# DA---Deterrence

## Deterrence---West Asia

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#### The US has advantages across every indicator, but maintenance is key.

Olsen ’23 [Nathan; Lieutenant colonel in the United States Air Force, Military Fellow at The Washington Institute, B.S., U.S. Air Force Academy, M.S., Air Force Institute of Technology, M.S., Air Command and Staff College. May 14, 2023; “Preserving U.S. Military Advantages in the Middle East”; *Washington Institute*; https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/preserving-us-military-advantages-middle-east] TDI

The 2022 National Defense Strategy (NDS) calls on the U.S. military to sustain enduring advantages and build new ones for the future fight. According to the NDS, building and maintaining advantages to advance U.S. national interests will allow the military to deter attacks against the United States and its allies and partners, while fostering a resilient military force and defense ecosystem. In the Middle East, this challenge is especially relevant. The United States has several enduring advantages that could eventually disappear if the U.S. government does not make significant changes in how it operates in this part of the world.

Access, Basing, and Overflight

The biggest enduring U.S. military advantage in the Middle East involves its ability to obtain access, basing, and overflight. Today, the U.S. military has more than 34,000 personnel across the region engaged in security cooperation with regional partners. The large military presence has often ensured U.S. access to key military and civilian leaders and allowed the United States to preserve strategic relationships during times of diplomatic or economic tension with these partners. And it could be critical in a crisis or conflict with China, which — as of 2021 — receives approximately 50 percent of its imported oil and 33 percent of its overall oil supply from the Middle East.

One way the United States advances its security partnerships — and thus its access, basing, and overflight privileges — is through large-scale exercises and training programs. Prime examples are the U.S.-led International Maritime Exercise 2022 and Cutlass Express 2022, which together included warships from sixty regional navies. America’s rivals in Beijing and Moscow have long viewed the U.S. footprint in the region as a strategic advantage and have tried to counter it accordingly — albeit with much smaller exercises that underscore the limits in their power projection capabilities and the narrowness of their military partnerships. Although these efforts may soon pick up steam, the United States is still clearly the military exercise partner of choice, having carried out more than seventy naval exercises in the Middle East last year.

The relationships built through regional military activities provide the United States with an unmatched ability to obtain rapid access and overflight authorizations. In a prominent example, the Egyptian government has often provided the U.S. Navy with front-of-the-line access to the Suez Canal for expedited passage. This allows U.S. forces to conduct a wide range of missions in the region, often on short notice.

The future of U.S. access, basing, and overflight in the region may depend on its success in dispelling doubts about America’s continued commitment to the security of its partners. Specifically, the United States needs to do more to contain Iran’s regional and nuclear activities and, when necessary, to help its partners respond in kind to acts of aggression — creating the type of true partnerships described in the Biden administration’s National Security Strategy.

Air Superiority

The U.S. military’s ability to gain and maintain air superiority over its adversaries has long been one of its core advantages. Advanced combat aircraft, weapon systems, and ground-based air defenses have made air superiority a fundamental component of the U.S. “way of war.” Competitors are rapidly modernizing, however, making it more difficult for the United States to maintain this advantage. Strikingly, former U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) head Gen. Kenneth F. McKenzie Jr. told Congress in spring 2022 that the United States is “operating without complete air superiority” for the first time since the Korean War because of the drone capabilities of Iran and its proxies.

The war in Ukraine has highlighted how difficult it is for a conventional air force to gain air superiority due to advanced air defense systems, drones, and cruise missiles. Through a variety of missile and gun systems, Ukraine claims to be shooting down approximately 80 percent of all incoming Russian drones and missiles, and Russia rarely sends crewed aircraft into Ukrainian airspace. Even so, the small number of drones and cruise missiles getting through Ukrainian air defenses have caused significant damage to critical infrastructure and housing. In preparation for future conflicts, U.S. adversaries are therefore likely to shift their efforts toward building more advanced air defenses and long-range drones and missiles to deny U.S. air superiority.

The United States thus needs to develop innovative ways to counter adversary air denial efforts and to gain and preserve air superiority. To this end, the military must further explore multi-domain approaches to the suppression of enemy air defenses. Additionally, U.S. planners must develop air domain tactics that use a mix of crewed aircraft, drones, missiles, long-range rockets, and integrated air defenses in order to gain and maintain air superiority in future conflicts.

High-Tech Arms and the Foreign Military Sales Conundrum

The U.S. defense industrial base is known for its innovative products. From stealth technology to unmanned aerial vehicles to precision-guided munitions, American firms have set the standard for high-tech arms, helping make the United States the single largest arms source in the region for more than two decades.

Obtaining U.S. arms is not easy, however, and many customers complain about high prices, long delays in deliveries, and complicated bureaucratic requirements. In some cases, the congressional notification process for a sale can take years, and on average a sales contract takes eighteen months to award. From 2012 to 2021, the average time between contract award and delivery was four years for air defense systems, three and a half years for aircraft, and two and a half years for missiles. Israel is suffering through the process now and, following years of delays, expects delivery of KC-46 aircraft in 2025 and 2026, nearly four years after signing the contract.

As a result, some allies and partners are starting to look elsewhere for arms. Current CENTCOM commander Gen. Michael Kurilla recently reported, “During my trips to the region and calls with regional Chiefs of Defense, I routinely hear how much faster and easier China’s foreign military sales program is than ours.” America’s defense industrial base offers an important advantage because it boosts the capabilities of key allies and partners and provides an avenue for the U.S. military to partner and train with militaries in the region — while defraying arms costs for the U.S. military thanks to economies of scale.

The United States, in turn, needs to reform its Foreign Military Sales (FMS) program to preserve the advantage of high-tech American arms. As Undersecretary of Defense Colin Kahl remarked last September, “Our process is too slow.” But he also noted that “one of the things that I think we’ve demonstrated with Ukraine is that when we really lean in, we can defy the laws of bureaucratic physics.” Middle East allies and partners noticed the speed with which the United States assisted Ukraine, and questioned the double standard vis-á-vis helping defend them against Iranian aggression. Removing some administrative red tape from the congressional notification and contract award processes will shorten timelines and help the United States remain an attractive arms-sourcing option.

Regional and Global Intelligence Capabilities

The war in Ukraine has enabled the United States to demonstrate its unparalleled intelligence capabilities. By publicly disclosing Russian moves before they occur, America has successfully shaped the narrative regarding the war in Europe and elsewhere, and U.S. intelligence has provided Ukraine with a decisive advantage over Russia in targeting and operations. This enduring advantage comes largely from the quality and quantity of U.S. assets dedicated to gathering intelligence. The combination of worldwide sources, government and commercial satellites, improved ability to intercept communications, and open-source material has helped the United States paint a clear picture of the Russian invasion. Additionally, U.S. advances in cryptology and electronic-intercept technology have given it an advantage with which few countries can compete. The Middle East region itself benefits greatly from U.S. intelligence, which continues to help allies and partners locate and neutralize key members of the Islamic State.

To maintain its intelligence edge, the United States needs to update its policy regarding classified information. Classified data breaches are becoming the norm and are causing frustration and confusion among U.S. allies and partners. Reducing the number of people with access to classified information is one place to start. The United States must do this to regain its credibility in the world and show its allies and partners that U.S.-held intelligence can be trusted and will not be shared or leaked to adversaries. At the same time, intentional disclosures have been invaluable in Ukraine in shaping the narrative and countering misinformation. The United States correspondingly needs to become more comfortable using intelligence to shape the battlefield, as ultimately the purpose of intelligence is to serve policy — whether by supporting military operations or by affecting the information environment.

Conclusion

The United States has consistently enjoyed the benefits of advantages in access, basing, and overflight; air superiority; high-tech arms and FMS; and intelligence. But these will not remain advantages forever unless America does what is necessary to preserve them. China and Russia are looking to advance their military engagement and influence in the Middle East and to counter or undermine these traditional U.S. strengths. The current era of great power competition therefore underscores the need for decisive, thoughtful U.S. steps to preserve these traditional advantages.

#### Deterrence is key to check adversarial ambitions. The plan unleashes a power struggle that escalates.

Cropsey & Roughead ’19 [Seth; senior fellow at Hudson Institute and former deputy undersecretary of the U.S. Navy. Gary Roughead; Robert and Mary Oster distinguished military fellow at the Hoover Institution, Stanford University, and former U.S. chief of naval operations. December 17, 2019; “A U.S. Withdrawal Will Cause a Power Struggle in the Middle East”; *Foreign Policy*; https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/12/17/us-withdrawal-power-struggle-middle-east-china-russia-iran/] TDI

The Middle East’s central location between Europe, East Asia, and Africa makes it geographically vital to U.S. interests. The rise of China had not changed that. U.S. lines of communication and supply between Europe and Asia pass directly through the Middle East. U.S. maritime strategy requires sailing carrier and expeditionary strike groups, submarines, and logistic ships between combatant commands, and passing through the Suez Canal is far more efficient than rounding the Horn of Africa.

Although the United States has decreased its reliance on Middle Eastern oil — a fact motivating some of the isolationist rationale for disengagement — Washington’s European and Asian allies still require uninterrupted access to the region’s energy resources. The Levantine Basin and Suez Canal are also international container shipping hubs. Disruption to that regional maritime trade would have immediate, far-reaching global implications.

The Ottoman Empire was the last entity to command regional hegemony in the Middle East. No country or group has made a legitimate claim to the mantle of a regional caliphate since. While a united Middle East under any version of a reconstituted caliphate could undermine U.S. interests by projecting power globally, a divided Middle East monopolized by a hostile great power could have the same effect. Either an external power or a regional hegemon could prevent the United States from communicating and coordinating among forces and allies in Europe and Asia and disrupt global economic activity by interrupting U.S. and allied shipping. Eliminating U.S. naval dominance would upend the current balance of power, with severe consequences for Europe and Asia.

The pursuit of this mantle in the 21st century has only one true aspirational contender: Iran. But Tehran lacks the resources to conquer the Middle East, and its Shiite character would inflame old sectarian enmities in an explicit imperial campaign. For that reason, Iran’s strategy involves expanding its influence through proxies supported by well-placed special operations forces in an attempt to wear down Saudi and Israeli strength.

Israel and Saudi Arabia are the two main challengers to Iran’s ambitions. The Israeli Defense Forces are the only military in the region of Western quality and proficiency. Israel likely operates a secure nuclear second-strike capability, and its foreign intelligence service, Mossad, is one of the world’s best. While Saudi Arabia’s armed forces are of lesser quality, the kingdom has been remarkably adept at cultivating support from Sunni radical groups—necessitated by the United States’ strategic neglect of the region after 2008. And despite questions about its legitimacy, the House of Saud remains custodian of Islam’s two holy cities, Mecca and Medina, a position of great religious and political importance.

Nevertheless, neither Israel nor Saudi Arabia can contend for the title of regional hegemon. Moreover, despite its military superiority, Israel does not have the capability or requisite political will. The House of Saud may have considered itself the ruling dynasty of a new caliphate at some point, but contemporary Saudi Arabia has no such delusions. The government understands that oil revenues determine its survival, and an imperial campaign would overstretch the Saudi economy, possibly leading to economic collapse and, worse, revolt. Both Israel and Saudi Arabia operate on the defensive.

