policy. Central Asia has long borders with both China and Russia. Perhaps the greatest achievement of the states of Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan) is that they have maintained their independence and established a largely stable order.

The United States has a strong interest in helping the Central Asian countries maintain their independence in the face of Kremlin and Chinese designs—that starts with close attention to Kazakhstan in the wake of the use of Collective Security Treaty Organization troops to secure President Qasem-Jomart Tokayev's rule. But the US must also pay attention to the human rights problems in these countries.⁷⁰ It would cut against US interests if either Russia or more likely China were to exert undue influence in the region.

It would be shortsighted to reduce US engagement with Central Asia after the United States' exit from Afghanistan. Instead, Washington should seek to increase its engagement at high levels and seek greater cooperation in the economic, intelligence, and security areas, even while continuing to advocate for the principles of human rights in this authoritarian region. Washington might consider greater cooperation with the EU, Japan, and South Korea in this effort.

THIRD ELEMENT: As the United States establishes deterrence and makes aggression painful, work with Moscow to mitigate nuclear confrontation and cooperate where possible.

While containment and deterrence of Moscow's aggressive policies is the basis for a successful policy toward Russia, the United States must also be open to cooperation with the Kremlin where interests overlap. Washington has done this before. While its overarching Cold War policy toward the Soviet Union was one of containment, the United States regularly negotiated arms control agreements at the same time.

Russia is a peer of the United States only in the area of nuclear weapons—the only country that could currently destroy the United States—and this gives its nuclear arsenal a critical role in its foreign policy. Recognizing that its formidable conventional forces are still no match for US and NATO forces, Moscow has developed the doctrine of early use of limited nuclear strikes as a means of ending a conventional conflict on Russian terms. Often described in Western literature as the “escalate to de-escalate” strategy, it might better be described as intimidate to achieve policy objectives.⁷¹

Reducing the danger posed by the possession of weapons of mass destruction is the principal area where the United States shares interests with Moscow, but it is not the only one. The United States and Russia may also have mutual interests in regulating interaction between their warships and warplanes that could escalate into a confrontation, as when the United States negotiated the Incidents at Sea Agreement with the Soviet Union in 1972.

There is also a need to beef up conventional confidence-building and

risk-reduction measures in Europe under the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and NATO-Russia Council. Washington has proposed such negotiations multiple times in recent years, with little response from Moscow, whose ships and warplanes continue to recklessly challenge their NATO counterparts. Washington should continue to suggest this.

The meetings between Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Mark Milley and Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation Gen. Valery Gerasimov and similar meetings between the Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR) and Gerasimov should continue because these dialogues could open the door to such negotiations. These high-level contacts have taken on more importance with the Russian suspension of diplomatic contacts under the NATO-Russia Council in October. Established relationships and open communication lines can prevent misunderstandings during crises.

The United States and Russia might also cooperate on counterterrorism and counter-narcotic efforts, as well as on climate change. Afghanistan might also represent an opportunity to jointly prevent the spread of Islamic extremism in Central Asia.

Seeking cooperation in these areas is important for three reasons. For starters, progress in each of these areas is of mutual interest. Next, demonstrating US willingness to work with Moscow, where appropriate, makes it easier to persuade allies to join Washington in strong measures against Russian aggression. Finally, such cooperation would undermine the Kremlin propaganda narrative that the United States is pursuing an irrevocably hostile policy toward Russia. It would demonstrate to the Russian elite and Russian people that good things can come from working with Washington. This would take advantage of the fact—revealed by numerous Levada Center polls—that a majority of Russians would like to see improved relations with the West.⁷² Cooperation with the West is the key to a prosperous Russian future.

FOURTH ELEMENT: Pursue a multitrack policy designed to promote a significant improvement in relations with Russia once Moscow turns away from a revisionist foreign policy.

The strategy toward Moscow must reflect short and long-term interests, as well as the right principles. While the immediate task is to thwart Kremlin provocations, the United States should also want to establish a framework for more interaction now with the Russian people and better relations with a future Russian government. This approach is designed to transcend the binary choice—evident in decades of foreign policy thinking—between better relations with an autocratic Kremlin and support for human rights and oppressed dissidents.

The key is to engage with all major segments of Russian society simultaneously. Consistent with longtime principles, Washington should maintain support for the “non-systemic” Russian opposition—i.e., the real opposition exemplified by the poisoned and now jailed Navalny. Support



Protesters demonstrate in support of jailed Russian opposition politician Alexei Navalny outside the Russian Embassy in London, Britain, April 21, 2021. REUTERS/Henry Nicholls

is not for Navalny as a future leader of Russia. The Russian people will or should be able to choose their own leader.

US support is for Navalny the activist who should not be repressed for political activity. The bases for this are agreements that Moscow has signed: the UN Charter, the Helsinki Accords, and the Paris Charter. US policy here should include public statements and diplomatic activity, bilateral and multilateral, in support of Navalny's rights and the rights of all Russians to organize a political opposition to the government, as well as sanctions against officials who order and implement repressive measures.

This support is more crucial than ever, as the Kremlin spent much of 2021 clamping down on independent media and nongovernmental organizations, often through the use of misleadingly named "foreign agent" laws that hamper and discredit organizations with integrity.⁷³ Harassment of civil society has also accelerated, as exemplified by the October 14 storming by masked men of a film about the Holodomor famine in Ukraine engineered by Joseph Stalin, screened by Memorial—a pillar of NGOs in Russia.⁷⁴

Because of this crackdown in Russia, many are fleeing Moscow for safe havens in Tbilisi, Kyiv, Vilnius, and more.⁷⁵ The United States can support independent media and civil society by providing financing for these organizations.

Washington should also explicitly tie its sanctions policy, or at least part of it, to its concern for the Russian people. How? When US sanctions tie up the assets of senior Kremlin officials and their associates, it should publicly announce that these assets will be held in a trust fund for return to the Russian people when a Russian government that respects the rule of law is established.

It is critical that US efforts here be supported by public outreach to the Russian people. This paper discussed above the importance of a reinvigorated VOA and RFE/RL to push back against Kremlin disinformation. That same capacity will be necessary to inform the Russian people that criticism of Kremlin repression is not a manifestation of Russophobia, but support for the rights of all Russians to participate in politics and express their views about what is happening in the country and its future. US information activities should also include Russian emigres, by pulling them into VOA and RFE/RL, an established practice, but also by supporting their own information efforts to reach the Russian people, including on YouTube and other social media, and by engaging with social media influencers to meet Russians where they are. It might also include support for independent media like Meduza and Dozhd. The Kremlin has put tremendous pressure on RFE/RL and its journalists—unless RFE/RL is allowed in Russia, RT and Sputnik should be expelled from the United States.⁷⁶

Outreach to the Russian people should also include more exchange programs, especially for high school and college students. As the Russian government cracks down on independent media and civil society, limiting the kind of information that Russians have access to, the importance of giving Russians the chance to make up their own minds is magnified. The United States should also consider funding for a new university in Europe and separate educational programs that Russians can access, especially with a focus on social science and civic education.

