



Executive Summary: U.S. Policy Considerations

By Graeme P. Herd

Given our cross-regional comparative assessment and the stated policy of the new Biden administration, what are the implications of this study for U.S. policy towards Russia and towards Russian global activism? This summary first identifies general considerations in terms of overall approach before examining specific regional considerations. This summary aims to provide opportunities for the United States, as well as its friends and allies, to engage with Russia more effectively in each region and globally.

Global

- The Biden administration has not adopted a new reset with Russia, as since 2012 President Putin embarked on more revisionist and revanchist policies. Although President Putin accuses the Biden administration of having embraced a comprehensive neo-containment policy, this is not the case. Unlike the late 1940s, the world is globalized and increasingly multi-polar. In this context, containment is not possible. In addition, the U.S. realizes that even to attempt such an approach would break transatlantic unity and undercut Euro-Atlantic cooperation with Russian civil society and parts of its private sector. There is a transatlantic consensus for a targeted “pushback” against the Kremlin’s malign activity and influence, especially “active measures” and to build resilience in defense of shared core democratic values and practices. The U.S. and Europe can coordinate approaches to “impose real costs” to reduce Russian military and diplomatic efficacy through disruption. Disruption can cause friction, overextend and unbalance Russia and thereby control Russian escalation and deter further malign activity. The tools at the disposal of the U.S. and its friends and allies that facilitate the imposition of costs are varied and context specific. These tools include:
 - **Diplomatic:** These tools include “attribution diplomacy” (“name and shame”), diplomatic expulsions, and closing diplomatic properties. In public diplomacy terms, the West can restructure the narrative from Putin’s preferred besieged fortress Russia encircled by an aggressive, dysfunctional, and failed West to one about a Russian elite kleptocracy and oligarchy (“Kremlin blacklist”) versus Russian civil society.
 - **Economic:** The expansion of U.S. anti-money laundering regime beyond traditional banks as well as the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act, which imposes visa bans and freezes the assets of individuals anywhere in the world who are responsible for committing human rights violations or acts of

significant corruption, is complemented by the European Magnitsky Act, established in December 2020. The Global Fragility Act calls for all parts of the U.S. government to coordinate strategies to prevent violence and extremism and to focus foreign assistance on averting conflict in fragile countries.

- **Cyber:** Cyber tools can be used to reveal or freeze Putin's secret assets and expose corruption and a policy of "defend forward" or "hack back" can be used.
- The U.S. needs to demonstrate positive world leadership and substantively re-engage globally: redouble its efforts to support and strengthen its existing alliance system beyond military exercises, arms sales, and senior leader dialogues to encompass the diplomatic, economic, and, in some cases, development communities. Partnerships should agree on shared ends but be flexible to allow partners to adopt different ways and means to these ends, allowing a mix of compellence and diplomatic persuasion.
- The U.S. should support the international system it helped create through statements and actions, in both word and deed. Messaging is critical to the success of U.S. efforts to engage with Russia. Partners and allies are important to the success of U.S. national security interests but they may not be as willing to cooperate with the U.S. if they do not understand U.S. objectives. The U.S. needs to improve its external messaging so that it is consistent and unambiguous in order to both reassure partners and allies of U.S. commitment; this helps build the consensus necessary to address large challenges and to provide very clear policy positions to adversaries, which can prevent misunderstandings from spiraling into conflict.
- The U.S. should look to potential cooperation with Russia in areas of mutual interest, including the prevention of further nuclear proliferation, counterterrorism and organized crime, cyber and outer space, and limiting China's influence, to give some examples. However, as the United States, friends, and allies have little direct leverage over Russian strategic behavior, Russian cooperation will be conditional and transactional. Beyond START III, Russia views indications of cooperation as "concessions," that is, signs of weaknesses. While Russia backs Assad in Syria, military deconfliction is possible but not cooperation. In Ukraine, where the U.S. is not part of the multilateral framework and where the discord is antagonistic, cooperative potential is very limited.
- U.S. policy responses cannot avoid generating unintended consequences in Russia, such as a rally around the flag effect in Russia. Attribution diplomacy can be ineffective when *siloviki* in Russia have *de facto* immunity from prosecution. Adverse publicity can intimidate opponents, instruct, and educate society into submission and be worn as a badge of loyalty. Russia may well adapt by further fragmenting internally, accepting greater strategic (including potential nuclear) blackmail and not just tactical risk, as well as weaponizing corruption and monetizing its foreign policy, resulting in greater unpredictability and increasing destabilization of its internal order.
- Russian confrontation with the U.S. is the norm; relations with the EU have deteriorated to a record low and will continue to remain there; and offensive cyber operations as well

