

# **STRATEGY OF “CONSTRAINTMENT”**

## Countering Russia’s Challenge to the Democratic Order



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## D-10 STRATEGY FORUM

This paper was prepared in collaboration with experts from a network of think tanks participating in the D-10 Strategy Forum. The D-10 Strategy Forum is a series of Track 1.5 meetings organized by the Atlantic Council and the Centre for International Governance Innovation that aims to bolster unity and coordination among leading democracies in addressing global challenges.

The Forum brings together top policy planning officials and experts from ten like minded democracies—transatlantic and transpacific—at the forefront of building and maintaining the rules-based democratic order. Participants in this “Democracies 10”—Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, South Korea, the United Kingdom, and the United States, plus the European Union—have demonstrated a commitment to shared values and interests, and possess the requisite diplomatic, economic, and military resources to act on a global scale.

The views expressed in this paper reflect those solely of the co-authors, and are not intended to imply endorsement or approval by any other participants in the D-10 Strategy Forum.



# Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .....	1
THE NEED FOR A COORDINATED STRATEGY.....	3
RUSSIA’S CHALLENGE TO THE RULES-BASED DEMOCRATIC ORDER .....	5
A COMMON STRATEGIC VISION.....	11
THE FIVE PILLARS OF “CONSTRAINTMENT” .....	13
ENGAGEMENT AND COOPERATION WITH RUSSIA.....	19
IMPLEMENTING THE STRATEGY IN TODAY’S ENVIRONMENT .....	21
ABOUT THE AUTHORS .....	22



## Executive Summary

Russia represents one of the most vexing geopolitical challenges facing the West today. In the aftermath of Russia’s annexation of Crimea and its unprecedented meddling in the US presidential election, relations between Moscow and the West have reached their lowest point since the end of the Cold War.

As the Trump administration begins to shape its national security strategy, how to deal with Russia will be a high priority. President Donald Trump’s rhetoric on Russia during the campaign, and his stated desire to “get along” with Vladimir Putin, suggest a new Russian “reset” may be in the offing. At the same time, senior administration officials have reiterated the importance of holding Russia to account for its actions in Ukraine and Syria.

The West needs a new strategy. The United States and its allies must be clear about the nature of the challenge posed by Russia, and put in place a coordinated and sustainable strategy to address this challenge, while advancing Western interests *and* values. Russian cooperation on certain issues—such as the fight against the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS)—may be worth exploring. To be effective, however, any approach to engage Russia must be grounded within the context of a broader strategy that recognizes and pushes back against Moscow’s efforts to undermine the rules-based international order.

This paper sets forth what such a strategy might entail. It provides a framework for assessing the nature of the challenge posed by Russia, outlines a common strategic vision, and sets forth a multifaceted approach for achieving that vision. In short, it proposes an active and sustainable strategy to *constrain Russia’s ability to challenge the security of the United States and the wider West, and the legitimacy of the rules-based democratic order*, while preserving channels of cooperation on issues of mutual interest.

### Russia’s challenge to the rules-based order

Since the end of the Cold War, the West has sought to integrate Russia into an expanding international order based on shared norms and values. The transatlantic community and its partners in the Asia-Pacific supported Moscow’s shift toward a market-based economy open to international trade and investment. At the same, the West

encouraged Russia’s transition to elected and accountable governance, while seeking to promote a Europe “whole, free and at peace.”

These efforts initially appeared successful. Russia implemented democratic reforms, joined the World Trade Organization, and became increasingly connected to the global economy. But, in recent years, Moscow’s actions have demonstrated a serious and deep-seated antipathy toward the West. Under Vladimir Putin’s leadership, Russia has sought to challenge Western leadership and undermine the rules-based democratic order, claiming that that order is part of a concerted effort to diminish Russia’s influence and reshape the global environment at its expense.

THE STRATEGY WILL  
CONSTRAIN RUSSIA’S ABILITY  
TO CHALLENGE THE SECURITY  
OF THE UNITED STATES AND  
THE WIDER WEST.

Moscow’s strategy appears aimed at four broad objectives. First, it is seeking to weaken the NATO alliance—which it views as its chief obstacle to expanding its influence into Eastern Europe and former Soviet space. Second, Russia is attempting to sow political divisions within the West by engaging in influence operations within Europe and the United States, on a variety of fronts. Moscow has been seeking opportunities to foster divisions within Europe and to undermine the legitimacy of the European Union. Third, Russia is engaged in an anti-Western information campaign aimed at creating an international political environment hostile to democratic values and liberal norms. Finally, Russia has invested a great deal of time and effort in building relationships with autocratic leaders around the world that share, at least to some degree, Russia’s contempt for the West.

Russia has gone to great lengths to challenge the United States and the West, and has done so in ways that directly

undermine the values and principles of the rules-based democratic order.

The Kremlin has acted to:

- use armed force to seize control of and annex foreign territory;
- engage in intimidation and coercion in an effort to control its neighbors;
- meddle in foreign elections;
- bolster and expand assistance to autocratic regimes;
- block efforts to hold accountable those complicit in committing war crimes; and
- suppress domestic opposition groups and conduct a campaign of political assassination.

Russia's actions in each of these areas represent serious and troubling violations of longstanding norms. Viewed as a whole, they suggest that Russia cannot be treated as a "normal" state. Russia's strategic aims are directly undermining Western security, and its actions are deeply incongruent with Western values and interests in advancing a rules-based democratic order.

### A common strategic vision

The relationship the West has with Russia today—tense and adversarial—is not the relationship it would desire. Ideally, the West should seek to promote a vision wherein Russia would contribute to a stable and mutually beneficial global security environment and support the fundamental principles of the rules-based order. With Putin likely to remain in office for years to come, however, the West will need to focus on a set of objectives that it can realistically achieve in the near term. Its more immediate objectives should focus on: preventing Russia from taking actions that undermine the security of democratic states; ensuring that Russia pays a price for its irresponsible behavior; and preserving the legitimacy of the rules-based democratic order.

### Five key pillars

To have the greatest chance of success, any new strategy for Russia should be *values based, long term, and collective*. The strategy of "constraint" proposed here consists of five key pillars.

#### 1. **Defend against and deter potential Russian threats.**

The West must enhance its capabilities to defend against potential Russian threats, by bolstering NATO allies and partners in Europe, strengthening cyber defense, deterring foreign meddling in elections, and reducing European energy dependence on Russia.

**2. Penalize Russian violations of global norms.** The West must be prepared to impose and maintain penalties against the Russian government for violating fundamental norms. The objectives of such penalties are to induce Russia to cease its existing violations of norms; deter future violations; and ensure that Russian leaders are held accountable for their unlawful and irresponsible actions.

#### 3. **Wage a battle of narratives to contest Russian propaganda.**

The United States and its allies need to engage in a sophisticated and coordinated effort to push back against Russia's propaganda and disinformation campaign. The goal is not only to expose and counter disinformation, but also to drive a narrative that advocates positively and persuasively in defense of democratic norms and values, and in favor of advancing a rules-based international order.

#### 4. **Support the aspirations of the Russian people.**

In the long run, an open and democratic Russia is more likely to support global norms and the rules-based order. The West should engage in a thoughtful and strategic effort to encourage the democratic aspirations of the Russian people. This includes speaking out regularly in favor of protecting democratic rights and individual liberties, meeting with opposition figures as a regular feature of diplomatic engagements, and encouraging more people-to-people contacts.

#### 5. **Maintain Western unity.**

The transatlantic alliance, an integrated Europe, and the broader network of alliances across the Asia-Pacific have served as a foundation of strength in upholding the post-World War II order. Maintaining Western unity will be essential to countering and constraining Russia's ability to challenge the West, and will require bolstering strategic collaboration and implementing collective policies and actions for dealing with Russia.