Turkey is a spoiler in this strategic balance. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has unmistakably neo-Ottoman objectives, but the Turkish Armed Forces are unprepared militarily for the potential confrontation with Iran and Russia that their Syrian offensive could prompt. In the coming years, Ankara will remain a wild card, and the political stance it takes will profoundly influence the strategic landscape. Its position on Iranian expansion is unclear, and even if its current offensive puts it at odds with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad’s regime — and by extension with Iran — Erdogan may well forego cooperation with the unofficial Saudi-Israeli entente.

But the United States must also contend with its two greatest geopolitical threats, Russia and China — both of which have interests in the Middle East. China, dependent on Middle Eastern energy, seeks to assure its energy supply, complete the midsection of its Belt and Road Initiative, and place at risk the European ports on which the United States would depend in a continental war. China’s objectives challenge Washington’s interest in its NATO and East Asian allies’ need for energy, along with the United States’ long-standing relationship with the continent most closely allied to its political, economic, and security interests. China’s growing control of Mediterranean and European port infrastructure will complicate logistics associated with a U.S. response in the region.

Russia has made serious progress toward fulfilling its Middle Eastern strategic objectives of maintaining a decisive hand in the region’s politics, a year-round ice-free port, and a portal through which to influence events beyond the eastern Mediterranean. Russian President Vladimir Putin has no desire to imperialize the Middle East in a manner akin to the Russian Empire’s conquest of Central Asia in the 19th century. Having obtained air and naval bases at Khmeimim and Tartus, both in Syria, Russia can once again turn its focus toward Europe. Still, the Kremlin likely prefers whatever political arrangement will most quickly secure its position as the Middle East’s predominant power, even if that puts it at odds with its erstwhile Iranian ally.

Nonstate forces will continue to play a crucial role in the strategic balance. The Kurds are arguably the most relevant of these, because of their highly disruptive presence in Turkish, Iraqi, Iranian, and Syrian national politics and, additionally, because their transnational character gives them the ability to stoke interstate conflict. Iran’s significance will, as a result of its economic woes, likely continue to decline, but the political vacuum it helped create in Iraq and Syria will persist, giving Russia and especially Iran the diplomatic cover to expand their influence.

The unique mix of political forces in the Middle East suggests three possibilities in the event of U.S. naval withdrawal from the region, and none favor U.S. interests.

First, Russia may broker a political arrangement among Turkey, Israel, and Iran, or, alternatively, support a coalition pitting some of those states against another in an effort to manufacture a manageable regional balance of power and allowing it to shift its attention back to Europe. The final shape of this strategy would depend on several variables: Turkey’s approach to Syria, Israel’s posture against Iran (and its proxies), the outcome of Saudi Arabia’s war in Yemen, the Kurdish question, and the possibility of the Islamic State’s resurgence.

Regardless of these factors, Russia will still bid for control of the Mediterranean Sea, which the United States will be hard-pressed to counter, particularly if China can manipulate its European economic partners into limiting or expelling the U.S. Navy from its Mediterranean bases. If that happens, Washington will have to fight its way back into the region for the first time since World War II.

In the second scenario, Iran defeats Saudi Arabia in a regional confrontation, thereby taking the top leadership spot in the Islamic world, making it a great power in its own right. Control of Middle Eastern oil exports would give Iran the ability to coerce and bully the United States’ European and Pacific allies, and it would deny the United States any peaceful access to the Levantine Basin. The balancing dynamics against this new great power are difficult to project, but regardless, the United States’ ability to control the strategic environment would be hampered markedly.

Third, a long-term regional war between Tehran and a fluctuating anti-Iran coalition composed of Saudi Arabia, other Sunni Gulf states, and Israel would cause widespread bloodshed. As the 1980s Iran-Iraq War demonstrated, both Iran and Saudi Arabia would be likely to attempt nuclear breakout. With Iran, this would mean closing the small technological gap that now exists between its low-enriched uranium to the higher level of enrichment needed for a nuclear weapon.

The Saudis could pay scientists from a sympathetic Sunni nuclear state — such as Pakistan — or simply buy nuclear weapons from Islamabad. An increasingly fractured and war-ravaged Middle East would spawn more jihadist organizations, and the West would be their primary target. Absent a reliable U.S. presence, Saudi Arabia and perhaps even Israel would increasingly turn to Russia and China as great-power guarantors, leaving U.S. officials in the unfortunate position of hoping polar ice will melt quickly enough to allow unrestricted year-round access over the Arctic, diminishing the importance of the Mediterranean.

But hope can only go so far, and the United States needs a more concrete, long-term approach to the Middle East. Despite modest increases in U.S. defense spending in recent years, peer and near-peer competition increasingly puts the predominance of the U.S. military at risk. In testimony before the Senate last year, Adm. Philip S. Davidson, commander of the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, noted that China is “approaching military parity” with the United States “in a number of critical areas,” and that “there is no guarantee that the United States would win a future conflict with China.”

The strength of hegemonic powers waxes and wanes, and allies respond accordingly. In 2018, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe made the first visit to China by a Japanese leader in seven years. There, he and Chinese President Xi Jinping agreed to elevate bilateral relations. Although Benjamin Netanyahu was first elected prime minister of Israel in 1996, he only visited Russia for the first time during his third term, in 2013. (He did not serve as prime minister during the decade from 1999 to 2009.) Since then he has been to the country 11 times, indicating that staunch allies that had previously relied on the United States for security now sense the need to open lines of communication with its adversaries.

The United States should reexamine its global commitments, especially those in the eastern Mediterranean, with a view to Russia’s expanding power. The Trump administration’s foreign and security policies in the region have included several bright spots: the strengthening of U.S.-Israel relations, an aggressive military campaign against the Islamic State, economic sanctions against Iran, and denial of F-35 fighter jet sales to Turkey following its purchase of Russian S-400 surface-to-air missiles.

But these have yet to be linked in a coherent strategic policy. Questions that need answers include: What is America’s goal in the region? Is growing Russian military and diplomatic presence consistent with U.S. regional goals? Should Washington leave the blossoming relations between Moscow and Ankara to run their course, and what is to be done if a true alliance between Russia and Turkey emerges? If regime change in Iran is not an option for U.S. policy, what should the goal be? Is it sufficient to assist Israel and Saudi Arabia and hope that they will manage regional tensions that could lead to war with Iran?

An examination of the global commitments recommended here should include the possibility of a comprehensive U.S.-Israel treaty that would gather together all the existing nontreaty agreements between the two nations on such matters as military aid, intelligence sharing, defense industrial cooperation, and free trade — to name a few.

The United States still retains strong interests in the Middle East. These include the untrammeled flow of oil to allies in Europe and Asia, the defense of democratic Israel, the security of NATO allies bordering the Mediterranean, and preventing conflict between regional powers.

If the United States withdraws from the region and hands the responsibility of those issues to another power (or set of powers), it will certainly give rise to another hegemonic power in the region that is hostile to U.S. interests. Such a change would copper-fasten the United States’ loss of great-power status.

#### Nuclear war in global hotspots. Probing in the Middle East spills over.

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Revisionist powers are on the move. ‎From eastern Ukraine and the Persian Gulf to the South China Sea, large rivals of the United States are modernizing their military forces, grabbing strategic real estate, and threatening vulnerable U.S. allies. Their goal is not just to assert hegemony over their neighborhoods but to rearrange the global security order as we have known it since the end of the Second World War.

We first wrote about these emerging dynamics in 2010, and then in TAI in 2011. We argued three things. First, that revisionist powers were using a strategy of “probing”: a combination of assertive diplomacy and small but bold military actions to test the outer reaches of American power and in particular the resilience of frontier allies. Second, we argued that the small, exposed allies who were the targets of these probes were likely to respond by developing back-up options to U.S. security guarantees, whether through military self-help or accommodation. And third, we argued that that China and Russia were learning from one another’s probes in their respective regions, and that allies themselves were drawing conclusions about U.S. deterrence in their own neighborhood from how America handled similarly situated allies elsewhere.

Five years later, as we argue in a new book released this month, these dynamics have intensified dramatically. Revisionist powers are indeed probing the United States, but their methods have become bolder, more violent — and successful. Allies have grown more alert to this pressure, amid the steady whittling away of neighboring buffer zones, and have begun to pursue an array of self-help schemes ranging from arms build-ups to flirtations with the nearby revisionist power. It has become harder for the United States to isolate security crises to one region: Russia’s land-grabs in Eastern Europe provide both a model and distraction effect for China to accelerate its maritime claims in the South China Sea; Poland’s quest for U.S. strategic reassurance unnerves and spurs allies in the Persian Gulf and Western Pacific.

By degrees, the world is entering the path to war. Not since the 1980s have the conditions been riper for a major international military crisis. Not since the 1930s has the world witnessed the emergence of multiple large, predatory states determined to revise the global order to their advantage — if necessary by force. At a minimum, the United States in coming years could face the pressure of managing several deteriorating regional security spirals; at a maximum, it could be confronted with a Great Power war against one, and possibly two or even three, nuclear-armed peer competitors. In either case, the U.S. military could face these scenarios without either the presumption of technological overmatch or favorable force ratios that it has enjoyed against its rivals for the past several decades.

How should the United States respond to these dynamics? As our rivals grow more aggressive and our military edge narrows, we must look to other methods for waging and winning geopolitical competitions in the 21st century.

The most readily available but underutilized tool at our disposal is alliances. America’s frontline allies offer a mechanism by which it can contain rivals — indeed, this was the original purpose for cultivating security linkages with small states in the world’s rimland regions to begin with. In coming years, the value of strategically placed allies near Eurasia’s large land powers will grow as our relative technological or numerical military strength shrinks. The time has come for the United States to develop a grand strategy for containing peer competitors centered on the creative use of frontline allies. It must do so now, before geopolitical competition intensifies.

Predatory Peers

Probing has been the strategy of choice for America’s modern rivals to challenge the existing order. Over the past few years, Russia, China, and, to a degree, Iran have sensed that the United States is retreating in their respective regions — whether out of choice, fatigue, weakness, or all three combined. But they are unsure of how much remaining strength the United States has, or of the solidity of its commitments to allies. Rather than risking direct war, they have employed low-intensity crises to test U.S. power in these regions. Like past revisionists, they have focused their probes on seemingly secondary interests of the leading power, either by humbling its weakest allies or seizing gray zones over which the United States is unlikely to fight. These probes test the United States on the outer rim of its influence, where the revisionist’s own interests are strongest while the U.S. is at its furthest commitments and therefore most vulnerable to defeat. Russia has launched a steady sequence of threatening military moves against vulnerable NATO allies and conducted limited offensives against former Soviet satellite states. China has sought out low-intensity diplomatic confrontations with small U.S. security clients, erected military no-go zones, and asserted claims over strategic waterways.