as active measures are ongoing and unremitting. Offering concessions to Russia or compromising on human rights in the name of pragmatic and flexible cooperation will not alleviate Russia's narrative of western encroachment, encirclement, and containment. The West does not have to confirm Russia's claim to Great Power status as it defines it. Russia's placing of its own interests above the sovereignty of neighboring states is neither aligned with Western national interest nor its democratic norms and values.

Regionally

Europe

- The U.S. should seek to strengthen ties with Europe and Germany in particular, as the Washington-Berlin relationship constitutes the operational center of gravity in the political West. Greater coordination of strategy through National Security Council-*Bundeskanzleramt* working groups can help shape shared NATO approaches and avoid strategic surprises in the relationship.
- Broader burden-sharing ("New Deal") and an Eastern Partnership Security Compact suggest Germany seeks to offset its determination to complete Nord Stream 2. A U.S.-German action plan can mitigate the negative effects by extending the gas transit agreements to increase revenue for Ukraine, increase support for the Three Seas Initiative and work can be done to agree to the regulatory environment once the pipeline is operational.
- Thus, in order to effectively "push back" against Russian malign activity and influence, the U.S. needs to strengthen transatlantic relations. In practice, this entails managing better the differences it has with Europe and recognizing their nature. Differences arise in part from different structural and economic relationships with Russia. Europe in general is more broadly and deeply dependent on and integrated with the Russian economy than is the United States; this includes, for example, the UK (financial services and investments) or Germany (trade and energy). European business interests, subject to Russia's "weaponized corruption," lead to different levels of threat perception and political will.

Arctic

- The U.S. should expand confidence-building measures around common interests and encourage Russia's desire to make a success of its chairmanship in the Arctic Council in order to discourage its military build-up in the High North and prevent further militarization of the Arctic.
- The United States, alongside its Arctic EU allies and with China, should work on dissuading Russia from asserting its sovereignty over the Northern Sea Route and enforcing restrictive regulations on the maritime traffic. For example, the U.S. could leverage China's preference for economic and scientific activities in the Arctic.

- Limited U.S. freedom of navigation operations to the west of the Bering Strait might reinforce the common benefit that flows from denying Russia the exclusive control over this maritime route.
- In general, U.S. Arctic policy should neutralize Russian strengths and pressure its weaknesses and vulnerabilities. For example, Russia is unable to protect its strategic nuclear submarines on the Kamchatka Peninsula, as it cannot organize a “naval bastion” or uses an anti-access/area denial “bubble” in the Sea of Okhotsk.
- Greater U.S. cooperation with NATO partners and Finland and Sweden in the Barents regions allows for asymmetric and smart containment. The U.S. should collaboratively build monitoring and intelligence gathering capabilities that are deployable and train through exercises to signal strategic resolve without triggering an Arctic security dilemma.

Latin America

- Russia’s post-Cold War reengagement with Latin America can leverage a long history of relations in this region, longer than most other U.S. competitors, including China, and it demonstrates it can be flexible and pragmatic.
- Russia’s engagement in Latin America has a regionally specific function: Russia signals it can operate in the United States’ backyard and fundamentally challenges the Monroe Doctrine. Russia also demonstrates that Great Powers can push back, provide an alternative to the United States, and support left-leaning regional groupings. In doing so, Russia imposes costs on the regional hegemon, dilutes its power, and undermines democratic values and practice.
- The U.S. has peaceful and productive relationships with the region and shared cultural capital rooted in democratic values, alliances, and partnerships. Recognizing the importance of these links and continuing to build on them through rhetoric and actions will be crucial in maintaining the U.S. position in the region.
- Although Russia is unconstrained by democratic norms as it engages the region, the U.S. should not abandon democratic principles, values, and norms in the name of Great Power competition. Greater engagement in the region will promote democracy and shut down the space for Russian gray zone activities.
- Geographical proximity to Latin America remains the greatest advantage the U.S. has in the region. However, this advantage is undermined if the United States does not capitalize on it by engaging with all instruments of power.
- While China is also strengthening relationships with Latin America, so far China and Russia have sought engagement in different spheres. Increased Russian ownership of

energy assets and related companies, particularly in Venezuela, could however create new dynamics as China seeks to continue to acquire oil and gas from the region to fuel its own growth.