At the same time, the United States should be pursuing talks with the Kremlin on issues of mutual interest. It should also propose track 1.5 or at least track 2 dialogues on alternative futures for the US-Russia relationship. Participants might include experts, former officials, and businesspeople; and current officials if the dialogue is track 1.5. The purpose of each would be to point to a future of cooperation and its benefits if the two countries were able to overcome current major disagreements; or, to phrase it differently, if Moscow accepted the basic rules of the international order as defined by the Helsinki Accords, the Paris Charter, and the UN Charter.

Washington might also want to establish a similar dialogue with representatives of the non-systemic opposition and with the Russian diaspora. There is an active diaspora in the Baltic states, Kyiv, Tbilisi, and also in London, Silicon Valley, New York, and Miami. This should be part of the United States' effort to interact with Russian society. The United States should publicize the results of this dialogue and make sure it echoes in Russia itself, with the elite and the people.

VII. ASSUMPTIONS

Assumption one is that in terms of military, economic, and soft power, the United States and the West have a decisive advantage over Russia and that Putin has succeeded in numerous aggressions and provocations by his willingness to take risks and working successfully to minimize the threat perception abroad. But if the United States and its allies are alert to check the Kremlin, this can be done with manageable risk.

Assumption two is that the Russian threat capability is likely at its peak now because 1) thanks to a successful military modernization since 2008, it has acquired new classes of high-tech weapons, together with a readiness to use force in ways that the United States and its allies may not; but 2) it suffers from a patronage political/economic system that limits the country's economic growth. Russia's domestic and foreign policies reinforce each other but lead to economic stagnation. Stagnation over time will reduce at least the comparative strength of the Russian military, which is currently the world's second most powerful.⁷⁷ But US policy needs to recognize that Russian power is not only substantial, and even declining major powers can be dangerous.

Assumption three is that only a major liberalization of the Russian economy—accompanied by the rule of law and, inevitably, some liberalization of the political system—will provide the basis for substantial economic development.

Assumption four is that significant segments of the Russian elite—in the financial, economic, and business worlds at least—understand the need for Moscow to liberalize its economy and the broader system. They understand, too, that Moscow's current, aggressive foreign policy is a hindrance to economic development as it raises barriers to Russia's global economic integration and results in the imposition of sanctions by the West.

Assumption five is that the current Kremlin leadership has a domestic liability because while it justifies its foreign and domestic policies by stressing the dangers posed by the West, it parks its assets there, and the Russian people increasingly understand this. This may help explain why despite massive anti-Western propaganda, Levada Center polls regularly show that the Russian people would like an improvement in relations with the West. Kremlin elites parking their assets in the West and the fact that the families of many senior Russian officials live there is also corrosive of Kremlin legitimacy, since a major aspect of Kremlin propaganda is that the West is the enemy of Russia.

Assumption six is that geopolitics and history suggest that China is more of a rival than a partner for Russia. The current entente between the two, based on animus against the United States and the international order it helped create—like the one established after Mao seized power in Beijing—will not last long. The United States and Russia will eventually be natural partners in dealing with a rising China.

VIII. GUIDELINES FOR IMPLEMENTATION

After a two-decade preoccupation with the War on Terror, there is now a bipartisan consensus that the world is in a renewed period of strategic competition. The two largest rival powers, China and Russia, are leading a serious effort to challenge US interests, and to undermine the international liberal order, established after World War II and reinforced at the end of the Cold War, that has ensured unprecedented peace and prosperity.

Russia is a nuclear superpower with a substantial conventional military force, first-rate cyber capability, a stagnant economy (but one that has great potential), and a stagnant but talented people. Its corrupt, authoritarian government uses the economy to oversee a political patronage system and to enrich its elite while suppressing all forms of political opposition. Moscow also suffers from a declining population and a brain drain as ambitious, educated Russians emigrate. If this does not change, the economy will continue to stagnate and Russian power will diminish over time. But, for the foreseeable future, Moscow will remain a large and disruptive presence on the international stage. While China may be the greater threat in the long term, Russia's modernization of its still formidable military capabilities—conventional, nuclear, and hybrid—and its readiness to use force to subjugate its neighbors make it the more immediate threat to stability and security in Europe and globally.

The US strategy toward Russia must manage its disruptive present and help set the stage for eventual cooperation that provides both security and prosperity for Russia and the West. Managing the disruptive present requires a firmer policy that deters aggression against the United States, its allies, and Russia's former Soviet neighbors, and imposes costs more quickly and severely on Moscow for its provocations. The point is to make clear that aggression does not pay and ultimately encourage a change in Russian behavior.

Setting the stage for eventual cooperation means identifying areas where US and Russian interests overlap today, and could in theory work with the current regime, though cooperation is likely to be limited; and laying out the prospects for a mutually beneficial future in which cooperation could become more profound. This second element requires outreach to the Russian people, support for the opposition in Russia, and countering Russian disinformation about US intentions, but also dialogue with the government and its auxiliaries in the think tank and media world.

The success of this second element depends on the first. When the Kremlin realizes that it cannot successfully undermine the international rules of the game or discredit Western values, it will find that its true interests include cooperation with the United States and developing its economy by unleashing its talented people and exploiting its great natural resources to prosper as part of global society. It will also find that Washington is a useful partner in dealing with China's expanding influence and territorial claims.

POLICY RECOMMENDATION 1: STRENGTHEN RELATIONS WITH ALLIES AND PARTNERS TO COUNTER KREMLIN REVISIONISM.

The policy outlined here toward Moscow is a key element in the West's overall defense of the international order. The West has a natural advantage in this contest with the authoritarians. There is a strong community of democratic nations and institutions that are the United States' natural allies and can be force multipliers in countering its great-power rivals. Washington needs to work with them in responding to the Kremlin's revisionist foreign policy and in leading a renaissance of the democratic West.

Biden understands the importance of working with allies. His preparation for his first meeting with Putin included meetings with the G7 and the EU and a NATO summit. Reaffirming US leadership of NATO, shaping a forward-looking Alliance agenda for deterring military and hybrid threats, and revitalizing multilateral cooperation with the United States' democratic partners in the G7 and EU strengthened Biden's hand in his meeting with Putin. The United States' comprehensive response to the Kremlin challenge has military, political, and economic components that are more effective in cooperation with allies and partners.