When we wrote about this behavior in The American Interest in 2011, it was composed mainly of aggressive diplomacy or threatening but small military moves. But the probes of U.S. rivals are becoming bolder. Sensing a window of opportunity, in 2014 Russia upped the ante by invading Ukraine — the largest country in Eastern Europe— I n a war that has so far cost 7,000 lives and brought 52,000 square kilometers of territory into the Russian sphere of influence. After years of using unmarked fishing trawlers to harass U.S. or allied naval vessels, China has begun to militarize its probes in the South China Sea, constructing seven artificial islands and claiming (and threatening to fight over) 1.8 million square kilometers of ocean. Iran has recently humiliated the United States by holding American naval vessels and broadcasting photos of surrendering U.S. sailors. In all cases, revisionist powers increased the stakes because they perceived their initial probes to have succeeded. Having achieved modest gains, they increased the intensity of their probes.

The strategic significance of these latest probes for the United States is twofold. First, they have substantially increased the military pressure on frontline allies. The presence of a buffer zone of some sort, whether land or sea, between allies like Poland or Japan and neighboring revisionist powers, helped to reduce the odds of sustained contact and confrontation between allied and rival militaries. By successfully encroaching on or invading these middle spaces, revisionists have advanced the zone of contest closer to the territory of U.S. allies, increasing the potential for a deliberate or accidental military clash.

Second, the latest probes have significantly raised the overall pressure on the United States. As long as Russia’s military adventures were restricted to its own southern periphery, America could afford to shift resources to the Pacific without worrying much about the consequences in Europe — an important consideration given the Pentagon’s jettisoning of the goal to be able to fight a two-front war. With both Ukraine and the South China Sea at play (and with a chaotic Middle East, where another rival, Iran, advances its reach and influence), the United States no longer has the luxury of prioritizing one region over another; with two re-militarized frontiers at opposite ends of the globe, it must continually weigh trade-offs in scarce military resources between geographic theaters. This disadvantage is not lost on America’s rivals, or its most exposed friends.

Frontier Frenzy

The intensification of probing has reverberated through the ranks of America’s frontline allies. In both Europe and Asia, the edges of the Western order are inhabited by historically vulnerable small or mid-sized states that over the past seven decades have relied on the United States for their existence. The similarities in the geopolitical position and strategic options of states like Estonia and Taiwan, or Poland and South Korea, are striking. For all of these states, survival depends above all on the sustainability of U.S. extended deterrence, in both its nuclear and conventional forms. This in turn rests on two foundations: the assumption among rivals and allies alike that the United States is physically able to fulfill its security obligations to even the smallest ally, and the assumption that it is politically willing to do so.

Doubts about both have been growing for many years. Reductions in American defense spending are weakening the U.S. military capability to protect allies. Due to cuts introduced by the 2009 Budget Control Act, the U.S. Navy is smaller than at any point since before the First World War, the U.S. Army is smaller than at any point since before the Second World War and the U.S. Air Force has the lowest number of operational warplanes in its history. Nuclear force levels are static or declining, and the U.S. technological edge over rivals in important weapons types has diminished. The Pentagon in 2009 announced that for the first time since the Second World War it would jettison the goal of being able to conduct a two-front global war.

At the same time that U.S. capabilities are decreasing, those of our rivals are increasing. Both Russia and China have undertaken large, multiyear military expansion and modernization programs and the technological gap between them and the United States is narrowing, particularly in key areas such as short-range missiles, tactical nuclear weapons, and fifth-generation fighter aircraft.

Recent American statecraft has compounded the problem by weakening the belief in U.S. political will to defend allies. The early Obama Administration’s public questioning of the value of traditional alliances as “alignments of nations rooted in the cleavages of a long-gone Cold War” shook allied confidence at the same time that its high-profile engagement with large rivals indicated a preference for big-power bargaining over the heads of small states. The U.S.-Russia “reset” seemed to many allies both transactional and freewheeling, and left a lasting impression of the suddenness with which U.S. priorities could shift from one Administration to the next. This undermined the predictability of patronage that is the sine qua non of effective deterrence for any Great Power.

As the revisionists’ probes have become more assertive and U.S. credibility less firm, America’s frontier allies have started to reconsider their national security options. Five years ago, many frontline states expressed security concerns, began to seek greater military capabilities, or looked to offset risk by engaging diplomatically with revisionists. But for the most part, such behavior was muted and well within the bounds of existing alliance commitments. However, as probing has picked up pace, allied coping behavior has become more frantic. In Europe, Poland, the Baltic States, and Romania have initiated military spending increases. In Asia, littoral U.S. allies are engaged in a worrisome regional arms race. In both regions, the largest allies are considering offensive capabilities to create conventional deterrence. Their willingness to build up their indigenous military capabilities is overall a positive development, but it carries risks, too, spurring dynamics that were absent over the past decades. The danger is that, absent a consistent and credible U.S. overwatch, rearming allies engage in a chaotic acquisition strategy, poorly anchored in the larger alliance. Fearing abandonment, such states may end up detaching themselves from the alliance simply by pursuing independent security policies.

There is also danger on the other side of the spectrum of possible responses by frontline allies. Contrary to the hopeful assumptions of offshore balancers, not all frontline allies are resisting. Some are choosing strategies of accommodation. Bulgaria, Hungary, and Slovakia in Europe and Thailand and Malaysia in Asia are all examples of nominal U.S. allies that are trying to avoid antagonizing the stronger predator. Worsening regional security dynamics create domestic political pressures to avoid confrontation with the nearby revisionist power. Full-fledged bandwagoning in the form of the establishment of new alliances is not yet visible, but hedging is.

Seeds of Disorder

The combination of intensifying probes and fragmenting alliances threatens to unravel important components of the stability of major regions and the wider international order. Allowed to continue on their current path, security dynamics in Eastern Europe and the Western Pacific could lead to negative or even catastrophic outcomes for U.S. national security. One increasingly likely near-term scenario is a simmering, simultaneous security competition in major regions. In such a scenario, rivals continue probing allies and grabbing middle-zone territory while steering clear of war with the United States or its proxies; allies continue making half-measure preparations without becoming fully capable of managing their own security; and the United States continues feeding greater and greater resources into frontline regions without achieving reassurance, doggedly tested and put in doubt by the revisionists. Through a continued series of probes, the revisionist powers maintain the initiative while the United States and its allies play catch up. The result might be a gradual hardening of the U.S. security perimeter that never culminates in a Great Power war but generates many of the negative features of sustained security competition — arms races, proxy wars, and cyber and hybrid conflicts — that erode the bases of global economic growth.

A second, graver possibility is war. Historically, a lengthy series of successful probes has often culminated in a military confrontation. One dangerous characteristic of today’s international landscape is that not one but two revisionists have now completed protracted sequences of probes that, from their perspective, have been successful. If the purpose of probing is to assess the top power’s strength, today’s probes could eventually convince either Russia, China, or both that the time is ripe for a more definitive contest. It is uncertain what the outcome would be. Force ratios in today’s two hotspots, the Baltic Sea and South China Sea, do not favor the United States. Both Russia and China possess significant anti-access/area denial (A2AD) capabilities, with a ten-to-one Russian troop advantage in the Baltic and massive Chinese preponderance of coastal short-range missiles in the South China Sea. Moreover, both powers possess nuclear weapons and, in Russia’s case, a doctrine favoring their escalatory use for strategic effect. And even if the United States can maintain overwhelming military superiority in a dyadic contest, war is always the realm of chance and a source of destruction that threatens the stability of the existing international order. Having failed a series of probes, the United States could face the prospect of either a short, sharp war that culminates in nuclear attack or an economically costly protracted two-front conflict. Either outcome would definitely alter the U.S.-led international system as we know it.

A third, long-term possibility is a gradual eviction of the United States from the rimland regions. This could occur either through a military defeat, as described above, or through the gradual hollowing out of U.S. regional alliances due to the erosion of deterrence and alliance defection — and therefore this scenario is not mutually exclusive of the previous two. For the United States, this would be geopolitically disastrous, involving a loss of position in the places where America must be present to prevent the risk of hemispheric isolation. Gaining a foothold in the Eurasian rimlands has been a major, if not the most important, goal of U.S. grand strategy for a century. It is through this presence that the United States is able to shape global politics and avoid the emergence of mortal threats to itself. Without such a presence, America’s largest rivals would be able to steadily aggrandize, building up enlarged spheres of influence, territory, and resources that would render them capable of sustained competition for global primacy. Unlike in the 20th century, current A2AD and nuclear technology would make a military reentry into these regions difficult if not impossible.

#### Turns regional instability. Overwhelming historical evidence.

Pollack ’22 [Kenneth; Senior Fellow at the American Enterprise Institute. June 2022; “The Middle East Abhors a Vacuum”; *Foreign Affairs*; https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/middle-east/2022-04-19/middle-east-abhors-vacuum] TDI

What underlay this overlooked stability was a skewed military balance that proved nearly impervious to change. There might have been chaos on the upper floors, but the foundation of Middle Eastern security remained rock solid. At one end of the spectrum, the United States was all-powerful, able to defeat any foe if it was willing to apply sufficient strength. Close behind was Israel, whose astonishing military competence and access to U.S. weaponry gave it a similar ability to use force with great latitude. At the other end of the spectrum were the Arab states, incapable of waging modern war effectively even against one another. Iran and Turkey fell in between, but far closer to the weaker than the stronger.

Given these disparities, only the United States and Israel used force regularly against external foes. Since both were staunch defenders of the status quo, they tended to act to preserve the existing order rather than remake it. Here, too, the exceptions proved the rule. Israel used force to try to transform Lebanon in 1982 and paid for it with 18 years of fruitless guerrilla warfare. The United States did the same in Iraq in 2003 and earned a similar fate.

As a result, the Middle East has not seen a major conventional interstate war in over 30 years. The one partial aberration was the 2006 Lebanon war, in which Israel fought Hezbollah, the de facto governing entity of Lebanon. Yet that, too, was an exception proving the rule. Neither side wanted war. Both stumbled into it and were so traumatized by the results that they have not repeated their mistakes since.

All of that has begun to change. In recent years, the rigid chrysalis of the Middle Eastern military balance has started to crack, releasing a swarm of twenty-first-century Furies that threaten to remake the region’s landscape. As new military and civilian technologies emerge, and as the United States contemplates a smaller role in the region’s internal affairs, Middle Eastern states are finding it increasingly difficult to know who holds the strategic upper hand. By convincing governments that they might triumph with the aid of new and untested weapons, the emergence of information-age warfare is threatening to rend the geopolitical laws that have ruled the Middle East for nearly half a century.

### link---top---2nr

#### US is key. Withdrawal makes escalation inevitable.

Yahya ’22 [Maha; Director of the Malcolm H. Kerr Carnegie Middle East Center. “The Middle East Is on the Brink Again”; *Foreign Affairs*; https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/middle-east/2022-03-22/middle-east-brink-again] TDI

Beyond a revenge of the old order, the autocratic resurgence playing out across the Middle East is a story of U.S. disengagement from the region and the geopolitical shifts that this has caused. The last three U.S. administrations, but especially the last two, have sought to pare back U.S. military commitments in the Middle East while maintaining Washington’s long-standing focus on combating terrorism. This has reduced U.S. influence in the region and made the United States more tolerant of autocratic partners, so long as they support its main priorities. It has also opened the door to greater regional activism by China and Russia and by regional powers such as Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and the Gulf states — all of which conceive of their national interests as extending far beyond their borders.