At the same time, given Russia's size, capabilities, and influence, the West will need to continue to engage with Moscow on matters of common concern. The question is not whether to engage, but how. To avoid compromising the larger strategy, the United States and its allies should adopt a policy of *principled engagement* that makes clear that it will not offer tradeoffs that give Russia a pass for its violations of fundamental norms. Instead, the West should identify channels of engagement on a narrow set of issues on which Russian and Western interests appear to converge to at least some degree. But it must also be realistic about the prospects of such engagement, and carefully consider what specific benefits might accrue, and at what cost.

## The Need for a Coordinated Strategy

Throughout the Cold War, *containment* defined the West’s strategy toward the Soviet Union. The objective was to contain the expansion of communism by deterring Soviet military aggression and countering the Kremlin’s political influence around the world. Despite variations in policy and emphasis, this underlying strategy was sustained in coordination with Western governments across Europe and through nine successive US administrations. Unable to compete with the West’s superior military and economic prowess, the Soviet Union abandoned its commitment to communism, and eventually collapsed.

With the end of the Cold War, Western strategy toward Moscow shifted toward *integration*—bringing Russia into an expanding liberal order. The United States and its allies supported Russian President Boris Yeltsin’s shift toward a market-based economy open to international trade and investment. At the same time, they encouraged a transition to democratic and accountable governance, and sought to integrate Russia into a range of bilateral and multilateral institutions. Russia joined the Group of Seven (G7) and NATO’s Euro-Atlantic Cooperation Council, became increasingly connected to the global economic system, and sought greater cooperation with the West on a range of global issues.

However, this proved a short-lived strategy. As Vladimir Putin consolidated his grip on power, the high-water mark of Russian-Western cooperation began to recede. Since 2000, the United States and its allies have lacked a clear and consistent approach for dealing with Russia—oscillating between engagement and cooperation on the one hand, and condemnation and isolation on the other. After getting “a sense of (his) soul,” President George W. Bush sought to establish a cooperative relationship with Putin, an effort that intensified in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks.<sup>1</sup> Relations broke down, however, with strains over the Iraq War, allegations of Western involvement in the color revolutions in Eastern Europe, the Kremlin’s internal crackdown on political dissent, and its invasion of Georgia.

1 Caroline Wyatt, “Bush and Putin: Best of Friends,” *BBC News*, June 16, 2001, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/1392791.stm>.

President Barack Obama began his term with an attempt to “reset” relations with Russia under President Dmitry Medvedev. But, after some initial results, that effort soured and gave way to condemnations and sanctions after Moscow’s support for the Bashar al-Assad’s regime, and its annexation of Crimea.<sup>2</sup> With Russia’s unprecedented meddling in the US presidential election, relations with Moscow have reached their lowest point since the end of the Cold War.

The West needs a new strategy.<sup>3</sup> In his comments about Western policy toward Ukraine, European Council President Donald Tusk emphasized the need to “go beyond reactive and defensive...we need a plan for years...a long-term strategy.”<sup>4</sup> The West must be clear about the nature of the challenge posed by Russia, and put in place a coordinated and sustainable strategy that addresses this challenge, while advancing Western interests *and* values.

To have the greatest chance of success, any new strategy for Russia should be *values based, long term, and collective*. Values based refers to a strategy framed around advancing the norms and values that underpin the democratic world order. Long term suggests a strategy that provides a framework for managing relations with Russia that can be sustained over the coming years, and even decades—for as long as Russia remains a challenge to this order. Collective means a strategy that has the support of, and is implemented by, a broad coalition of states that have the power and influence to potentially shape and constrain Russian behavior through their coordinated actions, with the United States and its allies in Europe and the Asia-Pacific at the core.

2 Mikhail Zygar, “The Russian Reset That Never Was.” *Foreign Policy*, December 9, 2016, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/12/09/the-russian-reset-that-never-was-putin-obama-medvedev-libya-mikhail-zygar-all-the-kremlin-men/>.

3 “The West,” or the “wider West,” as used in this paper, refers to the leading democracies across Europe, North America, and the Asia-Pacific that have demonstrated a shared commitment to the rules-based democratic order.

4 “EU Needs ‘Long-Term’ Russia Strategy, Says Donald Tusk,” *BBC News*, December 18, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-30543050>.



# Russia’s Challenge to the Rules-Based Democratic Order

Since the end of World War II, the United States and its allies across North America, Europe, and the Asia-Pacific have supported an international order based upon democratic values, free trade and an open global economy, and respect for a set of rules and norms governing state behavior. Backed by US leadership and power, and a network of alliances, this order has proven highly successful—advancing global prosperity, guaranteeing security, and fostering freedom around the world.

While Moscow initially seemed prepared to cooperate in support of this order, it has become increasingly clear that it no longer aspires to this role. Russia and the West remain far apart on issues fundamental to the rules-based democratic order.<sup>5</sup> The Kremlin now appears committed “to advance its longstanding desire to undermine the US-led liberal democratic order, the promotion of which Putin and other senior Russian leaders view as a threat to Russia and Putin’s regime.”<sup>6</sup>

What lies behind Russia’s actions to challenge to the West? As a powerful state actor, Russia is driven by its own interests and desire to expand its global influence—and, at some level, its views are bound to conflict with those of other global powers. However, the current trajectory of Russian behavior appears to reflect Putin’s personal ambitions as much as it does Russian state interests. Putin’s top priority is to preserve his own base of power for as long as possible, and, in the process, expand his personal wealth (by some estimates, Putin’s net worth now exceeds \$200 billion).<sup>7</sup> Putin appears equally driven by a preoccupation with empire, stating in 2005 that “the collapse of the Soviet Union was

the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the [20th] century.”<sup>8</sup> His aims are to resurrect Russia’s hegemony, while challenging the leadership of the United States and the West, which he sees as threats to Russian power and influence.

Over the long term, Russia may be a “declining power” as its population and relative share of global gross domestic product (GDP) have shrunk.<sup>9</sup> But its recent actions demonstrate that it remains capable of serving as a powerful disruptive influence on the global stage. In addition to using direct military force, Russia has resorted to a strategy that emphasizes influence operations, asymmetric tactics, and other forms of political warfare—not unlike those used during the Cold War. Moscow is highly opportunistic—adept at recognizing and exploiting opportunities to advance its goals as they come about.

## Moscow’s Objectives

Moscow appears intent on pursuing four broad objectives:

**Test the limits of NATO.** Moscow seeks to weaken and undermine the NATO alliance—which it views as its chief obstacle to expanding its influence into the former Soviet space and elsewhere in Eastern Europe. Its military incursions into Georgia and Ukraine were intended to foster political instability and internal conflict—and those actions have been successful in indefinitely delaying NATO membership for both states. Russia has also engaged in provocations against other NATO states, particularly in the Baltics.<sup>10</sup> Its actions appear to be aimed at testing the limits of NATO’s Article 5 security guarantee, by engaging in asymmetric operations that fall short of a full-scale military attack.

5 Also referred to as the “liberal international order,” i.e. an international system based upon principles of democratic governance, the protection of individual rights, economic openness, and the rule of law.

6 US Director of National Intelligence, *Assessing Russian Activities and Intentions in Recent US Elections: The Analytic Process and Cyber Incident Attribution* (Washington, DC: Director of National Intelligence), p. 1, January 6, 2017, [https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/documents/ICA\\_2017\\_01.pdf](https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/documents/ICA_2017_01.pdf).