Recommendation 1.1: The United States should strengthen its leadership in NATO, and cooperation with the EU and the G7, to develop a comprehensive strategy to deter Kremlin aggression and counter Kremlin provocations. This starts with the effort to develop a common threat assessment.

Recommendation 1.2: Building on the first Summit for Democracy, Biden should frame the problem of Russian (and Chinese) aggressive policies as part of an authoritarian challenge to the democratic world. At a minimum, this forum should offer a diplomatic response to Kremlin revisionism and should serve as the start of a continuing process that can underpin the comprehensive strategy set out above.

Recommendation 1.3: The administration should also develop the D-10, the world's ten leading democracies, as another vehicle to meet the authoritarian challenge and a venue to address money laundering.

The D-10 could prove important because the arrow aimed by Moscow and Beijing at the international order is also an arrow aimed at democracy. On the military side, the United States should build on increasing defense cooperation with Australia, India, Japan, and South Korea to address the Kremlin challenge in Northeast Asia and the wider Indo-Pacific region, both bilaterally through the Quad and AUKUS, as well as through NATO's global partnership program.⁷⁸

Recommendation 1.4: Be attentive to allied and partner concerns, but do not let those concerns override US interests on critical matters.

Working with allies and partners is an art requiring that the United States consider their interests and views. At the same time, that does not mean accommodating views and interests at the expense of the United States',

or at least major interests.⁷⁹ It means understanding and accepting their points of view in a way that enables the United States to achieve its policy objectives and reduce opportunities for Russian (and Chinese) wedge-driving. In discussion of other policy recommendations, the United States will see how allies and partners can enhance its policy toward Russia. Allies have varying views on how to deal with Putin's Russia and, on some issues (like Nord Stream 2), are sharply divided; Germany is internally divided on Russia policy, including Nord Stream 2, with some rising parties (like the Greens) in favor of more resistance to Putin's pressure. The conclusion is that the United States will be able to take advantage of the opportunity to shape ongoing policy debates in Europe.

For instance, the Biden administration made a dubious decision to waive sanctions that would have stopped the construction of Moscow's Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline, a geopolitical project that would make it easier for Moscow to use energy as a weapon against Ukraine and the United States' NATO allies in Eastern Europe, strengthen Moscow's influence in Germany and especially its business community, and provide Moscow additional revenues to suborn senior officials in the West, such as those who have joined the Nord Stream board of directors. Germany's refusal to reconsider the project even as the Kremlin has exploited, if not masterminded, a gas shortage in Europe since the waiver—and pressure Moldova to make political concessions in exchange for gas—should give the administration pause to reconsider its policy, especially as Congress may force the president's hand if he does not act.⁸⁰ It is also true that such a determined effort by the US administration would encourage Germany to consider serious measures to stop Moscow from using the pipeline for malign purposes.

In discussion of other policy recommendations below, we suggest specific ways that allies and partners can enhance US policy toward Russia.



Marines of the Baltic Fleet forces of the Russian Navy train in the zone of obstacles during military exercises at the Khmelevka firing ground in the Kaliningrad region, Russia November 24, 2021. REUTERS/Vitaly Nevar

POLICY RECOMMENDATION 2: THWART AND DETER KREMLIN AGGRESSION AND PROVOCATIONS IN THE MILITARY REALM

Moscow has not hesitated to use its military for revisionist purposes, most notably attacking Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine in 2014 and occupying territory in both countries in an ongoing low-grade war. The war against Ukraine and the seizure and annexation of Crimea are perhaps the most blatant act of aggression, certainly in Europe, since World War II. Moscow has also placed its best equipped and most capable troops in the Western Military District along the border with the Baltic states and the Southern Military District adjoining Ukraine. In the Western Military District and Kaliningrad, it has the formidable anti-access and area denial (A2/AD) capabilities and the means to overwhelm Baltic conventional defenses if NATO fails to improve the readiness and mobility of its forces and their capacity for rapid reinforcement, particularly in short-warning, hybrid threat scenarios.⁸¹

Moscow has also moved quickly to fortify Crimea, placing substantial air, missile, and expeditionary forces there as well as electronic warfare capacity S-400 missiles.⁸² Here, too, Russia's aim is to deny area access not just to Ukraine, but also to other littoral states, including NATO members, challenging NATO's ability to reinforce its southeastern flank in a crisis. Moscow is aiming to ensure its domination of the Sea of Azov and the eastern Black Sea, and to extend its reach into the central and even western Black Sea.

NATO has taken strong measures to ensure deterrence in the Baltics since 2014. The deployment of enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) multinational battle groups to the three Baltic states and Poland, led by Germany, Canada, the UK, and the United States, serves as a trip wire to Kremlin military intervention, making clear to Moscow that its invading forces would encounter forces from across the Alliance. Bilateral US defense cooperation with non-NATO members Sweden and Finland also contributes. In the face of continued Russian force modernization, including the deployment of intermediate-range missiles previously banned by the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, security measures on NATO's northeastern flank must be further improved.

Recommendation 2.1: Strengthen NATO defenses in the Baltic region, including the Suwalki Corridor that connects Poland and the Baltic states, and further strengthen the four eFP multinational battle groups.

Hardening NATO's defenses in the Suwalki Corridor serves two purposes. First, keeping that corridor open ensures land continuity between Poland and the Baltic states that is essential for the security of the Baltics. And second, strengthening those defenses makes it harder for Moscow to defend Kaliningrad if it decides to raise tensions with the Baltic states.

Even with the presence of eFP battle groups, defense of the Baltics depends on rapid reinforcement by allied forces and enablers deployed in Western Europe and North America, which could be hampered by mobility bottlenecks and Russian A2/AD capabilities. The ideal solution would be

to consider a permanent, as opposed to a rotational, presence in the Baltic states and Poland. At a minimum, the lead nations in the Baltics (the UK, Germany, and Canada) should be encouraged to reduce the potential for delays by prepositioning at least a brigade set of equipment for arriving allied troops in armored for the eFP battalions. Deterrence could be further enhanced by a more persistent US rotational presence in the Baltic states, in addition to the US forces deployed in Poland. Taking these steps also reduces the chances of Kremlin miscalculations. Another possibility to enhance deterrence would be to increase the size of the battle groups to 2,000 to 2,500 troops each, perhaps with a US company assigned to each battle group in the Baltics.

NATO's Southeastern Flank

With Russia's annexation of Crimea and its efforts to assert dominance over the Black Sea, US and NATO deterrence in the Black Sea region is in urgent need of bolstering as part of a comprehensive Black Sea strategy.⁸³ The United States needs to work with all three Black Sea NATO allies (Bulgaria, Romania, and Turkey), together with Georgia and Ukraine, two partner nations directly facing Russian occupation, in developing a comprehensive NATO and partner strategy.

Recommendation 2.2: Establish a stronger and more regular NATO naval presence in the Black Sea, including in the east.