The result has been a partial resurrection of the old authoritarian order, except without the authoritarian bargain — whereby populations reluctantly accepted economic prosperity in lieu of political freedom — that once underpinned it. Autocratic governments across the region are cracking down on human rights and rolling back democracy, but they can offer little in the way of jobs or other economic opportunities in return. Even though oil prices have risen as a result of the war in Ukraine, improving the short-term economic outlook for some authoritarian governments in the Middle East, many others are still reeling from the COVID-19 pandemic and facing unfavorable long-term economic trends, including a looming climate crisis that will hit them harder than most. Today’s Middle Eastern autocrats are not the face of a new, stable authoritarian order. They represent a fragile arrangement that could crack in the near future.

ARAB WINTER

The years since the Arab uprisings of 2011 have been disappointing ones for proponents of democracy. Not only have Libya, Syria, and Yemen been racked by civil war, but those governments that remained stable have for the most part preferred repression and surveillance to reform. In Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Tunisia, and elsewhere, governments have restricted basic freedoms and cracked down on civil society. Many countries have imprisoned human rights defenders, and some, such as Bahrain, have revoked the citizenship of government critics. Still more have used the COVID-19 pandemic as an excuse to impose curfews, restrictions on movement, and heightened surveillance. The United Arab Emirates (UAE) has used the messaging app ToTok to spy on millions of people.

Last year, coups in two countries called into question the region’s only remaining success stories. In July, the president of Tunisia, Kais Saied, suspended Parliament, fired the prime minister, and declared that he would rule by decree. He also ordered the arrest of members of Parliament and journalists who criticized his actions. In October, the army chief in Sudan, General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, made a similar power grab, suspending the country’s transitional government, appointing a new cabinet, and granting the security services new emergency powers to hunt down Sudanese citizens resisting military rule.

This trend toward authoritarianism has been reinforced by the United States’ gradual disengagement from the Middle East. Over the last decade, Washington has let its expansive goals of democratization and regional transformation fall by the wayside, replacing them with a more modest set of priorities — namely, ensuring regional stability, keeping Iran from gaining a nuclear weapon, and combating terrorism that threatens the U.S. homeland. The United States’ diminished presence in the region has given regional powers more space to pursue their authoritarian interests, and unsurprisingly, they have prioritized their own survival over the well-being of their people.

As Washington has pulled back, Russia and China have also moved to fill some of the void, threatening to turn the Middle East into an arena of great-power competition. Moscow has become deeply enmeshed in the Syrian conflict in particular, achieving significant diplomatic and military results at a relatively low cost. It has also increased its sway over other parts of the Arab world, especially North Africa, where it has used arms deals and mercenaries to advance its interests. The war in Ukraine has shifted Moscow’s focus back closer to home, but it would be premature to expect even a militarily stretched and internationally isolated Russia to turn its back on the Middle East.

China has also deepened its relationships with countries across the Middle East and North Africa, expanding economic and trade partnerships and building infrastructure, energy, finance, and technology initiatives. It has forged multilateral diplomatic agreements, including the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum, and bilateral military agreements with Egypt, Iran, and Saudi Arabia. Arab governments have welcomed China’s growing presence in the region, in part because it allows them to diversify their relationships with great powers as the United States pulls back, and in part because Beijing shares their antipathy toward democratic values.

In this context, a host of middle powers have also become more proactive about securing their interests in the region. The UAE, once a relatively minor regional actor, is now an influential player in Egypt, Libya, Sudan, Tunisia, Yemen, and the Horn of Africa, often lending financial and political support to authoritarian governments and armed proxy forces at the expense of democratically elected or reform-minded leaders. Likewise, Turkey, which only a decade ago sought closer ties to Europe, is now an active player in North Africa and the Levant. It is carving out an ever-expanding zone of influence by backing mainly Islamist proxy forces in Libya, Somalia, Syria, and Yemen. Qatar has also gotten into the game, alongside Saudi Arabia, which has long used its petrodollars to buy influence in the region. And, of course, Iran continues to exploit divisions in many Arab countries to augment its influence.

Not surprisingly, as authoritarian powers have pursued their interests farther abroad, they have often done so at the expense of democracy and human rights. Under the guise of “stabilization,” they have contributed to the fragmentation of some countries and undermined democratic transitions in others — most recently in Sudan and Tunisia, where the coup leaders received support from some Gulf countries. Other regional powers, including Egypt, Jordan, and the UAE, have begun to normalize relations with the Assad regime in Syria, even though it stands accused of war crimes. Their stated rationale is to curb Iranian influence in the Levant.

NEITHER FREE NOR STABLE

Once again, citizens in the Middle East are being asked to choose between freedom and stability. But unlike the last generation of Arab autocrats, who could at least claim to offer economic and social benefits in exchange for political obedience, the new crop of authoritarian leaders can promise neither prosperity nor stability. Faced with increasing economic headwinds, some owing to the pandemic and others to unfavorable long-term energy and climate trends, Arab states are increasingly incapable of holding up their end of the authoritarian bargain. Lebanon and Iraq are both in dire economic straits. Libya, Syria, and Yemen are mired in civil war and facing serious humanitarian crises. Even relatively stable countries such as Egypt and Tunisia are struggling economically, while the Gulf states, once unfathomably rich, must contend with the looming end of the oil era. Russia’s invasion of Ukraine may have given them a temporary respite, but eventually their rentier systems will become unsustainable. Across the region, ratios of public debt to GDP are rising while spending on public services is falling.

Lacking the means to co-opt society, some Arab governments have undertaken megaprojects intended to highlight the strength and grandeur of the state without delivering any actual services. Egypt is a prime example. The cost of a planned new administrative capital, owned primarily by the army and the Ministry of Housing, could reach upwards of $60 billion. Public spending on this and other nationalistic projects that aim to depict progress have driven Egypt’s ratio of public debt to GDP up to an astronomical 88 percent. To a lesser extent, Tunisia’s government has also pursued the politics of symbolism while ignoring economic realities, stoking popular discontent that in some ways mirrors the national mood in the lead-up to the revolution that began in 2010.

Environmental challenges, including warming temperatures and water scarcity, will only make it harder for Arab countries to grow their economies and provide for their citizens. The Middle East is warming at twice the average global rate, fueling food insecurity, urban migration, and competition over resources. Eleven of the 17 most water-stressed countries in the world are in the region. And according to the World Bank, water scarcity will cost governments in the Middle East and North Africa between seven and 14 percent of their GDP by 2050. Increasing desertification and drought are pushing people toward cities, putting pressure on infrastructure and heightening tensions among communities. Between 2007 and 2010, for instance, droughts drove 1.5 million people from northeastern Syria to the west of the country, contributing to a dramatic increase in the urban population. This did not spark the uprising of 2011, but it did accelerate declining living conditions and fuel popular discontent. Today, conflict in Libya, Syria, and Yemen is contributing to the flow of refugees into Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Somalia, Tunisia, and Turkey, sparking competition over scarce resources where local authorities have struggled to accommodate newcomers. In time, these population pressures are all but certain to stoke political and socioeconomic discontent.

Unable to provide for their citizens, Arab countries have grown more reliant on intimidation. This, in turn, has reinforced a regionwide culture of impunity. As Arab countries begin to normalize relations with the Assad regime in Syria, they do not seem interested in holding Syrian officials accountable for their horrific crimes. Nor does there appear to be much interest in resolving the refugee problem, which the Syrian regime will likely use as leverage to speed up the process of normalization. As long as Assad’s regime remains in power without a credible political solution, millions of refugees will be unable to return home. And as long as Syrian officials escape justice, authoritarian regimes throughout the Middle East and beyond will have little incentive to refrain from committing similar crimes against their own people.

UNSTABLE ORDER

The new autocratic order settling over the Middle East is destined to be unstable. Far from the “durable authoritarianism” that many scholars once saw in the region prior to the 2011 uprisings, the blend of domestic repression, deteriorating socioeconomic conditions, and international meddling that has taken hold in Arab capitals is likely to produce greater instability, more violence, and a resurgence of extremism.

Hollowed out by corruption and mismanagement and buffeted by adverse economic conditions, authoritarian governments in the Middle East are struggling to deliver the socioeconomic benefits that once pacified their publics. Armed actors, whether national security services or private militias, are playing an ever more important role in many countries — both economically and politically. Ordinary people, meanwhile, are being squeezed by growing violence on the one hand and dwindling resources on the other — just as they were prior to the Arab uprisings of 2011, and in Iraq and Syria, prior to the rise of the Islamic State.

To this political tinderbox, Russia and China have added heightened great-power tensions while Iran and the Gulf countries have stoked conflict and weaponized sectarian identities in pursuit of greater regional influence. Sunnis across the Middle East are bristling at Iran’s expansionist policies, having watched Syrian forces backed by Iran and Russia and a U.S.-led coalition against ISIS destroy four major Sunni cities — Mosul, Raqqa, Homs, and Aleppo. The Middle East’s authoritarian turn should reassure no one. Rather, it should serve as a warning of the greater instability to come.

### link---empirics---2nr

#### Strong US commitment is key to regional stability.

Roberts ’20 [David; Senior Lecturer at the School of Security Studies lead for Regional Security and Development at King’s College London, Adjunct Faculty at Science Po’s Paris School of International Affairs, Non-Resident Fellow at the Arab Gulf States Institute Washington, Formerly Director of the Qatar office of the Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies, PhD from Durham University. “For decades, Gulf leaders counted on U.S. protection. Here’s what changed.”; Washington Post; https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2020/01/30/decades-gulf-leaders-counted-us-protection-heres-what-changed/] TDI

Gulf countries relied on U.S. protection

For the Gulf monarchies, protection through deterrence has long been a central point of their relationship with the United States. Since the establishment of the Saudi-U.S. relationship in the 1940s, such starkly different countries have seldom forged denser bilateral relations.

Saudi leaders saw neither commonality nor familiarity with their U.S. counterparts. Rather, they expanded the scope and depth of this bilateral relationship to benefit from closer U.S. technical and advisory cooperation — and counted on an ever-closer defensive and protective relationship with the United States to ward off a growing array of regional security threats.

The U.S. government, a veritable army of contractors and consultants, and other Western nations such as Britain, played decisive roles in shaping and modernizing the security institutions in the Gulf monarchies, but particularly in Saudi Arabia. The security-rooted relationship between Washington, London, Paris and the Gulf capitals flourished regardless of other political controversies.

The monarchies enjoyed relatively unfettered access to the most advanced Western military equipment, spending hundreds of millions of dollars in Western capitals. By comparison, since 2008, the monarchies have outspent Iran by about 180 to 1 on weaponry.