7 Adam Taylor, “Is Vladimir Putin Hiding a \$200 Billion Fortune? (And If So, Does It Matter?),” *Washington Post*, February 20, 2015, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2015/02/20/is-vladimir-putin-hiding-a-200-billion-fortune-and-if-so-does-it-matter/?utm\\_term=.7c98541688ff](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2015/02/20/is-vladimir-putin-hiding-a-200-billion-fortune-and-if-so-does-it-matter/?utm_term=.7c98541688ff).

8 Vladimir Putin, “Annual Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, President of Russia,” April 25, 2005, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/22931>.

9 Ilan Berman, “Moscow’s Baby Bust? Birth Rates in Russia are Up, But the Demographic Crisis is Far From Over,” *Foreign Affairs*, July 8, 2016, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russian-federation/2015-07-08/moscows-baby-bust>.

10 Christopher Harress, “Russian Military Near Latvia: A Dozen Aircraft Spotted in Airspace Around Baltic Sea,” *International Business Times*, July 29, 2015, <http://www.ibtimes.com/russian-military-near-latvia-dozen-aircraft-spotted-airspace-around-baltic-sea-2029743>.

**Sow divisions within the West.** Russia has sought to sow political divisions within the West by engaging in influence operations within Europe and the United States, on a variety of fronts. It has been exploiting the populist backlash against the flow of refugees into Europe as a way to undermine support for the European Union.<sup>11</sup> The Kremlin has reportedly provided financial assistance, directly or indirectly, to right-wing nationalist parties in Europe, including in France and Austria,<sup>12</sup> and has sought to cultivate closer relationships with populist leaders, such as Milos Zeman in the Czech Republic and Viktor Orban in Hungary.<sup>13</sup> More recently, Moscow has stepped up efforts to interfere in elections across Europe and the United States in an apparent bid to undermine the legitimacy of the democratic process and potentially support candidates it believes are sympathetic to the Kremlin's interests.<sup>14</sup>

**Discredit the legitimacy of Western values.** Russia has been engaged in an anti-Western information campaign aimed at creating an international political environment hostile to Western norms. Through speeches and statements by its leaders, reinforced through state media, Russian messaging focuses on two core narratives: that the West, led by the United States, is undermining global stability and international law; and that the values of openness, tolerance, and pluralism espoused by the West are a threat to the "traditional values" for which large swaths of Russian society stands. Simultaneously, Putin has sought to portray himself as a defender of conservative Christian values against unchecked excesses of liberalism and multiculturalism. Russia has used its propaganda tools, including Russia Today (RT) and Sputnik—as well as a network of paid bloggers and trolls—to amplify public sentiment against globalization, fuel public cynicism, and undermine faith in democratic institutions.<sup>15</sup>

**Build a network of anti-Western states.** Russia has invested a great deal of time and effort in building



Russia is estimated to spend between \$600 million and \$1 billion a year on propaganda platforms such as RT.

Source: *Russia Today*

relationships with leaders around the world that share, at least to some degree, Russia's contempt for the West. Most significantly, Putin has sought to deepen Moscow's "strategic partnership" with Beijing, advancing coordination across political, military, and economic realms—though considerable differences remain between the two countries.<sup>16</sup> Beyond China, Russia has cultivated closer ties with anti-Western governments in Syria, Iran, and Venezuela, while seeking to exploit divisions between the United States and longstanding allies, such as Turkey, Egypt, and the Philippines, which have faced recent criticism over human-rights concerns. Russia has also sought to showcase its role in organizations that exclude Western states—such as the Eurasian Economic Union, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the BRICS nations, and the Collective Security Treaty Organization. As it builds these relations, Moscow aims to demonstrate its resilience in the face of Western pressure, and to depict the West as on the losing side of history as political momentum shifts against globalization and liberal norms.

### Violating the Rules-Based Order

Putin's determined efforts to maintain his grip on power and resurrect Russia's great-power status have led him to pursue policies of political pressure, economic coercion, and, at times, military force to achieve his goals. Moscow has gone to great lengths to advance its interests and challenge the West, and has done so in ways that directly

11 Janusz Bugasiski, "Moscow Exploits Migrant Crisis," *Center for European Policy Analysis - Europe's Edge*, February 19, 2016, <http://cepa.org/index/?id=3abb5cbfa10eae4f9133cab2719ab1a1>.

12 Mitchell A. Orenstein, "Putin's Western Allies," *Foreign Affairs*, March 25, 2014, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russia-fsu/2014-03-25/putins-western-allies>.

13 Neil Buckley and Henry Foy, "The Visegrad Four: Brussels' Eastern Critics," *Financial Times*, August 29, 2016, <https://www.ft.com/content/e99d3b12-6b96-11e6-a0b1-d87a9fea034f>.

14 Fiona Hill, "3 Reasons Russia's Vladimir Putin Might Want to Interfere in the US Presidential Elections," *Brookings*, August 3, 2016, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2016/08/03/3-reasons-russias-vladimir-putin-might-want-to-interfere-in-the-u-s-presidential-elections>.

15 Andrew Weisburd, Clint Watts, and JM Berger, "Trolling for Trump: How Russia Is Trying to Destroy Our Democracy," *War on the Rocks*, November 6, 2016, <https://warontherocks.com/2016/11/trolling-for-trump-how-russia-is-trying-to-destroy-our-democracy>.

16 Mathieu Duchatel and Francois Godement, "China and Russia: Gaming the West," *China Analysis*, November 2, 2016, [http://www.ecfr.eu/publications/summary/china\\_and\\_russia\\_gaming\\_the\\_west7166](http://www.ecfr.eu/publications/summary/china_and_russia_gaming_the_west7166).



Russian tanks enter Crimea in March 2014 in flagrant violation of Ukrainian sovereignty. Source: Getty Images / Olga Maltseva

undermine the values and principles of the rules-based democratic order. The most salient of these include:

**1. Russia's use of force to seize control of foreign territory.** Russia's decision to forcibly seize and annex Crimea represent a flagrant violation of international norms protecting sovereignty and territorial integrity. Since the end of World War II, the use of force to seize control of foreign territory has been remarkably rare and broadly condemned.<sup>17</sup> Moscow's seizure of Crimea appears intended, in part, as retribution for the Ukrainian people's uprising against pro-Moscow president Viktor Yanukovich. Moscow's action violated the terms of the Budapest Memorandum, to which it was a party.<sup>18</sup> It has also been met with global disapproval, with one hundred states voting in favor of a UN General Assembly resolution against Russia's actions in seizing Crimea.<sup>19</sup>

**2. Russia's deliberate efforts to control its neighbors.** One of the hallmarks of the rules-based order is that sovereign

democracies should be free from outside pressure or coercion in determining their own destiny. Insisting that it has a right to maintain what Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev has called “privileged” spheres of influence, Moscow has asserted that the West has no right to interfere in matters affecting its “near abroad”—in reality, a shared neighborhood of independent states, some with westernizing ambitions.<sup>20</sup> Moscow has used the presence of Russian-speaking populations in Georgia, Ukraine, and the Baltic states as a pretext for interfering in their political affairs. Russia's threats to cut off trade and disrupt energy supplies to coerce Armenia, Moldova, and Ukraine to join the Eurasian Economic Union<sup>21</sup> represent a clear affront to global norms.<sup>22</sup> The Kremlin allegedly plotted to

17 Saddam Hussein's 1991 seizure of Kuwait, for example, led the UN Security Council to authorize a US-led military coalition to restore the status quo.

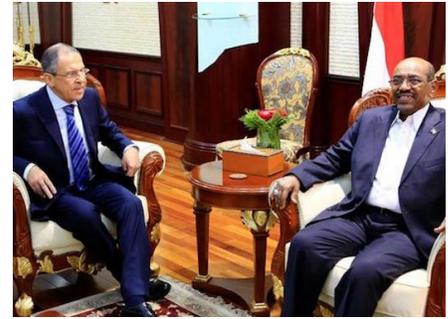
18 *Security Assurances: Memorandum on Security Assurances in Connection with Ukraine's Accession to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons*, 1994, [http://www.exportlawblog.com/docs/security\\_assurances.pdf](http://www.exportlawblog.com/docs/security_assurances.pdf).