NATO should periodically exercise the right of innocent passage in the Russian-controlled Ukrainian waters of Crimea. To make this happen, the United States should work in NATO to elevate the priority of the Black Sea region to encourage more frequent and longer deployment of allied naval assets there.⁸⁴ The Montreux Convention allows warships to operate for up to twenty-one days in the Black Sea. US warships normally stay about a week or less. To further strengthen deterrence, NATO should expand its tailored forward presence in Romania and Bulgaria to remove any doubts about its capacity to defend the Alliance's southeastern flank.

Recommendation 2.3: NATO should seek to combine three annual military exercises: Saber Guardian (a land exercise with Romania, Hungary, and Bulgaria), Sea Breeze (a maritime exercise with Ukraine), and Noble Partner (a land exercise with Georgia).

Combining the exercises would promote common understanding of the regional threat in the Black Sea and establish cooperation on air and sea defense. Ukraine and Georgia might enhance their prospects for eventual NATO membership by working with the Alliance to build facilities for exercises and training in the process of establishing interoperability. This might be done, for instance, at the Ukrainian port of Odesa.

Recommendation 2.4: Take steps to underscore the vulnerability of the Russian Black Sea Fleet in its base at occupied Sevastopol.

Deploying shore-based anti-ship missile systems in Romania and Bulgaria,

and perhaps also in Ukraine, would underscore the Russian Black Sea Fleet's vulnerability and complicate Moscow's assertive naval strategy. The United States might also consider using unmanned aerial systems (UAS) to achieve the same effect. For instance, the United States can deploy the MQ-9 Reaper in Romania and maritime UAS in the Black Sea. Another possibility is to increase the number of NATO aircraft flying over the Black Sea carrying anti-ship Harpoon missiles, perhaps by helping Romania, Bulgaria, or Turkey acquire the necessary aircraft.⁸⁵

Recommendation 2.5: Enhance cooperation among NATO members and partners on both NATO's northern and southern flanks.

The United States should explore expanded NATO intelligence cooperation with Finland and Sweden in the Baltic Sea, Georgia, and Ukraine as well as with Romania and Bulgaria in the Black Sea. Fusing together the various intelligence platforms (space, air, land, and maritime) in both regions would help form a common operational picture that could facilitate combined operations in a crisis. This need not mean that NATO would share all of its intelligence. These measures in the Black Sea require effort with Turkey, which has been receptive to Moscow's on-again, off-again efforts at rapprochement, while at the same time pursuing policies that run counter to Kremlin interests in the Caucasus, Syria, and Libya. Turkey has yet to act on Moscow's projection of power in the region since seizing Crimea, beyond its expressions of concern over the repression of Crimean Tatars. Growing, if careful, military cooperation with Ukraine and adroit US diplomacy should address this anomaly.⁸⁶

**POLICY RECOMMENDATION 3:
MANAGE THE RUSSIAN NUCLEAR SUPERPOWER BY STANDING UP TO
NUCLEAR INTIMIDATION, INSISTING ON STRICT IMPLEMENTATION OF
NUCLEAR ACCORDS WHILE INDICATING A READINESS TO NEGOTIATE
EQUITABLE AGREEMENTS.**

Moscow is a peer of the United States only in nuclear weapons, and this gives its nuclear arsenal a critical role in its foreign policy. Recognizing that its conventional forces are no match for US and NATO forces, once fully mobilized, Moscow has developed the doctrine of early use of limited nuclear strikes as a means of ending a conventional conflict on Russian terms. The purpose is to intimidate the West into not taking advantage of its conventional military superiority in response to Kremlin provocations.

The key here is for the United States to be stalwart in rejecting nuclear blackmail and reassuring its allies regarding its own readiness to respond in kind to any Russian limited use of nuclear weapons. The United States can do this by implementing the bipartisan plans begun under then US president Barack Obama to modernize the US nuclear triad of submarines, intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), and bombers. US policy should also continue NATO's nuclear-sharing arrangements (deployment of US B61 warheads on allied aircraft) and deployment of low-yield nuclear warheads on ballistic missile submarines. By having multiple rungs on the escalatory

ladder, the United States and its allies will leave Moscow in no doubt that Washington has the capacity to retaliate against any Russian nuclear strikes without escalating to the strategic level.⁸⁷

Although reducing its reliance on nuclear weapons should remain NATO's long-term goal, it is premature to shift to a posture under which the sole purpose of nuclear weapons would be to respond to nuclear attack.

As Ambassador Vershbow writes, "The improvements to NATO's conventional deterrence posture undertaken since 2014 are a work in progress and still need to be backed up by the option to escalate to the use of nuclear weapons as a last resort if deterrence fails. NATO should also maintain a mix of strategic and non-strategic nuclear options to dissuade Russia from believing it can succeed with its 'escalate to deescalate' strategy."⁸⁸

While rejecting nuclear intimidation, the United States should be open to maintaining and negotiating verifiable nuclear arms control agreements with Russia, as the Biden administration did in extending the New START Treaty in February 2021 and launching a strategic stability dialogue after the June 2021 Geneva summit. Future agreements will need to address nonstrategic weapons, new technologies like hypersonic missiles, and dangerous doctrines like "escalate to deescalate," in addition to deeper cuts in strategic systems. In offering to negotiate, the United States must insist on Russian compliance with existing agreements and be prepared to walk away if, and when, Moscow violates them.

Also important is making sure that future negotiations include China, which appears poised to double its nuclear arsenal in the coming years.⁸⁹ Beijing is delighted to have Moscow and the United States accept binding limits in the nuclear sphere as it develops a third premier nuclear force. It is neither in US nor Russian interest for this to happen; but Putin's reliance as the junior partner on Xi in an anti-US axis makes Russia reluctant to insist. That should not hamper the United States, which should not enter any arrangement with Moscow that benefits Beijing to Washington's disadvantage. In taking this position, the United States should make clear that it is also defending Russian interests, which sends a message to others in Russia that the United States is prepared to acknowledge and even advance legitimate Russian interests. This gesture would help set the stage for an eventual rapprochement with Moscow, after it discards its revisionist policies.

POLICY RECOMMENDATION 4: HELP DETER AND DEFEAT RUSSIAN AGGRESSION IN UKRAINE, GEORGIA, AND BELARUS.

In partnership with the EU, Washington has imposed painful economic sanctions on Russia for its war in the Donbas and it has provided significant military aid to Ukraine. These two instruments target Kremlin weakness: Russia's economy and Putin's need to hide from his public the fact that Russian soldiers are fighting in Ukraine.⁹⁰ Provision of US military aid to Ukraine, especially lethal equipment, increases the political risk to the

Kremlin of escalating aggression. These instruments have not induced Moscow to withdraw from the Donbas, but they have helped persuade the Kremlin not to escalate.