When its Gulf clients were threatened, the United States in the past delivered on its commitments. During the 1980s Tanker War, the United States deployed forces to the Persian Gulf to reflag and protect Gulf shipping. In 1990-1991, the United States led one of the largest coalitions in modern history to defend the monarchies and liberate Kuwait.

This Gulf War demonstrated both the dangers of the Gulf region, and the effectiveness of U.S. military force. Despite long-standing concerns about appearing too close to the United States, Gulf leaders encouraged the stationing of hitherto unimaginable numbers of U.S. forces throughout the monarchies.

### link---power vacuum---2nr

#### Power vacuums and regional instability escalate.

Pollack ’22 [Kenneth; Senior Fellow at the American Enterprise Institute. June 2022; “The Middle East Abhors a Vacuum”; *Foreign Affairs*; https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/middle-east/2022-04-19/middle-east-abhors-vacuum] TDI

The American exit from the Middle East has created a security vacuum. The most violent, aggressive, disruptive forces are all rushing to fill the void — led by Iran and its allies. From their low points in 2010 and 2015, following the American troop surge in Iraq and the near collapse of their Syrian ally, Tehran and its rogues’ gallery of friends—the Assad regime in Syria, the Houthis in Yemen, Hezbollah in Lebanon, Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad in the Gaza Strip, and a murder of Shiite militias from Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, and Syria — have built themselves back up by exploiting the region’s civil wars and their own skills in unconventional warfare. This strategy was straight out of the Iranian general Qasem Soleimani’s brilliant playbook — send in the militias in lieu of the regulars — and it has expanded Iranian influence throughout Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, and Yemen.

Iran’s burgeoning sway and the United States’ unseemly retreat have panicked U.S. allies in the region. It has driven some to band together in previously unimaginable ways. Bahrain, Morocco, Sudan, and the United Arab Emirates, for instance, have joined Egypt and Jordan in burying the hatchet with Israel by signing the Abraham Accords. Saudi Arabia seems likely to follow, albeit perhaps not until King Salman passes. These countries’ former hatred of the Jewish state has given way to a pragmatic appreciation for the country’s military might and willingness to use it against Iran. Many have celebrated this newfound amity as the end of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Even setting aside the unresolved misery of the Palestinians, however, such a perspective overlooks the fact that this is a war coalition in the making, and its ultimate purpose is belligerent, not pacific. Meanwhile, Qatar, Turkey, and half of Libya have banded together out of mutual sympathy for the Muslim Brotherhood — a bizarre platypus of a military alliance with little to strategically bind them.

In the wake of the United States’ long goodbye, the states of the region are brawling more often, and most expect that to become the new normal. The Saudis and the Emiratis, for instance, intervened in the Yemeni civil war in 2015 to prevent the expansion of Iranian influence. Although their intervention caused the very threat they sought to preclude, they took action explicitly because the United States was doing nothing about Iran’s regional gains and did so only after repeatedly imploring the Obama administration to act instead of them. Israel has struck Iranian targets in Syria hundreds of times over the past decade and has recently turned its attention to Iranian-allied militias in Iraq. Iran and Israel are engaged in a cyberwar that has now escalated to include Iranian attacks on Israeli hospitals and Israeli attacks on Iranian gas stations. Turkish forces are fighting Russian and Emirati proxies in Libya and the Syrian regime and Iranian forces in Syria.

Terrorism, Washington’s longtime preoccupation in the Middle East, is also gradually becoming a secondary problem. That’s because terrorism is the strategy of the weak, and the transformation of warfare in the region has allowed states that were once weak to engage in more conventional military operations. That is a worrisome development for both the United States and the Middle East.

The United States’ withdrawal, therefore, appears to be unleashing a predictable struggle among Middle Eastern states over which will take the United States’ place at the region’s head. Some are willing to fight hard to win that crown, and others are willing to fight just as hard to prevent someone else — or anyone — from claiming it. Even if all fail, the process will be gory and destabilizing. It may also singe neighboring regions, if not burn them to the ground.

### impact---middle east---2nr

#### Middle East escalates. Defense assumes deterrence, which is our internal link!

Mead ’23 [Walter; Ravenel B. Curry III Distinguished Fellow in Strategy and Statesmanship at Hudson Institute, the Global View Columnist at The Wall Street Journal and the James Clarke Chace Professor of Foreign Affairs and Humanities at Bard College in New York. February 27, 2023; “War in the Middle East Is Closer Than You Think”; *Wall Street Journal*; https://www.wsj.com/articles/mideast-war-is-closer-than-you-think-iran-nuclear-program-russia-oil-china-wedge-foreign-policy-biden-israel-b754ab96] TDI

Two years later, the Biden administration is struggling to manage the failure of its original design. Its aggressive rhetoric and policy toward China have intensified China’s hostility, but instead of facing an isolated China in an otherwise calm world, the administration faces simultaneous confrontations in Europe and the Far East. Russia isn’t parked, Iran isn’t pacified, and the three revisionists are coordinating their strategy and messaging to an unprecedented degree.

Worse, Iran’s inexorable march toward nuclear weapons, combined with its deepening partnership with Russia, is driving the Middle East steadily closer to a war that is likely to engage the U.S. — one that the Biden administration desperately wants to avoid.

For Mr. Putin, a major military confrontation in the Middle East would be an unmitigated blessing. Oil prices would spike, filling Moscow’s coffers and intensifying pressures on Europe. The Pentagon would have to split available weapons between Ukraine and Middle East allies. The balance in the Taiwan Strait would significantly shift in China’s favor. Spiking energy prices would boost inflation in the U.S. just as Mr. Biden tries to persuade antiwar Democrats to support another American military venture in the Middle East.

And while in a perfect world Russia might oppose an Iranian nuclear weapon, under current circumstances — in which Mr. Putin desperately needs Iran to help disrupt American strategy — Mr. Putin might well decide to help Iran cross the nuclear threshold.

But the Russian dictator doesn’t need to go that far. Simply by increasing Iranian military capabilities that limit Israel’s ability to attack Iran’s nuclear facilities, Mr. Putin could force Israel into a pre-emptive strike that would set off a regional war.

The U.S. can’t compel Iran and Russia to avoid actions that trigger a new Middle East war, but strong policy on our part still might deter them. Unfortunately for the Biden administration, that involves precisely the kind of hawkish Middle East posture that many Democrats — including senior Biden officials — viscerally loathe. The American approach to Saudi Arabia will have to move from a fist bump to wholehearted embrace. Drone attacks and other provocations by Iran and its allies against the Saudis, Emiratis and their neighbors will have to be met with the kind of American military response that leaves no doubt of our determination to prevail.

The best way to avoid war, and to minimize direct American engagement should war break out, is to ensure that our Middle East allies have the power to defend themselves. We must make it unmistakably clear that we will ensure our allies win should hostilities break out. Nothing else will do.

## Deterrence---China

### china deterrence---1nc

#### Biden’s pursuing an exclusionary policy against China in the Middle East.

Ghiselli ’23 [Andrea; Assistant Professor at the School of International Relations and Public Affairs of Fudan University, Head of Research of the TOChina Hub’s ChinaMed Project. January 9, 2023; “China and the United States in the Middle East: Policy Continuity Amid Changing Competition”; *Middle East Institute*; https://www.mei.edu/publications/china-and-united-states-middle-east-policy-continuity-amid-changing-competition] TDI

Elected to office having promised a clean break from Donald J. Trump, Joe Biden’s foreign policy is remarkably like that of his predecessor, at least vis-à-vis China. It is true that Biden has been placing more emphasis on multilateralism. However, as Stephen M. Walt pointed out, the administration’s emphasis on preserving the “rules-based international order” seems just another way to frame a more straightforward strategy of containment against China.[2] Washington is trying to create an “order of exclusion” by increasingly exploiting its central role in key institutions and industries to prevent China from accessing, for example, the most-cutting edge technologies.[3]

The development and consolidation of this strategy has naturally shaped the American approach to China in the Middle East. In the past, the US China policy was, at least to some extent, a function of Chinese actions in the region. The bargain between the two countries on the UN Resolution 678 of November 1990 – the one that gave Iraq until 15 January 1991 to withdraw from Kuwait and empowered states to use “all necessary means” to force it out of Kuwait after the deadline – is a good example of this.[4] Yet, as preserving its primacy in East Asia has become the top priority for the United States, the relationship between its China and Middle East policies has inverted. Today, American behavior in the region is increasingly influenced by trends in Sino-American relations. As such, Middle Eastern countries are feeling growing pressure to join the efforts to contain China. Because Chinese companies play an important role in many economies and development agendas in the region, acceding to Washington’s request is not something that comes cheap for MENA policymakers.[5]

Since imposing economic costs on one’s own partners rarely pays, the American response to the perceived expanding Chinese influence should not neglect greater economic engagement with the region. This is especially true as there is no real Middle Eastern demand for Chinese regional security products, and there is no substantial Chinese offer either. In other words, proposals of greater security cooperation alone will hardly compensate for the Middle Eastern countries’ costs of forcibly reduced economic cooperation with China. That “China can’t replace the U.S. as a regional security guarantor” matters only to some extent, regardless of what some believe.[6] Hence, Rush Doshi emphasized that although the United States should not compete with China “dollar-for-dollar, ship-for-ship, or loan-for-loan,” it still “should fund alternatives to those projects that have the greatest strategic potential (e.g., dual-use port projects, undersea cables, airfields) or work to multilateralize Chinese funding to ensure the United States has a seat at the table.”[7] Michael Singh stressed the need to “provide tangible benefits in the form of increased access to U.S. and European markets or technology.”[8]

The Biden administration is aware of this issue. As clearly stated in the latest US National Security Strategy, military and defense-related/framed solutions cannot be the default choice to deal with challenges in the region.[9] However, there is good reason to doubt that this will change. Biden is not the first American leader to propose and then fail to rebalance American foreign policy from over-reliance on the military toward greater use of diplomacy and economic tools of statecraft.[10] One of the main problems is that policy substitution, i.e., using one policy instrument instead of another to achieve the same goal, is difficult to achieve.

American leaders have long faced challenges of different magnitude depending on what policy tool they want to use. While the president can deploy some with a certain degree of freedom, others require approval from Congress. Among the latter, if and how they are used also depends on the outcome of often difficult and time-consuming negotiations involving lobbies and interest groups. These challenges further increase in moments of heightened political divisions like today. This has made the use of military power and defense-related assistance the go-to option for American leaders.[11] For the same reasons, it is also relatively easy for presidents to threaten and implement certain types of sanctions, such as restricting US technology exports.[12] In comparison, providing foreign development aid and greater access to the American domestic market is much more difficult. Moreover, as shown in the case of the tender for operating Haifa’s Bayport Terminal in Israel,[13] foreign non-Chinese companies, including American ones, often are not interested in those projects that Middle Eastern governments deem important, thereby adding one more challenge to the Biden administration.