19 United Nations General Assembly, “General Assembly Adopts Resolution Calling upon States Not to Recognize Changes in Status of Crimea Region,” March 27, 2014, <https://www.un.org/press/en/2014/ga11493.doc.htm>.

20 Dmitri Trenin, “Russia's Spheres of Interest, Not Influence,” *Washington Quarterly* vol. 32, no. 4, 2009. pp. 3–22, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01636600903231089>.

21 [http://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/22/world/europe/ukraine-refuses-to-free-ex-leader-raising-concerns-over-eu-talks.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/22/world/europe/ukraine-refuses-to-free-ex-leader-raising-concerns-over-eu-talks.html?_r=0); <http://www.rferl.org/a/eu-russia-threats-unacceptable/25103235.html>

22 Patrick Reevell, “Russia Threatens Economic Sanctions Against Turkey,” *ABC News*, November 27, 2015, <http://abcnews.go.com/International/russia-threatens-economic-sanctions-turkey/story?id=35441758>; Michael Birnbaum, “Putin Threatens to Cut Gas to Ukraine as Showdowns Shift to Economy,” *Washington Post*, February 25, 2015, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/putin-threatens-to-cut-gas-to-ukraine-as-showdowns-shift-to-economy/2015/02/25/b0d709de-bcf6-11e4-9dfb-03366e719af8\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.0c8f763ebc50](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/putin-threatens-to-cut-gas-to-ukraine-as-showdowns-shift-to-economy/2015/02/25/b0d709de-bcf6-11e4-9dfb-03366e719af8_story.html?utm_term=.0c8f763ebc50).



Russian President Vladimir Putin shakes hands with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and Chinese President Xi Jinping; Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov meets with Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir. Source: PUTIN-ASSAD (Kremlin / Alexei Druzhinin); PUTIN-XI (Getty Images / Sasha Mordovets); LAVROV-BASHIR (Reuters / Mohamed Nureldin Abdallah)

assassinate Montenegro's prime minister in order to thwart that country's bid to join NATO.<sup>23</sup>

**3. Russia's meddling in foreign elections.** Russia's unprecedented meddling in the US presidential election represents a serious affront to democratic norms. As reported by US intelligence and law-enforcement agencies, Russia engaged in a broad covert operation not only to undermine public confidence in the integrity of the US presidential election, but also to influence its outcome.<sup>24</sup> Russian influence operations in Europe—including in Ukraine—may have served as a template for these activities. Concerns are now being raised about Russia's influence operations to impact the upcoming elections in the Netherlands, France, the Czech Republic, and Germany.

**4. Russia's support for autocratic regimes.** Russia has established a practice of supporting autocratic regimes around the world, particularly those opposed to the West. Its closest political and military partners are authoritarian governments—Syria, Iran, China, Sudan, Venezuela, Belarus, and the Central Asian members of the Moscow-based Collective Security Treaty Organization. Moscow's support for autocratic regimes has included use of its veto power at the UN Security Council to block resolutions critical of human rights in states such as Syria, Zimbabwe, and Myanmar. In the case of Syria, Russia has gone so far as to intervene, with military force, to defend the Assad

regime from opposition groups seeking to remove it from power.<sup>25</sup>

**5. Russia's alleged complicity in war crimes.** Russia has sought to prevent Western-led efforts to hold accountable those involved in the commission of war crimes, and may itself have been complicit in committing such crimes. Moscow has blocked UN actions to refer Syria to the International Criminal Court following the Assad regime's alleged use of chemical weapons against civilians, and prevented the establishment of an international tribunal to hold accountable those involved in the downing of Malaysian Airlines flight MH-17—which was struck by Russian-backed forces in eastern Ukraine.<sup>26</sup> According to Human Rights Watch, Russian and Syrian military forces engaged last year in the indiscriminate use of bunker-busting and incendiary bombs against heavily populated areas of Aleppo, and may have deliberately targeted a hospital facility and a UN aid convoy.<sup>27</sup> As evidenced by the digital forensic research featured in the Atlantic Council's *Breaking Aleppo* project, Russian and Syrian forces have committed numerous atrocities against civilians as

23 Ben Farmer, "Russia's Plotted to Overthrow Montenegro's Government by Assassinating Prime Minister Milo Djukanovic Last Year, According to Senior Whitehall Sources," *The Telegraph*, February 19, 2017, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/02/18/russias-deadly-plot-overthrow-montenegros-government-assassinating/>.

24 David Herszenhorn, "Facing Russian Threat, Ukraine Halts Plans for Deals with E.U.," *New York Times*, November 21, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/22/world/europe/ukraine-refuses-to-free-ex-leader-raising-concerns-over-eu-talks.html>.

25 Larry Diamond, "Russia and the Threat to Liberal Democracy," *Atlantic*, December 9, 2016, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2016/12/russia-liberal-democracy/510011/>.

26 United Nations News Service, "UN News - Russia, China Block Security Council Referral of Syria to International Criminal Court," May 22, 2014, <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=47860>; United Nations Security Council, "Security Council Fails to Adopt Resolution on Tribunal for Malaysia Airlines Crash in Ukraine, Amid Calls for Accountability, Justice for Victims," July 29, 2015, <https://www.un.org/press/en/2015/sc11990.doc.htm>; Joint Investigation Team, "Presentation Preliminary Results Criminal Investigation," *Openbaar Ministerie*, September 28, 2016, <https://www.om.nl/onderwerpen/mh17-vliegcramp/presentaties/presentation-joint..>

27 Human Rights Watch, "Russia/Syria: War Crimes in Month of Bombing Aleppo," December 1, 2016, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/12/01/russia/syria-war-crimes-month-bombing-aleppo>.

part of a scorched-earth campaign to regain control of the city.<sup>28</sup>

MOSCOW HAS GONE TO GREAT LENGTHS TO UNDERMINE THE VALUES AND PRINCIPLES OF THE RULES-BASED DEMOCRATIC ORDER.

**6. Russia’s suppression of democracy and political assassination campaign.** Russia’s turn away from democracy at home represents a significant setback for Western efforts to promote a rules-based international order. As president and prime minister, Putin has embarked upon an across-the-board crackdown on civil society, aimed at strengthening his grip on power and weakening any potential political opposition. As noted by Freedom House, Russia’s March 2012 presidential election was “skewed in favor of Putin, who benefited from preferential media treatment, numerous abuses of incumbency, and procedural irregularities during the vote count, among other advantages,” as well as a “field of weak-hand chosen opponents.”<sup>29</sup>

At the same time, the Kremlin appears to have embarked upon a ruthless campaign of assassination targeting its political opponents. Since 2000, a significant number of Putin’s critics—including activists, politicians, journalists, and lawyers—have died under suspicious circumstances. This includes: Boris Nemstov, a prominent opposition leader; Anna Politkovskaya, a prominent journalist and critic of Putin; Sergei Magnitsky, a lawyer who was investigating potential fraud and was brutally beaten while in police custody; Sergei Yushenkov, who was shot while investigating charges that Putin’s Federal Security Service (FSB) planted apartment bombs in Moscow; and Alexander Litvinenko, a former Russian intelligence agent who was poisoned with radioactive polonium in London. More recently, Vladimir Kara-Murza, a vocal Kremlin critic, was poisoned and spent several days in a coma at a Moscow hospital. While the Kremlin has denied any involvement in these incidents, human rights organizations

have documented that Russia has been using the tactic of political assassination to silence those who could potentially undermine Putin’s legitimacy.<sup>30</sup>

Russia’s actions in each of these areas represent serious and troubling violations of longstanding norms. Viewed as a whole, they suggest that Russia cannot be treated as a “normal” state. Russia’s strategic aims are directly undermining Western security, and its actions are deeply incongruent with Western values and interests in advancing a rules-based democratic order.