Recommendation 4.1: Increase pressure on Putin to de-escalate now and agree to a fair political settlement that would reintegrate the Donbas under genuine Ukrainian sovereignty.

On the military side, the United States ideally would raise assistance from the \$300 million budgeted in Washington's 2022 budget to \$1 billion. At minimum, the aid should be increased to \$400 million per year.⁹¹ While a relatively modest increase was announced during Zelenskyy's White House visit in September 2021, a larger figure would remind Moscow that things are not getting easier.⁹² Washington should send more Javelin missiles and launchers, more Mark 6 patrol boats, shore radar, and shore based anti-ship missiles, such as Harpoons, and drones. The United States should also start to look at air defense capabilities, both interceptors and anti-air radar systems, to dissuade Russia from reengaging its air force. This becomes feasible if US aid rises to \$1 billion yearly.

Increasing the US and allied presence in Ukraine, such as a permanent rotating contingent of troops at a Ukrainian training center, would be an important signal.⁹³ Indeed, the United States should work to make it NATO's responsibility to help Ukraine defend itself against Kremlin aggression—without, of course, involving a commitment to use NATO forces.

The United States should press other allies to do more to arm and train Ukrainian armed forces so that not just the United States has skin in the game. It should work more closely with the UK and Canada as they send trainers and should encourage other allies to join the effort.

Rather than wasting political capital on the issue of a Membership Action Plan (MAP) for Ukraine, Washington should work within the NATO 2030 project to seek a consensus on what should be the conditions for Ukrainian accession and a clear understanding of what it will take to extend an Article 5 guarantee to Ukraine.⁹⁴

The Minsk process has produced no progress toward a diplomatic solution to the war in the Donbas, but it remains an important piece of the Donbas solution because it is the basis for maintaining EU sanctions on Moscow and keeping Germany and France engaged in the effort to thwart Moscow's aggression in the Donbas.

Recommendation 4.2: The United States should take a more active part in Donbas diplomacy with Moscow, in coordination with Kyiv, Berlin, and Paris, by designating a high-level official to engage directly with Kremlin decision makers. This could be either a dedicated special envoy like Kurt Volker, but the Biden administration seems to have opted for a serving assistant secretary of state, Karen Donfried.

Since Moscow began its war on Ukraine, the only serious discussions of possible Kremlin concessions took place in talks for a period of several months each with Nuland and Volker.⁹⁵ When Moscow decides to end its occupation of the Donbas, it will want an American interlocutor. Before we

reach that point, naming a senior US official responsible for the diplomacy also helps prevent European negotiators from going wobbly—a persistent Kremlin tactical objective.

Recommendation 4.3: The Biden administration should reaffirm former secretary of state Mike Pompeo’s Crimea Declaration that the United States “reaffirms as policy its refusal to recognize the Kremlin’s claims of sovereignty over territory seized by force in contravention of international law.”⁹⁶ It should encourage the EU and other key allies, especially the UK and Canada, to issue similar statements.

***Recommendation 4.3a:* The United States should coordinate closely with Ukraine as it uses the Crimea Platform to focus global attention on the Crimea question and focus on human rights violations against ethnic Ukrainians, Crimean Tatars, and religious groups affiliated with Ukrainian churches.**

***Recommendation 4.4:* To further strengthen Georgian security and, again, to complicate the planning of the Kremlin general staff, Washington should put in US infrastructure (logistics, equipment, an airstrip) for US Air Force use. This is well short of putting in a US base, but would provide a footprint for US Air Force in Georgia. This would also increase NATO interoperability.**

***Recommendation 4.5:* Washington should also be prepared to sanction the Kremlin the next time it moves the internal boundary between Russian-occupied regions and the rest of Georgia to take more territory. Moscow’s expansive ways in Georgia have been cost free. It is time to change that. If the EU will not go along, Washington should be prepared to act alone.**

***Recommendation: 4.6:* Washington should sanction businessmen who are helping Russia take over the Belarusian economy.**

The Kremlin helped Alyaksandr Lukashenka survive the street protests that followed his theft of the August 2020 presidential election in Belarus. Since then, Russia has established a joint military training center in Belarus and a de facto rotational presence following the Zapad 2021 exercises and is putting pressure on Minsk to agree to a union. Dmitry Mazepin, Mikhail Gutseriev, and German Gref, a Belarusian-Russian and two Russian businessmen, respectively, want to buy large Belarusian state companies. Washington should sanction these men to weaken the Lukashenka regime by demonstrating that support for him is costly.

**POLICY RECOMMENDATION 5:
TAKE THE OFFENSIVE BY USING WESTERN STRENGTHS AGAINST
RUSSIAN VULNERABILITIES TO CONTAIN AND DETER KREMLIN
AGGRESSION AND HYBRID OPERATIONS.**

***Recommendation 5.1:* Pull RFE/RL out of Russia and move to the West**

while providing additional funding—from \$21 million to \$100 million—and encouraging greater and tougher coverage from outside Russia of the Kremlin’s activities and the situation in Russia.

Increasing Kremlin restrictions on RFE/RL personnel makes their presence there increasingly difficult.⁹⁷ They are hostages to Kremlin displeasure. Pulling them out and providing more funding for covering developments in Russia from outside the country would enable more comprehensive and impactful reporting. In response to the conditions that RFE/RL and independent media in Russia have had to endure, the United States should prohibit the activities of Russian state propaganda agencies RT and Sputnik in the United States.⁹⁸

The United States should also find a way to support efforts by opposition and other Russians in the diaspora to develop ways to deliver information to the Russian people on social media. This concept also can enhance US outreach to the Russian people and is, therefore, covered under Policy Recommendation 9 below.

Recommendation 5.2: Forcefully implement new US (EU and UK) laws on financial transparency to expose and stop the flow of illicit funds from Russia (and other countries) to ensure transparency, the swift reporting of relevant transactions, and enact credible fines.

Russian private “dark money” in the West is estimated at approximately \$1 trillion.⁹⁹ Exposing this money serves two purposes. First, this money is used for subversive purposes in the West, such as financing the Brexit campaign in the UK or far-right leader Marine Le Pen’s presidential campaign in France. Second, Putin and his cronies keep their riches in the West as Russia has no property rights. So, targeting this money, which also corrupts the US financial system, will be a blow to Putin’s patronage system.

Recommendation 5.3: Make public US intelligence about the assets in the West of senior Russian officials involved in provocative Kremlin policies and Putin cronies and their families and facilitate the spread of this information on Russian social media.