#### Deterrence works---empirics prove.

Hubbard & Qin ’22 [Ben; Istanbul bureau chief for The New York Times, studied history and French at Northwestern University, served in the Peace Corps in Togo, and received a Master’s in Journalism from the University of California, Berkeley, finalist for the Pulitzer Prize in International Reporting. Amy; national correspondent for The New York Times, graduate of U.C. Berkeley and Oxford University, taught international reporting as a visiting professor at U.C. Berkeley. February 2, 2022; “As the U.S. Pulls Back From the Mideast, China Leans In”; *New York Times*; https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/01/world/middleeast/china-middle-east.html] TDI

As the United States, fatigued by decades of war and upheaval in the Middle East, seeks to limit its involvement there, China is deepening its ties with both friends and foes of Washington across the region.

China is nowhere near rivaling the United States’ vast involvement in the Middle East. But states there are increasingly looking to China not just to buy their oil, but to invest in their infrastructure and cooperate on technology and security, a trend that could accelerate as the United States pulls back.

For Beijing, the recent turmoil in neighboring countries like Afghanistan and Kazakhstan has reinforced its desire to cultivate stable ties in the region. The outreach follows the American military’s withdrawal from Afghanistan after 20 years, as well as the official end of its combat mission in Iraq. That, along with the Biden administration’s frequent talk of China as its top national security priority, has left many of its partners in the Middle East believing that Washington’s attention lies elsewhere.

Beijing has welcomed the chance to extend its influence, and Arab leaders appreciate that China — which touts the virtue of “noninterference” in other countries’ affairs — won’t get involved in their domestic politics or send its military to topple unfriendly dictators. And each side can count on the other to overlook its human rights abuses.

“There is a feeling in the region that the United States is actively on the way out, and that’s an opportunity for China,” said Gedaliah Afterman, head of the Asia Policy Program at the Abba Eban Institute of International Diplomacy at Reichman University in Israel.

China’s interest in the Middle East has long been rooted in its need for oil. It buys nearly half of its crude from Arab states, with Saudi Arabia topping the list, and it is sure to need more as its economy, the world’s second largest, keeps growing.

But in recent years, China has also been investing in critical infrastructure in the region and making deals to supply countries there with telecommunications and military technology.

Chinese state-backed companies are eyeing investments in a maritime port in Chabahar, Iran. They have helped to finance an industrial park in the port of Duqm, Oman, and to build and operate a container terminal in Abu Dhabi, the United Arab Emirates’ capital, as well as two new ports in Israel.

Such moves reflect Beijing’s view of the Middle East as crucial to its Belt and Road Initiative, a sweeping plan to build international infrastructure to facilitate Chinese commerce.

China hopes to link markets and supply chains from the Indian Ocean to Eurasia, making the Persian Gulf region “a really important hub,” said Jonathan Fulton, a nonresident senior fellow for Middle East programs at the Atlantic Council.

#### Chinese peace in the Middle East is a farce that won’t last.

Moonakal ’22 [Nadeem; Dr. TMA Pai Fellow and PhD scholar at Department of Geopolitics and International Relations, Manipal University. M.A. in Geopolitics & International Relations from Manipal Academy of Higher Education. July 9, 2022; “The Impact and Implications of China’s Growing Influence in the Middle East”; *The Diplomat*; https://thediplomat.com/2022/07/the-impact-and-implications-of-chinas-growing-influence-in-the-middle-east/] TDI

Beijing has a huge stake in the region especially as China’s top crude oil providers include Saudi Arabia, Oman, Kuwait, Iraq, and the UAE. China in recent years has increased its oil imports from Iran at cheaper rates as well. To protect its strategic interests, China will likely enhance its military ties further as regional tensions escalate and extraregional powers are now focused on quickly adapting to regional geopolitical changes.

While Beijing has exploited the desperation of countries under U.S. sanctions in the Middle East like Iran and Syria, Washington is trying to minimize Chinese cooperation with Iran by introducing new sanctions. In this context, Chinese defense exports will feature as an important aspect for the regional powers in the Middle East. China’s growing military ties with Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Iran, and the UAE become important in understanding the emerging regional geopolitical dynamics. As the United States is now focusing on mechanisms, alliances, and security arrangements to contain Chinese aspirations in the region Washington’s allies in the Middle East may limit military cooperation with China at some level. China meanwhile will continue to become more involved in joint maritime exercises and strengthen cooperation in nontraditional security operations with regional partners.

Diplomats and strategic experts in China have given some insights into what a proactive Chinese role in the region would be based on. Beijing believes in the idea of peace through development by enhancing “shared security perceptions,” which is different from the Western-led “traditional security perception” that is focused on pursuing security by defeating the enemy and maintaining exclusive military alliances. However, Chinese propositions to promote political dialogue between rival countries and establish multilateral arrangements to minimize mistrust and broaden common interests (which was also a part of China’s Arab Policy Paper) still lack clarity on actual mechanisms to achieve these goals, especially amid lingering conflicts. Chinese ambassadors have been careful in their responses to regional political changes, largely emphasizing common interests and avoiding commenting on sensitive political tussles, and have often argued for a multipolar alternative to U.S.-led security initiatives in the region.

As the regional security situation becomes vulnerable to more conflicts and attacks, China faces a real challenge in protecting its maritime interests and maintaining security and stability along strategic chokepoints and crossroads. The role of China in the emerging security arrangement remains to be seen; however, China would be reluctant to replace the United States as the security provider. Beijing has shown little interest in taking up that responsibility so far. In this context, regional powers could be more assertive in increasing their influence.

Amid the political deadlocks and security challenges in countries like Iraq, Syria, and Yemen, regional powers will likely take up new roles to secure their interests. For example, Iranian forces now filling the void in Syria; a similar pattern could be observed with other proxy militias and groups that intend to broaden their influence in the backdrop of U.S. withdrawal. China’s response to such regional changes would determine to some extent the emerging regional security dynamics.

Economy, trade, and investment are the fulcrums of Beijing’s balancing act; however, to continue this momentum it is vital to maintain the security and stability of the region. That becomes difficult in the absence of any strong collective and inclusive security arrangement. China could be more assertive and use its economic and political tools directly and indirectly by influencing the powerful and ruling elites in the region to protect its strategic interests upon reaching a difficult position in the delicate balancing act. Although China has so far refrained from being a part of any regional conflicts, Beijing’s strategy of hedging and limits of non-interference will eventually be put to test.

## Deterrence---Russia

### russia deterrence---1nc

#### The Middle East is Russia’s next step after Ukraine. US military presence is key to deterrence.

Milburn ’22 [Andrew; retired from the Marine Corps in 2019 as the Deputy Commander of Special Operations Command Central. Bachelor's from University College London, Law degree from Westminster University, Master’s Degrees in Strategic Studies and Operational Studies, Graduate of the Marine Corps University and the School of Advanced Warfighting. March 1, 2022; “Is the Middle East next on Putin’s agenda? What the US can do to prepare”; *Middle East Institute*; https://www.mei.edu/publications/middle-east-next-putins-agenda-what-us-can-do-prepare] TDI

Conventional wisdom has it that the conflict in Ukraine will lead the United States to bolster its military presence along NATO’s boundary in Eastern Europe, with a concomitant downscaling in the Middle East. While presenting a robust front in support of NATO is of course critical, it would be a mistake to do so at the expense of the U.S. military presence in the Middle East at a time when it appears likely that Russian President Vladimir Putin has chosen the region as the venue for the next moves in his campaign to marginalize the United States.

In the last year, Russia has moved strategic bombers to western Syria (from which it can hit targets in Europe), warned Israel against conducting strikes in Syria, and started mounting combined air patrols with the Syrian air force. Incidents of aggressive Russian aerial maneuvers that bring U.S. and Russian aircraft into close proximity have become increasingly common.

All these indications should be warning signs for Washington, offering the opportunity to pre-empt rather than react, if the political will exists to do so.

Why is this the case? Well, to begin with, Russia does not separate the world into compartments the way the United States government does. For Russia, Syria is an integral cog in its global campaign to displace the United States — one in which the United States will again be presented with the choice to escalate or step down.

The next flash point

Russia's 10,000 troops in the country are not there simply to bolster Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. The Russian military presence embeds it in the geopolitics of the Middle East and grants it ready access to the region. From Syria, the Russian military can project power not just into Crimea and Ukraine but all of southern Europe, thus threatening NATO's southern flank. The Russians are quite open about this objective. Since last May, Russian Tupolev Tu-22M3 Backfire bombers have staged at the Hemeimeem airbase in western Syria, from which they can strike any target in the Mediterranean Sea. It didn’t require Western intelligence analysts to figure this out — the Russians themselves announced the move, and its significance, in the press.

Russia’s friends in the region

Russia’s strong position in the Middle East is most clearly evidenced in the close military-to-military relationships that Moscow has developed with the key players — arguably more so in recent years than the United States. Israel to this point has worked closely with Russia over Syria and other areas of mutual interest. The UAE joined Russia in its backing for the attempt by Gen. Khalifa Hifter and his rebel army to wrest power from the Libyan government, which was supported by the West. Saudi Arabia and Russia signed a Military Cooperation Agreement last August. The agreement came in the wake of the U.S. withdrawal of its Patriot and Terminal High Altitude Air Defense (THAAD) anti-air defenses and gives Russian defense contractors a foothold in the lucrative Saudi arms market.

Iran: Fellow pariah

Among countries in the Middle East, Iran is likely to emerge as the greatest beneficiary of the Ukraine conflict. Russia’s new role of international pariah points to a natural partnership with the Islamic Republic. Both countries are heavily sanctioned by the West, and thus have little to lose — and both want to undermine the United States. A worst-case scenario would have Putin advise Iran to quit the talks in Vienna and sign an agreement with Russia whereby the latter provides the technology required to create nuclear energy. Even if this doesn’t happen, it is likely that Russia will provide more overt support to Iran, and the latter — emboldened by this partnership — will step up its proxy campaign against other regional players and the United States.

What this means for US military posture

War in Europe would normally suggest a pooling of U.S. forces in the region, accompanied by a reduction elsewhere. However, it is the Middle East where the United States needs to prepare to counter Putin’s next moves.

Washington needs to move fast to strengthen ties with Middle Eastern leaders, while stepping up military-to-military engagements with nations in the region. Such engagements do not require a significant relocation of forces, only a reprioritization of time and resources. It is now time to force Israel and the UAE to take sides, but with an emphasis on enhanced military cooperation with both countries in return. The United States should reach out to Turkey to invite greater cooperation on the ground in Syria as well.

Military planners need to come up with a contingency plan to respond to a flash point between U.S. and Russian forces in Syria. The lines of direct communication between the two militaries, previously used to de-escalate tensions, will likely no longer be available. The chance of a clash is now greater than ever, and the United States can’t be caught flat footed when it does happen. Nor must it back down too quickly — escalate to de-escalate should be our watch phrase in future confrontations with the Russians. U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) should also be looking at how to give U.S. forces a position of advantage in Syria. Even a token military presence in Syria carries significant moral value. Instead of downsizing or withdrawing U.S. troops in the country, now would be a good time to reinforce them — if only as a sign of resolve that the United States is still in play. However, a position of advantage doesn’t necessarily mean more boots on the ground. It might mean instead arming forces that are there with the weapons systems that pose the greatest threat to Russian troops: electronic warfare, drones, long-range precision fires, and anti-tank and anti-aircraft missiles, for instance.