28 Maks Czuperski, Faysal Itani, Ben Nimmo, Eliot Higgins, and Emma Beals, *Breaking Aleppo*, Atlantic Council, February 13, 2017, <http://www.publications.atlanticcouncil.org/breakingaleppo/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/BreakingAleppo.pdf>. Drawing on open-source information ranging from satellite imagery and social-media sources to closed-circuit television footage.

29 Freedom House, “Country Report: Russia,” *Freedom in the World*, 2015, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2015/russia>.

30 Stephen Ennis, “Alexei Navalny Convicted: The Fates of Putin’s Enemies,” *BBC News*, July 18, 2013, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-23343788>.



## A Common Strategic Vision

Formulating a strategy involves identifying a set of objectives and articulating the means to achieve them. The starting point for a strategy for Russia is clarity of objectives. The relationship the West has with Moscow today—tense and adversarial—is not the relationship it would desire. What, then, is its strategic vision for a relationship with Russia?

Ideally, the West should seek to promote a vision wherein Russia would be willing to:

- contribute to a stable and mutually beneficial security environment;
- engage in cooperative economic and trade policies;
- protect human rights, conduct free and fair elections, and respect the rule of law; and
- support the fundamental principles of the rules-based democratic order.

With Vladimir Putin likely to remain in office beyond the upcoming 2018 Russian elections, however, such a vision appears beyond reach. While he may be willing to

cooperate more closely with the West on specific issues, Putin is unlikely to abandon his overarching ambitions or radically shift his behavior in ways that would be consistent with the vision described above.

Given this reality, the West will instead need to focus on a set of near term objectives, including:

- preventing Russia from taking actions that undermine the security of democratic states;
- ensuring that the Russian government pays a price for its irresponsible behavior; and
- preserving the legitimacy of the rules-based democratic order.

At the same time, Western policy should consciously pursue the longer-term strategic vision set forth above. If Russia begins to transition toward more democratic and accountable governance in the future, it could once again become a partner with the West in contributing to international security and supporting key tenets of the rules-based order.



NATO leaders convene for a 2014 NATO summit meeting. Allies must work toward a common strategic vision for Russia.  
Source: AFP / Getty Images



## The Five Pillars of “Constraintment”

Left unchecked, Russia has the capability to damage Western interests in significant ways, while it undermines the international order that has served to preserve peace and enhance global prosperity since the end of World War II. To succeed in countering this challenge, the West needs to demonstrate the resolve to act forcefully, utilizing broad elements of its collective national powers, in accordance with a long-term strategic framework.

The United States, collectively with its allies in Europe and the Asia-Pacific, should implement a bold and dynamic strategy to constrain Russia’s ability to challenge the security of the West and the legitimacy of the rules-based democratic order, while preserving channels of cooperation on issues of mutual interest.

This strategy of “constraintment” consists of five key pillars:<sup>31</sup>

### PILLAR 1. DEFEND AGAINST AND DETER POTENTIAL RUSSIAN THREATS

The first pillar of the strategy focuses on defense and deterrence. The United States and its allies must enhance their capabilities to defend against potential Russian threats, including direct and indirect military actions, cyberattacks, and asymmetric operations against their interests.

This will require:

- **Bolstering the security of NATO allies and partners, particularly states along Russia’s border.** To prevent further destabilization of European security, Russia must remain deterred from attempts to challenge the security of NATO allies. The decisions made at the 2016 Warsaw Summit to bolster NATO’s deterrence-and-defense posture, including deployment of armed battalions in Poland and the Baltic states on a rotational basis, are a step in the right direction.

31 US Naval Commander Daryk Zirkle has called for “constraining Russian behavior within international norms” See Daryk Zirkle, “Now Hear This - Russia: Constrain, Not Contain,” *US Naval Institute Proceedings Magazine*, April 2015, <http://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/2015-04-0/nw-hear-russia-constrain-not-contain>.

Given the ongoing threats from Moscow, NATO allies should commit to sustaining their deployment until there is a fundamental improvement in the security environment.

The United States and its allies should be prepared to provide increased security assistance, including defensive weapons, to ensure that other vulnerable states along Russia’s border—such as Ukraine and Georgia—have the means to defend themselves. The West must also take steps to guard against hybrid or asymmetric threats, including those modeled after Russia’s brazen abduction of an Estonian intelligence officer within Estonian territory, or its instigation of an ambiguous domestic crisis in eastern Ukraine to justify direct military intervention and ongoing support for local militia forces.<sup>32</sup> The West will need to develop and articulate clear redlines for these types of hybrid threats, laying out specific consequences for Russia if such actions are carried out.

In addition, the West needs to address the consequences of Russia’s recent military modernization efforts—including an emphasis on A2AD (antiaccess and area-denial) capabilities—which has enabled Russia to establish military dominance in certain sub-regions (such as the Baltic and Black Seas). To be clear, Russia’s military capabilities are no match for the West—its total annual military expenditure is far outweighed by the United States and its NATO allies combined.<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, the West must be prepared to allocate resources necessary to ensure that its conventional forces maintain a credible deterrent

32 Shaun Walker, “Russia Jails Estonian Intelligence Officer Tallinn Says Was Abducted over Border World News,” *Guardian*, August 19, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/aug/19/russia-jails-estonian-police-officer-allegedly-abducted-border-eston-kohver>; See, for example, Paul D. Miller, “How World War III Could Begin in Latvia,” *Foreign Policy*, November 16, 2016, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/11/16/how-world-war-iii-could-begin-in-latvia/>.

33 In 2015, NATO allies spent a combined total of \$993 billion on defense, compared to Russia’s \$566 billion. NATO Public Diplomacy Division, “Defense Expenditures of NATO Countries,” 2016, [http://www.nato.int/nato\\_static\\_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf\\_2016\\_07/20160704\\_160704-pr2016-116.pdf](http://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2016_07/20160704_160704-pr2016-116.pdf); Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, “Trends in World Military Expenditure 2015,” April 2016, <http://books.sipri.org/files/FS/SIPRIFS1604.pdf>.



Countries in Europe where Russia has been interfering in democratic elections. Source: USA Today<sup>34</sup>

across the regions where Russia's military posture is most threatening, as well as across the global commons.

- **Enhancing cyber defenses.** Russia has built a sophisticated cyber warfare operation, with demonstrated capability to penetrate vulnerable networks in the United States, Europe, and around the world. According to the former US director of National Intelligence, "the Russian cyber threat is more severe than we had previously assessed."<sup>35</sup> To address this, the West should develop a new global strategy to strengthen the protection of critical infrastructure and global data flows, in both the public and private sectors. This will require investing greater resources in cyber-defense capabilities and "developing a full range of response and countermeasures" that extend beyond the threats of military action.<sup>36</sup> At the

same time, the West should develop specific norms for cyber warfare to constrain Russian behavior, with clear redlines. The aim is to deter Moscow and ensure that it pays a significant price for its actions.

- **Deterring Russian meddling in elections.** Free and fair elections are at the heart of the democratic process—and the United States and its democratic allies should work collectively to develop a strategy to prevent Russian meddling in future elections. Such a strategy would need to entail several elements: domestic laws and policies prohibiting political parties or candidates from receiving assistance from a foreign source, and robust efforts to expose any violations; strengthened protection of electronic ballot boxes and the hardware and software used to conduct elections; enhanced intelligence collection to expose and counter Russian meddling; and a declaratory policy with clear and credible redlines that emphasize the seriousness with which Western governments will view future attempts by Russia, or any other state, to influence the outcome of elections. When such redlines are crossed against a democratic ally, the United States and its allies must be prepared to respond collectively, with serious retaliatory measures.