Northeast Asia

- The U.S. needs to build stronger relationships between its allies with the goal of a true multiparty alliance structure. Stronger relations between allies and partners will minimize Russia's and China's ability to sow dissension or pit one ally against another.
- The U.S. should work across elements of national power to strengthen its relationship with Japan. Particularly, the U.S. should re-enter the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade agreement, now retitled the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership, which Japan leads.
- The U.S. should encourage Japan to table its desire to settle the Kuril Islands dispute in the near-term.
- Helping Mongolia to maximize its status as a free and independent partner in Northeast Asia can be enabled by the U.S. supporting the Third Neighbor Policy and Mongolian democracy.
- The U.S. needs to consider and be prepared for potential Russian support to the People's Republic of China (PRC) in various forms if the PRC should employ a more coercive approach toward Taiwan.

China

- Splitting the partnership between Russia and the PRC through U.S. actions may not be fully possible in the near term.
- Incentivize Russia to moderate its support of the PRC in the Indo-Pacific through greater economic integration between the Russian Far East and non-PRC partners in Asia. These additional economic considerations could complicate Russian decision-making in a dispute between the PRC and another Russian economic partner or regarding PRC actions that generally affect new Russian economic interests.
- The U.S. needs to effectively use and message the Indo-Pacific Strategy as a model for its engagement in region. This model champions each state's sovereignty, fair trade, and the role of regional institutions. While the strategy is not ostensibly against anything, it does seek to preserve the system that Russia and the PRC are seeking to alter.
- The U.S. should visibly engage partners and allies at all levels and expand engagement with countries beyond the military domain. Russia and the PRC engage where the United States does not—both geographically and in various sectors and domains—and the U.S. should not cede the competition in these areas due to inattention.

Middle East

- Since the “Arab Spring,” some Arab leaders have perceived the U.S. as an unreliable partner. This misperception is based on an incorrect understanding of the “Carter Doctrine.” The doctrine pledged U.S. support to defend Arab countries against foreign threats, not to keep ruling regimes in power against the will of their peoples. Given this misperception, Russia has an opportunity to present itself as a reliable partner.
- The U.S. needs to work closely with European allies to address socio-economic and political challenges in the Middle East. Russia and China will continue to be adversaries. Presenting Middle Eastern leaders with a united Western front against Moscow and Beijing will further strengthen U.S. influence and credibility.
- Iran is a major regional power. Since the 1979 revolution, U.S.-Iranian relations have been poor, leaving Iran with two options: Moscow and Beijing. Reaching an agreement on Iran’s nuclear program and then gradually reducing tensions will reduce incentives for Iran to maintain its strategic partnerships with Russia and China.
- Civil wars in Syria and Libya provide Russia opportunities to intervene. The U.S. needs to work with our European allies to end these civil wars.
- Several Middle Eastern countries, particularly oil producers, are much more interested in economic than political reform. However, consistently low oil prices force producers to diversify their economies by introducing measures to encourage foreign investment and empower the private sector. The U.S. should encourage and support these economic reform efforts, particularly in the IT sector.
- The U.S. enjoys “soft power” advantages in the Middle East as members of the political and economic establishments speak English and American movies, TV, and sport are very popular. Washington should seek to expand this positive influence.
- Russia builds civil nuclear reactors in the region, but several states have expressed an interest in renewable energy. The U.S. can help Middle Eastern countries to “go green,” reduce their reliance on fossil fuels, and utilize the region’s solar and wind potential.