The United States needs to message Iran unequivocally that any further support for drone or missile attacks on U.S. partners or interests will result in retribution. Until this point, Iran has been able to shelter behind a thin guise of separation from its various proxy forces, but no more. Divide and conquer should be the U.S. approach here, before Iran can take advantage of its position with Russia.

All indications are that that Putin’s next steps will be to consolidate Russia’s position in the Middle East. The United States can either plan now to preempt him, or simply hope that this is not the case. And as military planners are fond of reminding one another, hope is not a course of action.

#### Empirics & Syria proves Russia’s rational calculations are based on US military presence.

Borshchevskaya ’22 [Anna; senior fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. January 23, 2022; “Russia’s Strategic Success in Syria and the Future of Moscow’s Middle East Policy”; *Lawfare*; https://www.lawfareblog.com/russias-strategic-success-syria-and-future-moscows-middle-east-policy] TDI

The intervention was a low-cost strategic success. Moscow established control of western and central Syrian airspace and an agreement granting it a permanent military presence in the Eastern Mediterranean for at least the next 49 years, realizing a strategic aspiration that eluded Russian czars and Soviet leaders. Moscow has retained the Tartus facility in Syria since the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, but the Syria intervention afforded Moscow the opportunity to modernize and expand Tartus and establish a new air base in Khmeimim. Russia has never had a military position this deep and broad on the Eastern Mediterranean before, and it has now secured long-term guarantees for sustaining this presence.

Moscow considers this foothold critical for deterring the West and projecting power into NATO’s southern flank and amplifying Moscow’s intelligence-gathering opportunities against the United States and its partners in favor of Russia’s interests. Russia’s secure position in Syria also bolsters its presence in the Black Sea; indeed Crimea played an important role in Moscow’s plans for Syria. Russia’s Black Sea fleet in Sevastopol, a key to Russia’s annexation of Crimea, has supported Russia’s Syria intervention since the beginning. Russia’s stronger military position on the Eastern Mediterranean bolsters Russia’s military power projection options in the Black Sea. It also creates commercial opportunities; starting in approximately 2017, activities between Crimea and Syria increased, including a visit by a Syrian trade delegation to Crimea. Russia’s position in Syria also facilitated its operations in Libya, and the Kremlin sees other opportunities farther south in Africa and the Red Sea. Russia has secured its access to a warm water port in the Mediterranean and now is looking to capitalize on it.

Tens of thousands of Russian military personnel have rotated through Syria over the years and received valuable training and experience, which will bolster the Russian military’s performance globally. The intervention has also demonstrated the effectiveness of Russian weaponry, which has bolstered Russia’s arms sales. After the interventions in Georgia in 2008 and Crimea in 2014, Syria provided a third live military training opportunity to test out, improve and illustrate the strength of the Russian military after a series of recent military reforms. Moreover, the Syria intervention will serve as a guide for future Russian defense decision-making. Valery Gerasimov, chief of staff of the Russian armed forces, said in early 2019 that lessons from Syria will serve to defend and promote Russia’s “national interests” outside Russia’s borders. The Syria intervention, according to Gerasimov, demonstrated the utility of self-sufficient and highly mobile military formations (groupings) that will likely be more important to future missions. The success of this approach, according to Gerasimov, depends on “winning and holding information superiority, preemptive readiness of command-and-control and comprehensive support systems, and covert deployment of the necessary [military] grouping.”

As the Syrian civil war unfolded, Russia’s competition with the West was one-sided. Commentators have characterized Putin over the years as a reckless gambler, but he read his adversary correctly — the West did not push back decisively. Indeed, Putin never paid a serious price for supporting Assad, and in fact Western officials continued to see Moscow as part of a political solution, a perception Moscow bolstered. Putin understood that the West was risk-averse and had little appetite to get involved in Syria. Perhaps nothing illustrates the United States’ calculus as clearly as the Obama administration’s choice to go with a Russia-brokered deal to remove Syrian chemical weapons rather than enforce the 2013 red line. Moscow has also served as the guarantor in a number of cease-fires in Syria, all of which have ultimately broken down. But Moscow’s position as mediator remains.

The fact of the matter is that, with its intervention in Syria, Moscow won a degree of begrudging respect from U.S. partners and adversaries. Western leaders talked a lot — about values, freedom, dignity, the Assad regime’s loss of legitimacy and the need for regime change. But when push came to shove, they preferred to limit involvement. Putin said little but did what he said he would do — he saved Assad.

Appetite comes with eating, and success in Syria can only bolster Moscow’s self-confidence. The Middle East, for its part, has come to see Russia’s regional policy as a reality they have to deal with, while U.S. commitment to the region has been characterized by ambivalence for the past decade. In recent years, Turkey, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and others have begun expanding their military relationships with Russia, and increased purchases of Russian military equipment and systems will increase Moscow’s leverage. Moscow, for its part, has focused on soft power and other tools of influence — arms deals, trade, diplomacy and provision of nuclear reactors. As James Sherr has written, in the chekist mindset guiding the Kremlin, diplomatic pragmatism is about a cold, cynical calculation of national interest and a utilitarian approach to ends and means. Moscow remains committed to building pragmatic relationships in the region that play to Russia’s strengths vis-à-vis other partners to ensure Moscow retains advantages.

Looking into the near future, Russia will work to preserve and reinforce its presence in Syria and elsewhere in the region. But it will be cautious of overextension and will continue to pursue a strategy of limited means.

#### Russia war destabilizes Syria, Iran and spills over.

Notte ’22 [Hannah; senior research associate with the Vienna Center for Disarmament and Non-Proliferation. PhD and M.Phil. in international relations from Oxford University and a B.A. in social and political sciences from Cambridge University. March 29, 2022; “WILL WESTERN-RUSSIAN CONFRONTATION SHAKE THE MIDDLE EAST?”; *War on the Rocks*; edited for ableist language---noted by brackets; https://warontherocks.com/2022/03/will-western-russian-confrontation-shake-the-middle-east/] TDI

Russia will likely seek to avoid coming to blows with NATO forces in Syria while its military remains fully committed inside Ukraine. However, Russia’s previous nod to U.S. counter-terrorism strikes in Syria, or acquiescence to limited flows of international humanitarian aid into the country’s northwest, could change. Restoration of the Iran nuclear deal might still succeed, but additional efforts on regional arms control could take a backseat amid Russian equivocation and U.S. preoccupations elsewhere. Overall, the Syrian and Iranian dossiers suggest that heightened Russian-Western confrontation will likely manifest in the Middle East through a mix of aversion to direct military confrontation, yet intensified competition and shrinking opportunities for cooperation.

Syria Intensified?

Russia’s intervention in Syria in September 2015 laid the foundation for a sustained military presence in the Levant. Its anti-access/area-denial deployments at the Tartus naval port and the Khmeimim air base allowed the Russian military to establish a buffer zone on its southern flank and signal that it has the capacity to push back against NATO forces outside of Europe. Russian exercises in the Eastern Mediterranean last summer, which involved Tu-22M3 bombers and MiG-31K interceptors with Kinzhal air-launched ballistic missiles, served as a reminder that Russia can quickly position serious naval and aerial assets to Syria. Ten days prior to its invasion of Ukraine, Russia redeployed the same systems to the area. Such Russian military muscle-flexing has complicated the operations of NATO’s navies and air forces, given the potential for unsafe and unprofessional intercepts or aggressive actions by Russian forces. While 2021 saw a reduction in incidents of brinkmanship between Russian and U.S. troops in northeast Syria, the United States complained about increased occurrences of Russian harassment in the weeks prior to the invasion of Ukraine.

Now that Russia has the bulk of its active-duty military committed to Ukraine and faces a war of attrition, the risk of it picking a fight with U.S. forces in Syria in the near future should be lowered. Though Russia technically maintains the capacity to “lash out” in Syria with existing aerial and naval assets, it is in a weaker position to do so since invading Ukraine, where it now desperately seeks to gain momentum. Reports of Russia recruiting Syrian fighters for urban warfare in Ukraine are indicative of the shortages faced by the Russian military. Against that backdrop, collision with U.S. or Turkish forces in northern Syria would now come with far greater risks to Russia. Recently, Gen. Kenneth McKenzie indicated that Russian forces in Syria have shown no signs of intent to escalate tensions with U.S. troops there since Russia invaded Ukraine.

While we might see such Russian risk aversion in the immediate term, it is not a given that Moscow’s acquiescence to U.S. counter-terrorism operations will stand the test of time. U.S.-Russian counter-terrorism cooperation was always hindered by stark disagreements over the anti-Assad armed opposition, but Russia usually refrained from challenging U.S. air access for counter-terrorism strikes. Deconfliction channels for air security and ground operations enabled the U.S. military to safely operate within specific boundaries, though the Pentagon was adamant that such mechanisms did not constitute cooperation with Russia.

Just a few weeks prior to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, the U.S. military killed Islamic State leader Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurayshi in an airstrike, reportedly informing its Russian counterpart of the planned operation in advance. As Mackenzie noted, “Sustained [counter-terrorism] pressure is what prevents groups from being able to grow, to train, to think about plotting beyond their immediate survival, for example up and down the Euphrates River Valley in Iraq and Syria.” Should terrorist cells remain in Syria, and even regain strength, America’s ability to maintain such sustained pressure is not cast in stone. Russia, all-consumed by the Ukraine battlefield, might refrain from challenging U.S. forces in Syria in the near-term — given resource constraints, risk aversion, and the fact that it is far from obvious how military action on its southern flank would help it turn the tide in Ukraine. Taking the longer view, however, the U.S.-Russian deconfliction mechanism in Syria could become a victim of their intensified and protracted confrontation.

Heightened Russian-Western friction could also adversely affect the situation in Syria in other ways. Going forward, Western capitals will be eager to further complicate Russia’s efforts at normalizing Syria’s position in the region, since such normalization would enhance Russia’s own net gains by easing the burden of shouldering reconstruction costs for the war-ravaged country. The West will also be hard-pressed to ease pressure on the Syria dossier at the U.N. Security Council, notwithstanding rumors to the contrary. Further, neither Russia nor Western countries should be inclined to see their Syrian partners yield in negotiations led by the constitutional committee, whose “small body” is presently convening in Geneva.

It is also conceivable that Russia might stop cooperation on the humanitarian dossier. Last summer, the U.N. Security Council unanimously agreed to extend the mandate for the transport of aid to Syria through a crossing on the border with Turkey, adopting Resolution 2585. In July, that resolution will be up for renewal and a Russian veto could precipitate a ~~crippling~~ [devastating] humanitarian crisis for millions of Syrian civilians. Hopefully, Moscow will calculate that the last thing it needs on its hands now is a humanitarian crisis in Syria. Government-controlled parts of the country — where intermittent instability has caused headaches for the Russians — will likely have to contend with reduced Russian wheat supplies as a result of the war in Ukraine. It is not a given that Russia will want to accelerate a wider food crisis by shutting down cross-border aid, especially if an endgame in Ukraine remains elusive. Still, some observers recommend an overhaul of U.S. Syria policy toward a “freeze and build” strategy, one that pivots away from tactical emergency assistance toward strategic stabilization across northern Syria. Amid such an overhaul, Western “early recovery” projects in government-held Syria might appear less politically palatable. Such projects were endorsed as part of a package-deal compromise in Resolution 2585, following years of Western agonizing over the concern that such aid would effectively constitute “development” assistance to a pariah state. Going forward, any and all forms of humanitarian assistance to Syria could well be looked at again through the lens of competition with Russia.