34 Orin Dorell, "Russia Engineered election hacks and meddling in Europe," USA Today, January 9, 2017, <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2017/01/09/russia-engineered-election-hacks-europe/96216556/>.

35 James Clapper, "Statement for the Record Worldwide Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community," February 26, 2015, [http://cdn.arstechnica.net/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Clapper\\_02-26-15.pdf](http://cdn.arstechnica.net/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Clapper_02-26-15.pdf).

36 Center for Strategic and International Studies, "A Cybersecurity Agenda for the 45th President," January 5, 2017, <https://www.csis.org/news/cybersecurity-agenda-45th-president>.

- **Reducing energy dependence on Russia.** A large number of European and Asian economies rely on Russia’s energy supplies, particularly its natural gas. Putin recognizes that such a situation creates a strategic vulnerability that he can exploit to try to weaken Western resolve. By reducing energy dependence on Russia, the West will have greater freedom to maneuver in terms of imposing sanctions without fear of Russian retribution. The EU has made significant progress on this front since Russia cut off gas supplies to Ukraine beginning in 2006. It is investing in the interconnectivity of the European gas-pipeline network to reduce the single-supplier phenomenon and to reduce Europe’s reliance on Russian energy. To succeed, a clear strategy—coordinated among governments and the private sector in Europe, and where relevant, other Western states—should be developed to achieve this goal over a sustained, but identifiable, period of time. Democratic allies should not cooperate with Russia’s attempts to build and expand new pipelines with clear geopolitical motives, such as Nord Stream 2. The West should support efforts such as the Three Seas initiative, which seeks to integrate energy-delivery mechanisms in Eastern Europe as a means to diminish reliance on Russia.

## PILLAR 2. PENALIZE RUSSIAN VIOLATIONS OF GLOBAL NORMS

The second pillar of the strategy focuses on upholding the norms and principles at the foundation of the rules-based democratic order. Russia must understand that there will be consequences for its actions—and that the West is prepared to impose *and maintain* penalties against the Russian government for violating fundamental norms. The objectives are to: induce Russia to cease its existing violations of norms; deter future violations; and ensure that Russian leaders are held accountable for their unlawful and irresponsible actions. This will require four actions.

- **Setting clear expectations.** The West must make clear that it expects Russia to comply with the fundamental norms of the rules-based order. Many of these norms are set forth in treaties to which Russia has subscribed, such as the UN Charter, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Helsinki Final Act, and the Charter of Paris for a New Europe.<sup>37</sup> The West should reiterate Russia’s obligations under these agreements and set forth—in clearly articulated statements and declarations—

the fundamental norms that Russia must respect if it expects to be treated as a responsible member of the international community.

WHEN REDLINES AGAINST ELECTION MEDDLING ARE CROSSED, THE UNITED STATES AND ITS ALLIES MUST BE PREPARED TO RESPOND COLLECTIVELY, WITH SERIOUS RETALIATORY MEASURES.

- **Naming and shaming.** The West needs to ensure that Russian violations of fundamental norms are publicly exposed and denounced, to make clear that such violations will not be tolerated as the “new normal.” Public statements by US and Western officials should call out the Kremlin for its actions, coordinating condemnations through multilateral venues, such as the G7 and the UN General Assembly, and forcing Russia to use its veto power at the UN Security Council to block international censure. In addition, the West should call for independent investigations of alleged violations, to ensure that Russia is held accountable.
- **Imposing calibrated penalties tied to specific violations.** The United States and its allies should develop a more systematic approach for imposing penalties, including economic sanctions, for future violations of global norms. For example, a calibrated range of penalties could be utilized to tie specific violations to certain penalties, based on their magnitude. A matrix of penalties should include: economic sanctions on targeted sectors of the Russian economy; travel bans and asset freezes on designated Russian officials and individuals; other symbolic or retaliatory measures, such as suspending high-level meetings. The goal is to provide greater clarity, predictability, and certainty regarding the imposition of penalties, in place of the current ad hoc approach.
- **Sustaining these penalties over time.** The Kremlin likely believes that if it waits long enough, sanctions will eventually be lifted as new leaders emerge and other policy priorities take precedence. The West should make clear, as a matter of policy, that sanctions will be sustained for ongoing

<sup>37</sup> *Charter of Paris for a New Europe: A New Era of Democracy, Peace and Unity*, 1990, <http://www.osce.org/mc/39516?download=true>.

violations of global norms, and will not be traded away in exchange for cooperation on separate, unrelated issues. In particular, the current sanctions regime against Russia for its seizure of Crimea and support for its proxy forces in Ukraine should not be lifted unless Russia is prepared to reverse its actions and fully implement the Minsk Agreements.

### PILLAR 3. WAGE A BATTLE OF NARRATIVES TO CONTEST RUSSIAN PROPAGANDA

The third pillar of the strategy focuses on the need to bolster the West's efforts to counter Russia's disinformation and propaganda campaign. By some estimates, Russia is spending between \$600 million and \$1 billion a year on a propaganda campaign to undermine Western credibility, and to spread a pro-Kremlin counter-narrative.<sup>38</sup> It does so through a variety of platforms, including RT—Moscow's state-owned TV station, which broadcasts in multiple languages worldwide and is available on satellite channels in more than one hundred countries—as well as its government-controlled news agency Sputnik, a network of paid bloggers and journalists, and other clandestine operations.<sup>39</sup>

The United States and its allies need to engage in a sophisticated and coordinated effort to push back against Russian efforts in this space. Broadcasting objective news and information—such as through Voice of America, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, and their recently launched television companion Current Time—is an important part of this effort, but more must be done. The goal is not only to expose and counter Russian disinformation, lies, "fake news," and propaganda, but, just as importantly, to drive a narrative that advocates positively and persuasively in defense of democratic norms and values, and in favor of advancing a rules-based order.

To succeed, this will require two key elements.

- **Empowering a whole-of-government approach.** Since the US Information Agency was dismantled after the end of the Cold War, responsibility for strategic communications in the United States has been spread among several offices within the State

Department and across various other government agencies. In December, Congress enacted legislation that would establish a Global Engagement Center within the State Department to coordinate efforts to "recognize, understand, expose, and counter foreign state and non-state propaganda and disinformation efforts aimed at undermining United States national security interests."<sup>40</sup> This is an important step forward, but will need to be followed by a sharp increase in resources dedicated toward this whole-of-government effort. The United States should closely coordinate its activities with similar efforts across the West, most notably the EU's East Stratcom Task Force—initiated in 2015 specifically to address Russia's ongoing disinformation campaigns.<sup>41</sup>

THE GOAL IS NOT ONLY TO EXPOSE RUSSIAN DISINFORMATION, BUT TO DRIVE A NARRATIVE IN DEFENSE OF DEMOCRATIC NORMS AND VALUES.

- **Creating a separate entity to drive a positive narrative.** Government should not be left to fight the battle of narratives alone. To complement efforts in this space, the United States and its allies should collectively establish and fund a separate, independent entity whose primary mission would be to advocate in favor of a positive narrative supporting the rule-based, democratic order. An independent entity along these lines, loosely modeled on the National Endowment for Democracy, for example, could provide several advantages: encouraging greater creativity in terms of messaging and content across a range of platforms (e.g., funding documentaries, producing television and Internet video ads); providing greater flexibility in terms of branding and coordination across the West; simultaneously engaging both foreign and domestic audiences (given that governments may

38 UK House of Commons Defence Committee, "Russia: Implications for UK Defence and Security," March 8, 2016, <http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/defence-committee/russia-implications-for-uk-defence-and-security/oral/30301.htm>.