Corruption is at the core of the Putin regime and one of its greatest vulnerabilities. The Russian public understands that Putin and his associates are corrupt but does not know the full extent. Navalny and his team have used this issue effectively against the Kremlin. This information can be publicized directly or through private media, such as the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project, which produced the Panama Papers and the Pandora Papers that provided embarrassing information on officials and businesspeople from Russia and other countries. This tool should be used to discourage election and other political interference by the Kremlin. In addition, Western countries should make it harder for foreign oligarchs to sue for libel.

Recommendation 5.4: Target the assets of senior Russian officials and their families in the West by freezing the funds, placing them in a publicly visible escrow account until they can be returned to the Russian people once an honest government is running Russia.

This, too, serves two purposes. It would be a major blow against the Kremlin patronage system as faithful servants of the regime and cronies and their families could not count on keeping their resources. It would also be part of the US outreach to the Russian elites and people that the United States is not hostile to them and looks forward to the day when relations can be improved. Seizing these assets would require new legislation. Visa sanctions should also be applied against the families of those sanctioned.

Recommendation 5.5: Respond to repeated Russian cyberattacks—from the government and affiliated hackers—with a strong but calibrated cyber ops while continuing a dialogue on the subject.

Both official and criminal hackers in Russia have launched costly cyberattacks on the United States in 2021 before and after Biden laid down clear redlines for Putin at the Geneva summit. The United States must respond not just to maintain credibility, but to establish deterrence. To prevent major Russian cyber intervention in the 2018 midterm elections, US Cyber Command took scores of individual Russian hackers offline for several days. The response also included sanctions and international indictments.¹⁰⁰ As John Herbst and Jeff Stacey recommend in the *National Interest*, US Cyber Command should target a range of Russian entities: potential targets include every GRU hacker and proxy group hacker (taking them offline for a prolonged period and sanctioning them), major Russian firms operating in rogue states (such as Rosneft in Venezuela), key Russian energy and transport infrastructure, and sizable business firms important to Russia's trade balance.¹⁰¹ The point is not to go after all or most of them. It's enough to cause some disruption and send the message that the Russian cyber offensive—from Russian officials and "private" Russian groups—must cease.¹⁰²

At the same time, Washington should use its cyber dialogue with Moscow to lay out principles for avoiding a cyber clash. But the dialogue cannot be in lieu of action.

Recommendation 5.6: Understand and counter so-called Havana Syndrome attacks on US personnel.

Beginning in Havana, Cuba, in 2016, hundreds of US personnel have reportedly fallen seriously ill after experiencing piercing and disorienting sounds believed by some to be microwave or directed energy attacks.¹⁰³ While debate continues on the details of Havana Syndrome—many personnel who report being affected by it have fought for the issue to be taken seriously—signs increasingly point to the involvement of the Russian intelligence services on at least two dozen of these cases.¹⁰⁴

The US government must make this issue a priority going forward. The US government should document and release detailed evidence of these attacks, and attacks on US personnel must be raised in dialogues with Russian officials. A punitive response against Russia for these attacks and future incidents must be thoroughly considered. US personnel impacted must also be provided with the care they need, both as the right thing to do and in order to retain a high-quality workforce. Calling the attacks "real" and

“serious,” CIA Director William J. Burns has begun escalating investigations into Havana Syndrome incidents.¹⁰⁵ Assessments from the CIA and a panel of scientific experts working for US intelligence agencies are a good first step.

Recommendation 5.7: Restore sufficient and reciprocal diplomatic staffing at the US Embassy and consulates in Russia.

Even in tense times, proper relations with Moscow require adequate diplomatic staffing. Recent staff reductions have put staffing at a bare-bones minimum on both sides. Washington should negotiate substantial increases in diplomatic representation at the US Embassy in Moscow and insist that Russian representation in the United States is not larger than US representation in Russia. Washington should not press for major increases or the reopening of Russian consulates that further Kremlin intelligence operations, especially economic espionage, in cities like San Francisco and Seattle. Reciprocity, or the reciprocal relationship of diplomatic facilities, means that the United States should not accept the Russian position that Russian nationals working at US diplomatic missions are counted as diplomats.

Recommendation 5.8: If Russia refuses to reinstate hiring of local staff for visa and other administrative functions, these functions should be offshored to the maximum extent possible to nearby embassies. Reestablishing some normality to visa services is essential to facilitate student exchanges and other people-to-people contacts.

POLICY RECOMMENDATION 6: MAINTAIN AND EXPAND THE USE OF SANCTIONS.

Recommendation 6.1: Sanctions should be used quickly and flexibly to demonstrate that provocations have an immediate cost. This also helps them serve as a deterrent. Preference should be given to financial sanctions and sanctions on oligarchs close to the Kremlin. Sanctions should be linked to specific Russian actions, not to a group of actions, in order to have a chance that they might achieve their objective of persuading the Kremlin to alter course as opposed to simply inflicting costs on Moscow.

Recommendation 6.2: Where Moscow is conducting offensive military operations, like in the Donbas, the United States should impose sanctions that ratchet up on a yearly basis.

The United States could provide a list of Russian state and crony firms that would face sanctions on January 1 if Moscow's occupation of the Donbas continues. One or two new entities should be sanctioned every January 1. The purpose is to underscore that ongoing aggression means mounting costs.

Recommendation 6.3: Sanctions should be used in coordination with the EU, the UK, other European countries, and Canada to heighten their impact, but when the EU is slow to act, the United States should be prepared to act on its own.

Recommendation 6.4: The Biden administration must work with Congress to ensure that the sanctions imposed for specific Kremlin provocations are removed quickly once the provocation is reversed.

The Kremlin is not inclined to reverse any of its provocative policies, but policy makers should set the stage for an eventual reversal. The United States needs to make this point clearly and persuasively with congressional participation. Hawks in Moscow point to the unfortunate example of the Jackson-Vanik sanctions, which should have been reversed after the fall of the Soviet Union, when freedom of emigration was achieved. This recommendation is also part of our strategy to lay out a positive future for US-Russia relations. In fact, the United States and EU agreed as early as 2014 that should a settlement in the Donbas be reached that restored Ukraine's sovereignty, the West would remove its Donbas-related sanctions. This will prove complicated because subsequent US sanctions included steps imposed for Ukraine-related and other reasons. But the principle of removing sanctions in response to a settlement of issues must be respected.

**POLICY RECOMMENDATION 7:
DEVELOP POLICIES IN LINE WITH THE “INTERIM NATIONAL SECURITY GUIDANCE” OF MARCH 2021 THAT RECOGNIZE CHINA AND RUSSIA AS THE TWO GREAT AUTHORITARIAN POWERS DIRECTLY CHALLENGING THE INTERNATIONAL LIBERAL ORDER UNDERGIRDING GLOBAL STABILITY AND PROSPERITY. THIS SHOULD INCLUDE STARTING A LONG-TERM STRATEGY FOR UNDERMINING THE CURRENT CHINA-RUSSIA ENTENTE.**

Recommendation 7.1: Respond to Russian provocations, in part with a view toward its impact on Chinese policy.