South Asia

- The Soviet Union was a key arms supplier to India, aided its embryonic nuclear power program, and used (and Russia continues to use) its UN veto power to block resolutions critical of India, for example on Kashmir. Although the shared ideological-emotional mindset (loosely “anti-colonialism”) has waned in the post-Cold War period, the Soviet legacy continues to provide substantial leverage for contemporary Russian activism in the region, even in the context of a rising China. Furthermore, in a very pragmatic sense, India today is still heavily dependent on Russia for maintenance of its large arsenal of Soviet-era weaponry, a situation that will remain a constant for many years to come.
- From the mid-2010s, Russia softened its antagonistic Cold War relationship with Pakistan to develop select areas of cooperation, such as Russian-Pakistan support for the Taliban in Afghanistan. Both Moscow and Islamabad see their limited collaboration as a

means to reduce American influence in the region while expanding their own, but Pakistan, desperate for outside support, is especially keen to portray any interaction with Russia (even symbolic) as an advantage in its perennial rivalry with India. Russia aims more to depict itself as an alternative to the United States, therefore its growing connections to Pakistan pose challenges to its “traditional” ties with New Delhi.

- Russia resents India’s participation in the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (the “Quad”) as Russia understands India’s role as the United States’ “preeminent U.S. partner in the Indo-Pacific” as a dilution of India’s “strategic autonomy” and as shift away from Moscow towards Washington. Close cooperation between India and the U.S. thus represents a potential attack on Russia’s interests and influence. In fact, Indian moves to hedge against or balance China are in some respects a reprise of its role in the Sino-Soviet dynamic during the Cold War, a role that the USSR had endorsed.
- Russia prefers a Russia-India-China (RIC) trilateral grouping as it could then hold the balance of power through mediation, promote multi-polarity, and advance non-western if not anti-western global governance norms, institutions, and practices. India, on the other hand, seeks to maintain its policy independence in what it sees as a permanently multipolar world, while finding an equilibrium between the U.S. and Russia that pushes back against China. As part of its hedging against Beijing, New Delhi is thus likely to endeavor to reinforce its ties to Moscow while continuing to expand cooperation with the United States.
- In the current Sino-Indian border confrontation, Russia has pragmatically declined a mediation role due ultimately to its dependence on China, while retaining its position as a key arms supplier to India.
- In South Asia, the breadth and depth of U.S.-India linkages far exceed those of Indo-Russian relations in almost all areas. However, the Russia-India arms relationship will remain in place as a practical lynchpin for the foreseeable future. Moreover, many Indians retain a sentimental attachment to Russia as emblematic of their country’s “strategic autonomy,” while Russia looks to weaken U.S.-India collaboration. Washington will thus continue to face challenges in balancing improving its ties with New Delhi while contending with Russia as a competitor.

Africa

- The United States’ security and economic interests in Africa are best advanced by long-term partnerships with stable, democratic governments. Despite a long history of engagement in Africa, there is a common perception that the United States has not been playing its traditional leadership role on the continent in recent years, creating a vacuum that Russia has tried to fill.
- A first priority is to articulate clearly the shared interests and vision that the United States holds with Africa. In so doing, the United States can underscore that U.S. policy in Africa encompasses far more than simply countering Russia (or China).

- Another priority is to weigh in on Russia’s geo-strategic positioning on the continent, particularly in Libya, where the establishment of a Russian foothold poses a long-term threat to NATO. The U.S. should commit to working with EU and NATO partners to support United Nations-backed stabilization efforts while isolating the influence of rebel warlord, Khalifa Haftar.
- The United States can also enhance its interests by being more diplomatically active in conflict mitigation efforts. By working with host nations and regional bodies, U.S. diplomatic, technical, and financial support can serve as a stabilizing counterweight to Russian destabilization.
- Helping Africa fight Russian disinformation campaigns is another critical vehicle for advancing stability and democracy. These disinformation campaigns aim to foment political and ethnic polarization, distrust, and political instability—to Russia’s advantage. Strengthening the capacity of African governmental and non-governmental fact-checking and digital detective firms to identify fake Russian-sponsored accounts, trolls, and disinformation campaigns can help mitigate these destructive effects.
- U.S. Treasury sanctions on Yevgeny Prigozhin for his destabilizing activities in Sudan and the Central African Republic are useful and should be expanded. The Global Magnitsky Act and the European Magnitsky Act broaden the means to apply such penalties in a coordinated manner in defense of democracy and human rights. The Global Fragility Act includes provisions for punitive actions to be taken against political actors that drive instability. These tools, as well as the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act, the Countering American Adversaries through Sanctions Act, and laws pertaining to transnational criminal organizations provide the United States with a menu of legal means of increasing penalties on Russia for its destabilizing activity in Africa.

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