39 William Courtney and Christopher Paul, "Russian Propaganda Is Pervasive, and America Is Behind the Power Curve in Countering It," *RAND blog*, September 12, 2016, <http://www.rand.org/blog/2016/09/russian-propaganda-is-pervasive-and-america-is-behind.html>.

40 US Congress, "Text - H.R.5181 - 114th Congress (2015-2016): Countering Foreign Propaganda and Disinformation Act of 2016," <https://www.congress.gov/bills/114/congress/house-bills/5181/text>.

41 European Union External Action, "Questions and Answers About the East StratCom Task Force," January 14, 2017, [https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage\\_en/2116/%20Questions%20and%20Answers%20about%20the%20East%20StratCom%20Task%20Force](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage_en/2116/%20Questions%20and%20Answers%20about%20the%20East%20StratCom%20Task%20Force).

be restricted by law from engaging in the latter); and providing training and support for journalists in vulnerable states that lack competitive media markets, in order to encourage them to investigate and expose Moscow’s influence operations.

At the same time, it is imperative that the content that stems from this effort be credible and objective, and not be perceived as twisting reality or advancing a political agenda. The goal is to be clear, effective, and strategic in communicating what the West stands for and what it stands against. In implementing such efforts, it is essential to carefully distinguish propaganda—deliberately misleading information—from truthful, fact-based information and legitimate advocacy.

#### PILLAR 4. SUPPORT THE ASPIRATIONS OF THE RUSSIAN PEOPLE

The fourth pillar focuses on efforts to support the aspirations of the Russian people for more accountable governance. In the long run, an open and democratic Russia is more likely to support global norms and the rules-based order. Putin has placed significant restrictions on free speech and political association within Russia. At the same time, Putin’s government has significantly reduced opportunities for societal engagement with the West, with a crackdown on Western and Western-funded nongovernmental organizations (such as Open Society Foundation) and discouraging a large share of Russian citizens from travel abroad.<sup>42</sup> Putin has also engaged in a deliberate strategy to undermine civil-society groups and opposition figures, by tainting those who associate with the West as agents of foreign influence.

These restrictions underscore the difficulties involved in supporting pro-democracy forces. Nevertheless, the West should not shy away from these efforts. It should seek thoughtful and strategic new ways to encourage the democratic aspirations of the Russian people—while being careful not to undermine Russian civil society. Specific actions might include the following.

- **Speaking out for democratic rights.** US and Western officials should speak out regularly in favor of protecting democratic rights and individual liberties. This should be done in both public remarks and in private meetings with Russian officials. Multilateral venues, including the Organization for Security and

Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the Council of Europe, should be strengthened to increase pressure on Putin to restore political and civil rights for the Russian people—including those set forth in the Russian constitution itself.<sup>43</sup>

- **Meeting with opposition figures.** During the Cold War, the Helsinki Process provided a legitimate means for top US and Western officials to meet with dissidents in the Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact nations—meetings that many dissidents have cited as instrumental in their ability to promote democratic change. Building on this precedent, senior Western officials should make a point of meeting with opposition figures as a regular feature of their diplomatic engagements in Russia.
- **Engaging the Russian public.** Direct assistance to Russian NGOs may be difficult in today’s environment—and may even be counterproductive, because it could open these groups to allegations of being agents of the West. However, other means to engage and communicate with the Russian public and encourage greater people-to-people contacts should be expanded—including via social media, foreign-student scholarships, research fellowships, and private-sector interaction.

Moscow is sure to react with displeasure at such actions, and may even seek to impose retaliatory measures (as it did following US enactment of the Magnitsky Act). The West should be prepared for such measures, and not be deterred by them. At the same time, it should make clear that this effort is not intended to target Putin’s regime per se; rather, it is grounded in a broader, sustained Western policy to advance democracy and human rights worldwide.

#### PILLAR 5. MAINTAIN WESTERN UNITY

The fifth and final pillar of the strategy focuses on the need to maintain Western unity in the face of Russia’s efforts to sow discord. The transatlantic alliance, European integration, and the broader network of alliances across the Asia-Pacific have been among the defining features of the post-World War II order, and have served as a foundation of strength in upholding this order. Putin clearly recognizes this. Through various means, he has sought to divide the United States from its allies across the Atlantic and Pacific, and to sow internal divisions within Europe.

42 Human Rights Watch, “World Report 2016: Russia,” <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2016/country-chapters/russia>; Tatia Lemondzhava, “In Russia, the Doors Are Closing,” *Foreign Policy*, April 29, 2016, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/04/29/in-russia-the-doors-are-closing-tourism-putin-human-rights/>.

43 The Russian Constitution guarantees the rights of “association” and “freedom of thought and speech,” as well as the rights to “assemble peacefully” and hold “mass rallies.” *Constitution of the Russian Federation*, Article 17-64, 2001, <http://www.constitution.ru/en/10003000-03.htm>.



The combined annual defense expenditures of the United States and its leading allies far outweigh those of Russia.  
 Source: *Washington Post*<sup>44</sup>

Yet the ties that bind the Western alliance are deep seated. Unlike Russia’s relations with its most important partners, which are largely transactional or coercive, the transatlantic alliance reflects a longstanding, mutual commitment to a set of values and principles, including democracy, human rights, free and open economies, and the rule-of-law. Putin may have underestimated the strength of these ties when he invaded Ukraine, as Western sanctions have held steady for nearly three years.

Maintaining Western unity will be essential to countering and constraining Russia’s ability to challenge the West. Strong public statements from US and Western officials reaffirming the importance of bilateral and multilateral alliances and partnerships (including NATO and the EU), and demonstrating a clear commitment to shared values and principles, are important—particularly in this uncertain time. But more must be done to reinforce this sense of unity, including:

- **Bolstering strategic collaboration.** The United States and its allies should continue to collaborate on defense and security issues (primarily through NATO and bilateral consultations), as well as sanctions, and should ensure that any proposed policy shifts are carefully coordinated among key allies in Europe and the Asia-Pacific. At the same time, Western governments need to bolster cooperation

at the strategic level. Collaborative platforms that bring together leading democracies, such as the G7 and the Democracies 10 (D-10), should be used to identify and build support for sustainable strategies and approaches for dealing with Russia.

- **Strengthening intelligence sharing.** The 2016 NATO Summit Warsaw Communiqué highlights the need to “work together to promote intelligence-sharing.” To encourage common assessments of the Russia challenge, and in particular, Russia’s enhanced activities in the cyber and information domains,<sup>45</sup> Western governments should seek ways to strengthen intelligence sharing, and to ensure key allies not only in NATO, but across North America, Europe, and the Asia-Pacific have access to information about threats and challenges affecting Western interests and the rules-based order.<sup>46</sup>

44 Adam Taylor and Laris Kaklis, “This Remarkable Chart Shows How U.S. Defense Spending Dwarfs the Rest of the World,” *Washington Post*, February 9, 2016, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2016/02/09/this-remarkable-chart-shows-how-u-s-defense-spending-dwarfs-the-rest-of-the-world/?utm\\_term=.ac635e16d0b3](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2016/02/09/this-remarkable-chart-shows-how-u-s-defense-spending-dwarfs-the-rest-of-the-world/?utm_term=.ac635e16d0b3)

45 North Atlantic Council, “Warsaw Summit Communiqué,” NATO, July 9, 2016, [http://nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_133169.htm](http://nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_133169.htm).