China finds Russia a useful provocateur in challenging the institutions and legal system undergirding the international order and draws conclusions from how the United States responds. Ignoring Moscow's flagrant violations of international law is more likely to encourage China to do the same. This means that a weak response—even if designed to persuade Moscow to work with Washington against Beijing—is more likely to encourage China to pursue more aggressive policies.

Recommendation 7.2: Play the long game to split open the current small cracks in the China-Russia relationship.

Cracks in the China-Russia relationship have already begun to appear—as diplomats, academics, and journalists have publicly expressed Chinese claims on Russian lands, such as Vladivostok.¹⁰⁶ Given both Putin and Xi's interest in challenging the United States, China will keep these claims low key and Moscow will continue to ignore them in the short term. But Moscow knows that Beijing is keeping these claims alive for future use. The United States should devote attention to these differences in the process of describing future US-Russia cooperation. Russian polymath and writer Mikhail Lomonosov famously said that the future of Russia lies in the vast treasure house of Siberia; Chinese claims are a threat to that.

As part of diplomatic interaction with Moscow, the United States should periodically affirm that Washington and Moscow are natural allies against Chinese claims in the Russian Far East and Central Asia. The United States

cannot create a split between the two powers, but it can point out that the principles Washington supports in Ukraine and Georgia against Kremlin aggression also apply in defense of Russian territorial integrity in the Far East.



A Russian serviceman runs during the ceremony marking the beginning of the withdrawal of peacekeeping troops of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) from Kazakhstan, in Almaty, Kazakhstan January 13, 2022. REUTERS/Pavel Mikheyev

POLICY RECOMMENDATION 8: MANAGE THE RUSSIAN CHALLENGE IN EAST ASIA, CENTRAL ASIA, THE NEAR EAST, AND LATIN AMERICA.

Kremlin activities across much of the world are secondary or even tertiary theaters in the competition with the United States. The Kremlin often sees the United States as its real enemy in these regions, even when it is not involved. But US and Russian interests are not opposed everywhere. The United States needs to carefully analyze each instance and choose the right mix of policies that apply.

Recommendation 8.1: Establish a dialogue with Moscow on ways to manage competition in hot spots, such as North Korea, Afghanistan, Iran, Syria, Libya, and Venezuela.

Recommendation 8.2: Explore cooperation with Moscow on Afghanistan.

With the NATO and US pullout from Afghanistan, the Taliban have returned to power in Kabul. Both the United States and Russia share an interest in preventing the spread of Islamic extremism into Central Asia from Afghanistan. Beijing, with its long alliance with Pakistan, which has provided support to the Taliban, will enjoy a privileged position in Taliban-controlled Afghanistan. The United States should explore with Moscow and the Central

Asian states how it might help protect against the spread of terrorism if a victorious Taliban returns to its previous policies. Moscow has backed away from Putin's overture to Biden that the United States might use Russian bases in Central Asia for intelligence purposes, but the United States should see if some other form of cooperation might be possible.¹⁰⁷ Any cooperation on this subject must be done delicately, in consultation with the Central Asians, not as a joint US-Russian project presented to them.

Recommendation 8.3: Increase US engagement with Central Asia.

Only one region in the world sits between Russia and China: Central Asia. Given the United States' competition with Russia and China, its long-standing interest in the security and stability of the region has become increasingly important. Washington wants to ensure that Central Asia remains independent of these two great powers, and the Central Asian states would welcome greater cooperation with Washington. The United States should pursue this by building on the C-5, the yearly consultations of the secretary of state with the Central Asian foreign ministers, pay greater diplomatic attention to Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, seek ways to foster regional economic integration, and secure transportation routes to the Indian Ocean. At the same time, the United States should continue to champion human rights in the region.

Recommendation 8.4: Explore with Moscow how best to reestablish the nuclear agreement with Iran.

The Biden administration's decision to return to the nuclear deal with Iran and to improve relations with allies opens the door to cooperation with Moscow. The Kremlin's stated position is that it wants to see a restoration of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)—the nuclear deal with Iran. Given that, it might be supportive of efforts by the United States to restore the nuclear deal if Iran will return to the status quo.¹⁰⁸

Recommendation 8.5: Consult with Venezuela's Guaidó and his team on the most effective ways to undermine Moscow's support for Nicolás Maduro.

Recommendation 8.6: Provide strong diplomatic, financial, and energy support to the current reformist government of Moldova.

**POLICY RECOMMENDATION 9:
ENCOURAGE THE EMERGENCE OF A POLITICAL SYSTEM IN RUSSIA
THAT REJECTS A REVISIONIST FOREIGN POLICY, MOVES TOWARD A
MORE OPEN SOCIETY, AND THAT WOULD BE A GOOD PARTNER FOR
COOPERATION WITH THE UNITED STATES AND THE WEST.**

US policies will not create a democratic government in Russia. Russians operating in Russia will determine the future of its government and society. But the West can encourage healthy trends in Russian society and outline a future of bilateral cooperation that over time could help move Kremlin thinking on foreign policy and domestic developments in a positive direction.¹⁰⁹

Recommendation 9.1: Maintain support for the “non-systemic” Russian opposition and dissidents consistent with US principles. This includes statements of public support when basic human rights and political norms are violated. It might also include sanctions, as Washington and Paris both promised, if a prominent opposition figure like Navalny dies in prison under suspicious circumstances.

Recommendation 9.2: The United States should explore new ways to reach Russians online and support credible voices discussing the real issues shaping Russia.

The United States should invest in and further update the US Agency for Global Media (USAGM) and the news organizations supported by it. While outlets like RFE/RL, VOA, and Current Time are sometimes tarred as “American propaganda,” their editorial independence provides essential fact-based reporting and information, often in media markets where that is in short supply. At the same time, modern media has changed with the internet—people consume information differently today than when organizations like RFE/RL were founded, and USAGM and media organizations should work on adapting to this.

Specifically, the United States should draw in voices from the Russian diaspora—both the Russian political opposition abroad and nonpolitical Russians—to create quality programming on social media to be seen in Russia and the *Russkiy Mir*, or Russian World, that is the target of Kremlin information operations. The United States should look at a public-private partnership to realize this. Some of the most credible voices for all internet users, including Russians, are not formal news organizations, but more familiar influencers on YouTube, Instagram, and other popular sites. These voices do not always focus explicitly on political topics, but the forces shaping Russia inevitably come up. The United States should explore ways to support fact-based online voices in ways that allow them to maintain credibility with their audiences while continuing to explore real issues facing Russians. Above all, these efforts should be dedicated to enhancing access to credible information that Russians can use to make up their own minds about the West, Russian government, and current events, and which way their country should be headed.