46 Carsten Schmiedl, “Focus Should be on Closer Intelligence Cooperation, not Defense Expenditures,” *Atlantic Expedition*, December 9, 2016, <http://atlantic-expedition.org/closer-intelligence-cooperation-not-nato-defense-expenditures-should-be-the-focus-of-transatlantic-security-relations/>.

## Engagement and Cooperation with Russia

While the primary aim of this strategy is to constrain Russia, this is not to suggest that the West should avoid efforts to find ways to cooperate with it. As an influential global power, with a permanent seat on the UN Security Council, Russia’s cooperation could be useful to address the many crises and challenges facing the West. Particularly for Europe and Asia, which cannot escape geography, Russia will remain a large neighbor with an intertwined history and strong economic ties.

The question is not whether to engage, but how. How can the West maintain channels of cooperation with Russia on issues of common interest, without undermining the broader strategy?

The United States and its allies should adopt a policy of *principled engagement*, using the following guidelines:

**Be prepared to compartmentalize.** The West must be careful not to link cooperation with Russia in ways that require it to compromise on its commitment to the rules-based, democratic order. Russia’s canny ability to compartmentalize should be matched by a similar Western approach. Putin will certainly seek to condition cooperation in one area (e.g., assistance in fighting ISIS) with reducing pressure in another (e.g., Ukraine-related sanctions)—partly to obtain meaningful concessions, and partly to undermine Western credibility. It is incumbent upon the West to make clear that it will not engage in tradeoffs that involve eliminating penalties for violations of fundamental norms until those violations have been resolved.

**Pay attention to symbolism.** Moscow attaches the utmost importance to symbolism and its great-power status. President Putin values engagement at the head-of-state level, and will see direct engagement with the US president as a victory in and of itself. Therefore, the level of engagement needs to be properly calibrated, on a case-by-case basis, based on Western interests and political objectives.

**Maintain an economic relationship, with appropriate exceptions.** Economic sanctions are an important tool of leverage against Moscow. At the same time, it is in the West’s interest to ensure that Russia remains linked to the global economy, as it provides Moscow with a continued stake in the international system and an incentive to play a more responsible global role. Commerce also provides a vehicle for direct and continuing interaction with the Russian people. The West should adopt policies that foster private-sector engagement in Russia in areas not directly affected by sanctions, but that restrict transactions with officials and oligarchs tied to Putin’s regime. It should also ensure that Russia complies with its obligations under the World Trade Organization, and put in place an agreed-upon set of policies to prevent the sale of arms, military equipment, and dual-use technologies, to avoid repeating a situation similar to that in 2015 where France entered into an agreement (later rescinded) to sell warships to Russia.<sup>47</sup>

THE QUESTION IS NOT  
WHETHER TO ENGAGE WITH  
RUSSIA, BUT HOW.

**Focus on a narrow set of issues on which cooperation could yield positive results.** The West should focus its efforts toward channels of engagement on a narrow set of issues on which Russian and Western interests appear to converge, at least to some degree. These include arms-control and confidence-building measures; nuclear non-proliferation efforts, particularly with regard to Iran and North Korea; and ISIS and the threat of terrorism. At the same time, it is important to recognize that Russian interests, even in these areas, are not entirely aligned with the West. In Syria, for example, Russia’s primary focus has been on ensuring the preservation of the Assad regime, not on fighting ISIS.<sup>48</sup> Regarding Iran, Moscow and Tehran share a deep-seated

<sup>47</sup> “Egypt Agrees to Buy Warships built for Russia from France,” BBC News, September 23, 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34335224>.

<sup>48</sup> Olga Oliker, “Russia in Syria,” *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, October 29, 2015, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/russia-syria>.

interest in supporting Assad and have expanded security and intelligence cooperation since the signing of the Iran nuclear agreement.<sup>49</sup> The West must be realistic about the prospects of engagement with Russia on these issues, with careful consideration of both potential benefits and risks.

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49 Frederic Hof, "Russia and Iran: Split over Syria?" *Defense News*, February 8, 2017, <http://www.defensenews.com/articles/russia-and-iran-split-over-syria>; Kirk Bennett, "The Myth of a U.S.-Russian Global Agenda," *American Interest* December 22, 2016, <http://www.the-american-interest.com/2016/12/22/the-myth-of-a-u-s-russian-global-agenda/>.

# Implementing the Strategy in Today’s Environment

The strategy outlined here relies on the perceived legitimacy of the West as guardian of the rules-based democratic order. Russia can only be expected to comply with the fundamental rules and principles of this order if Western states are willing to base their own actions in accordance with these rules. Some degree of inconsistency is inevitable, of course, and charges of hypocrisy will always follow. Still, as long as the leading Western states continue to advocate in favor of a rules-based order—and act broadly in ways that advance it—they can, and should, expect others across the international community, including Russia, to do the same.

Given its tremendous influence across the military, economic, and diplomatic domains, the role of the United States remains critical. US leadership is a prerequisite for the successful implementation of this strategy. President Trump’s rhetoric on Russia during the campaign and his stated desire to “get along” with Putin suggests that a new effort to engage Russia may be forthcoming. At the same time, senior administration officials have reiterated the importance of holding Russia to account for its actions in Ukraine and Syria.

The direction of US policy toward Russia is unclear. The rationale for the strategy outlined here, however, *is* clear. While it builds upon some of elements contained in the Obama administration’s approach to Russia, it goes much further—outlining a robust, comprehensive, and sustainable framework that will directly serve to advance US economic and security interests.

Ideally, a strategy for countering Russia’s challenge to the international order would draw the support of states beyond the West. Given their increasing global capabilities, it would be highly advantageous to have China, India, and other emerging powers on board with efforts to help constrain Russia. China, however, has been seeking to deepen its economic and strategic partnership with Russia—in part, to push back on Western expansion of the international order—and will not find such a strategy congruent with its interests. With their traditions of nonalignment and focus on economic development, rising democracies, such as India, Brazil, and South Africa, may find it difficult to support policies that put at risk their desire to maintain cooperative relations with Russia.

THE STRATEGY OUTLINED  
HERE CAN SUCCEED WITH  
THE COLLECTIVE SUPPORT  
OF LEADING DEMOCRATIC  
POWERS.

Nevertheless, this strategy can succeed with the collective support of leading democratic powers. Together, the United States and its NATO and Asian-Pacific allies account for more than 60 percent of global gross domestic product, and more than three-fourths of the world’s military expenditures.<sup>50</sup> Given the tremendous military, economic, and diplomatic resources they possess, Western states retain a level of global influence that, if utilized collectively, can serve as a powerful constraint against Russia’s ability to challenge the global order.

This strategy provides a set of realistic goals—deterring Russia from taking actions that undermine the security of the United States and its allies, and ensuring that Russia pays a price for its irresponsible behavior—while grounding them in a long-term strategic vision. Should the Russian leadership decide, at some point, to change course and commit itself to respecting the fundamental rules of the existing order, the West could, and should, expand cooperation further and return to seeking a genuine partnership built on mutual interests. In the meantime, by implementing the proactive strategy outlined here, the West will put itself in a stronger position to counter the challenge Russia poses to Western interests and the rules-based democratic order.

50 Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, “Trends in World Military Expenditure 2015.”

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Camille Grand was the director of the Paris-based policy think tank Fondation pour la Recherche Stratégique (FRS) from 2008 to 2016. He has served on several senior expert panels and groups on the future of NATO and disarmament related matters. He was previously Deputy Assistant Secretary for Disarmament and Multilateral Affairs in the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2006-2007). He also was the Deputy Diplomatic Adviser to the French Minister of Defense (2002-2006), and a research fellow with several think tanks. He contributed to the early version of this paper in his research capacity prior to joining NATO as Assistant Secretary General for Defense Investment in October 2016.

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