***Recommendation 9.3:* In all relevant contexts, the United States should raise its concern that Russia violates numerous international agreements, such as the UN Charter, the 1975 Helsinki Accords, the 1990 Paris Charter, and the 1993 Chemical Weapons Convention.**

The United States must defend its values, which are universal values. Since the end of World War II, the Soviet Union and its successor state Russia have committed themselves to extensive human rights agreements. The United States must insist that Russia sticks to its international commitments.

***Recommendation 9.4:* Establish a track 2 dialogue on the future of US-Russia relations. The participants would include experts, former officials, and businesspeople. The purpose would be to point to a future of cooperation and its benefits if the two countries were able to overcome current major disagreements.**

While it would be ideal to do this in a single dialogue, it may well be necessary to do one with participants close to the regime and a second one with the non-systemic opposition and the diaspora.

***Recommendation 9.5:* The United States should support internet freedom around the world, especially in Russia, to counter the Kremlin's efforts to restrict its citizens from independent information.**

The United States should pursue a proactive policy of supporting internet freedom in Russia and globally, pushing back against the Kremlin's efforts to cut its citizens off from both independent sources of news inside the country as well as the global internet more broadly. This support should consist of greater ongoing engagement in international internet governance bodies to promote connectivity and openness as global internet norms, support for new technology and advocacy efforts designed to defend internet users against surveillance and censorship by authoritarian governments like Russia's, and robust public political support for tech companies (especially American ones) facing pressure to enable Russian government surveillance and censorship efforts. In Russia and other countries with significant media censorship, where platforms offered by US tech companies are vital spaces for free and open discourse and for civil society organizing, the US government should use diplomatic channels to consistently push back against efforts to make those platforms complicit in governmental internet control efforts.

IX. RISKS, CRITICISMS, AND ALTERNATIVES

The Russia policy outlined here has several key elements. But the principal recommendations call for thwarting Kremlin aggression. These recommendations are based on the analysis that Moscow is pursuing a revisionist foreign policy that poses a direct danger to the international order established at the end of World War II and adjusted at the end of the Cold War.

This view holds sway in US policy circles, but not everywhere. In American universities and influential quarters in Western Europe, an alternate view suggests that current tensions with Moscow are a result of NATO and the EU extending their ranks to include not just former members of the Warsaw Pact, but also former republics of the Soviet Union—and the prospect of Ukraine and Georgia eventually joining these organizations provoked aggressive Kremlin policy not just toward those countries, but the West more broadly.¹¹⁰ This point of view, explicitly or not, concedes to Moscow the right to a sphere of influence where it—at a minimum—restricts the national security policy of its neighbors; at the very least it implies that if the West acknowledges Moscow's legitimate interest in dominating its neighborhood, a cooperative relationship can be restored.¹¹¹

Perhaps the most important argument made by this alternate policy school stresses the fact that Russia is the only peer nuclear competitor of the United States.¹¹² It claims that determined efforts to block Kremlin aggression, for instance, in Ukraine or in the Baltic states, risk a nuclear confrontation or worse.¹¹³

While a serious proposition, there are several problems with this criticism. First, it ignores the accumulated dangers of unchecked Kremlin aggression, with numerous Kremlin provocations documented in this paper. Second, it ignores the lessons of the Cold War. Today's critics say that the West should not risk nuclear conflict with Russia in defense of Ukraine or even its NATO allies in Eastern Europe, echoing warnings by some analysts in the 1960s that the United States should not risk "New York for Paris." However, during the Cold War, the United States maintained an effective containment policy even as Russia was a match for the US military in both the nuclear and conventional areas.

At that time, the United States maintained 200,000 troops in Germany and elsewhere in Europe. But its own analysis then was that this sizeable number would be unable to stop a conventional Soviet attack, so that large force was a strategic trip wire warning Moscow not to attack. The same is true today with the much smaller NATO forces in the Baltic states and Poland. While the beefed-up Russian forces in the Western Military District and Belarus could easily overwhelm NATO's presence in those countries, that presence still provides the same trip wire function.¹¹⁴ Still, the risk today is less than during the Cold War because Western conventional forces have a clear advantage over Russia's.

But the United States should still seek to minimize the risk of nuclear

escalation. This can be done by laying down clear redlines regarding unacceptable Kremlin behavior and pursuing dialogue with Moscow on deconfliction where US and Russian conventional forces encounter each other and on arms control and the broader outreach of US policy that also includes efforts to demonstrate that basic US and Russian interests are not in conflict.

A second area of risks concerns cyber operations and Washington's calls for a strong cyber response to Russian cyber provocations. Uncertainty comes from the fact that cyberattacks from Russian territory against the United States and its allies come from both state actors and criminal groups. Some experts claim that the United States cannot treat "criminal" cyberattacks as state sponsored. But close analysis suggests that there is often a connection between Russian state authorities and major criminal cyber groups and, at a minimum, the Kremlin has the means to act against any cyber group launching a major operation in the West.

Some experts also fear that the United States' open society makes it more vulnerable to cyber escalation. This is a serious consideration, but diplomacy and dialogue will not halt the attacks. Experience also suggests that forceful responses to cyber provocations can persuade Moscow to desist.¹¹⁵

But here too, to mitigate risk, the United States should combine clear redlines and a readiness to strike back with a willingness to hold a dialogue on cyber rules. The cyber initiative that Washington and Moscow put forward at the UN General Assembly in the fall of 2021 might prove a worthwhile start in developing cyber rules; but again, the primary goal should be to end hostile Russian cyber operations against the United States, its allies, and its partners.¹¹⁶

X. CONCLUSION

This paper offers a strategy and policy recommendations designed to achieve a wide number of objectives: to thwart and deter the Kremlin's malign behavior in the short run, cooperate where possible in the short and medium run, stand by American principles and support Russian victims of repression and the right of the Russian people to choose their own leaders, and to establish a future of close cooperation between the United States and a Russia that abides by the rules of the international order enshrined in the Helsinki Accords and the Paris Charter.

Managing the different strands of the strategy will require nuance. Yes, the United States would like to reach agreement on a new, fair, and stabilizing strategic nuclear arms arrangement, but not at the cost of acquiescing to Moscow's aggression in Ukraine or Georgia. Yes, the United States would like a dialogue with the Russian government and business community on how the United States and Russia could create a friendly and cooperative future relationship, but not by standing silent as the Russian government arrests opposition politicians and civil society activists for voicing their opinions.

The first and most important goal is to contain and deter Moscow's provocative foreign policy. The other objectives make sense as long as the United States establishes that as a firm basis.

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