Iran Inflamed?

In past years, Russian-Western engagement on the Iran nuclear dossier remained remarkably insulated from broader tensions, whether during President Barack Obama’s second term, or through 2021. Even as Russia invaded Ukraine in late February, its diplomats and Western counterparts proceeded with talks in Vienna, aimed at restoring the Iran nuclear deal, largely uninterrupted. Whether such insulation can continue was thrown into doubt when Moscow surprised Washington and irritated Iran by demanding written U.S. guarantees that Russia’s trade, investment, and military-technical cooperation with Tehran would not be hindered by the sanctions imposed against it over Ukraine. Russia appears to have walked back its pushy rhetoric since, yet restoration of the nuclear deal is still hanging in the balance.

Even if Russia and its counterparts can push that deal across the finish line, tensions in Europe could affect all sides’ desire and bandwidth to prevent further nuclear or missile proliferation in the Middle East. In the past, U.S.-Russian cooperation was instrumental for arms-control gains in the region. Though Moscow and Washington often disagreed on the right balance between carrots and sticks in dealing with nonproliferation-averse players, past initiatives — such as the Arms Control and Regional Security working group in the 1990s, or the Glion/Geneva consultations in 2013 and 2014 — benefited from U.S. leadership and Russian support. In the absence of U.S. leadership, initiatives usually struggled for relevance. The U.N. conference on the establishment of a zone free of weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East is a case in point.

Amid new confrontation in Europe, Russia might be less inclined to support Western-led initiatives for arms control in the Middle East. To be sure, its ambivalent stance on the Iranian missile and proxy threats is hardly new and has been rooted in the calculation that those can play into Moscow’s hands. Tehran’s “offensive defense” strategy has been viewed by the Kremlin as convenient, in that it pins down U.S. attention while allowing Moscow to pose as chief regional intermediary. Iran or its proxies overstepping and inviting outright military escalation would not be in Russia’s interest now, while its own diplomatic and military resources are consumed by Putin’s Ukraine gambit. At the same time, Moscow will see preciously little incentive to work with the West toward even the most modest and incremental regional arms-control process anytime soon.

On the back of the Ukraine war, Russia’s lukewarm disposition toward supporting arms control in the Middle East could be compounded by reduced U.S. bandwidth. Already in recent years, regional states’ efforts at balancing between the United States, Russia, and China were largely driven by perceptions of limited U.S. attentiveness to, or unpredictable policies in the Middle East. Washington’s perceived handling of the Iran nuclear dossier and insufficient push-back against Iranian proxies, as well as its failure to turn the tide in the Syrian civil war, unnerved the Arab Gulf states and Israel. U.S. military drawdowns from Afghanistan, the Gulf, and Iraq further amplified the perception of an American pivot to the east. Having long sought opportunities for freeing up resources for the Indo-Pacific theatre, the United States might feel even greater compulsion to realize a low-cost posture in the Middle East, now that the war in Ukraine has ignited great-power competition in Europe.

Could the combination of Russian equivocation and U.S. distraction compel regional adversaries to pursue arms control and trust-building more proactively? It was the perception of U.S. disengagement from the region that partially motivated several Arab states to normalize relations with Israel over the past eighteen months. The Baghdad Conference for Cooperation and Partnership last August and Iranian-Saudi talks were further indicators of a growing realization among regional states that they need to talk to their adversaries rather than just shore up deterrent capabilities. Developments since the Ukraine invasion — be it the recent Iranian strikes on Israeli targets in Erbil, the suspension of Iranian-Saudi talks, or Friday’s Houthi attack on an oil depot in the Saudi city of Jeddah — raise doubts over the robustness of that realization, however. Meanwhile, the United States warns that Russia (and China) will seek to capitalize on any opportunities afforded by perceptions of U.S. disengagement from the Middle East amid intensified great-power confrontation.

Don’t Be Optimistic

Assuming that Russia and the West have entered a new era of protracted and heightened confrontation, their appetite for taking that contest to the Middle East, insulating cooperation on urgent matters there, and freeing up resources to stay engaged in the region will impact stability for better or worse. In that context, Syria and Iran offer useful test cases for assessing what to expect. In Syria, Russian concerns with “overstretching” itself should lead its military to refrain from escalating tensions in the foreseeable future. Humanitarian aid flows, U.S. counter-terrorism efforts, and whatever is left of the political process, however, could all suffer as Syria turns into an arena of heightened Russian-Western competition. Regarding Iran, the soon-to-be-decided fate of the nuclear deal will be indicative of a joint Russian-Western ability to insulate regional arms control and nonproliferation in the future. Whether the Middle East can move forward on these issues will also depend on Moscow’s disposition and Washington’s bandwidth to pay attention.

#### Syria escalates, spills over and draws in great powers.

Jeffrey ’21 [James; Chair of the Middle East Program at the Wilson Center. He served as a Foreign Service officer in seven U.S. administrations, most recently as Special Representative for Syria Engagement and Special Envoy to the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS. December 13, 2021; “A Deal Is Still Possible in Syria”; *Foreign Affairs*; https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/syria/2021-12-13/deal-still-possible-syria] TDI

As U.S. President Joe Biden and his team focus on the Iran nuclear file, the war in Syria remains a festering wound at the heart of the Middle East. Although the current administration has made no dramatic departures from the approach of previous administrations, its decision to deprioritize the conflict comes at a particularly bad time. Opportunities to find a solution to the Syria crisis are now emerging — and the United States should devote the diplomatic energy necessary to seize them. The keys to success after years of failure include not just high-level engagement but a realistic assessment of what can be achieved in any deal.

The risks in keeping Syria on the back burner are significant. The conflict is already a strategic train wreck: a victory by President Bashar al-Assad’s regime would send a message to autocrats across the globe that mass murder is a viable tactic for retaining power and signal the regional ascendance of Assad’s Russian and Iranian enablers. It has also spawned geopolitical threats, from the rise of the Islamic State (also known as ISIS), to the deployment of Iranian precision missiles that target Israel, to the massive refugee flows that threaten to destabilize neighboring states and Europe. And for Syrians themselves, the decade-long civil war has resulted in horrendous casualties, displaced half the population from their homes, and left most citizens destitute. If left unaddressed, these dynamics will threaten to destabilize the Middle East for years to come.

Syria’s war has also drawn in the U.S., Israeli, and Turkish militaries, and the risk of clashes between them and Iranian, Russian, and Syrian forces remains very real. Washington views the Syrian Democratic Forces’ (SDF) enclave in northeastern Syria as an important ally against ISIS, but Ankara views the Kurdish group as a terrorist threat. Two recent provocations — Assad’s violation in July of a 2017 cease-fire in the southwest that had been negotiated between U.S. President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin and an attack by Iranian-backed fighters in October against U.S. forces at their al-Tanf base in southern Syria — came without noticeable American response and could encourage Assad or the Iranians to escalate in areas patrolled by Turkish or U.S. troops.

### uniqueness---top---2nr

#### The US is specifically countering Russia in the Middle East now.

Britzky & Liebermann ’23 [Haley; National Security Producer at CNN. Oren; Pentagon Correspondent at CNN. June 14, 2023; “US deploys fighter jets to Middle East after ‘unsafe and unprofessional behavior’ by Russian planes”; *CNN*; https://www.cnn.com/2023/06/14/politics/us-fighter-jets-middle-east-russia/index.html] TDI

The US military deployed F-22 fighter jets to the Middle East this week due to concerns about ‘unsafe and unprofessional behavior,’ by Russian aircraft, the US military announced on Wednesday.

“Russian Forces’ unsafe and unprofessional behavior is not what we expect from a professional air force. Their regular violation of agreed upon airspace deconfliction measures increases the risk of escalation or miscalculation,” CENTCOM commander Gen. Michael “Erik” Kurilla said in a news release. “Alongside our partners and allies, we are committed to improving the security and stability in the region.”

The F-22s are from the 94th Fighter Squadron out of Langley Air Force Base, Virginia. Lt. Gen. Alex Grynkewich, commander of US Air Forces Central, said in a statement on Wednesday that the Raptors were redeployed from in Europe.

The move comes as aggressive Russian flights in the region have increased. While Russia’s military is continuing its fight in Ukraine, the US has continued having interactions with Russian aircraft in the Middle East, particularly in and around Syria.

In April, Russian pilots attempted to “dogfight” US jets over Syria. And in March, Kurilla told lawmakers there had been a “significant spike” in aggressive flights by Russia.

## Deterrence---Iran

### iran deterrence---1nc

#### US military presence to counter Iran is increasing, operationally & perceptually.

Hawkins ’23 [Ari; POLITICO Fellow. Formerly covered the energy and commodity market for Bloomberg News in New York City and was a frequent on-air correspondent for the Dubai-based outlet Asharq Al-Awsat. Graduated from NYU Abu Dhabi. “U.S. boosts military presence in the Middle East after Iran seizes tankers”; *POLITICO*; https://www.politico.com/news/2023/05/12/us-military-middle-east-iran-seizes-tankers-00096708] TDI

The U.S. military is working with allies to send more ships and aircraft to the Middle East as Iran escalates its seizures of merchant tankers, the National Security Council announced Friday.

“Today, the Department of Defense will be making a series of moves to bolster our defensive posture in the Arabian Gulf,” NSC spokesperson John Kirby told reporters.

The announcement comes after Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps seized a Panama-flagged oil tanker called Niovi on May 3, as the ship was traveling through the Strait of Hormuz. The tanker left Dubai, and moved toward a UAE port when a dozen boats from the IRGC navy forced the tanker to head into Iranian waters.

Another incident occurred April 27, when the Advantage Sweet tanker ship belonging to the Marshall Islands was also seized after colliding with an Iranian boat, which injured several crewmembers, according to Iran’s state media.

Over the past two years, the IRGC has attacked or disrupted 15 tankers as tensions between Iran and the U.S. grow over the country’s nuclear program.

Kirby said he will “provide additional details on those reinforcements” within days. Washington will also be increasing its coordination with the International Maritime Security Construct, a group of 11 nations formed to help protect merchant shipping in the region.

The government of Iran has “no justification for these actions,” said Kirby, adding that the U.S. “will not allow foreign or regional powers to jeopardize freedom of navigation in the Middle East waterways, including the Strait of Hormuz and the Bab al-Mandab.”

Vice Adm. Brad Cooper, head of U.S. Naval Forces Central Command, also said in a statement that “Iran’s unwarranted, irresponsible and unlawful seizure and harassment of merchant vessels must stop.”

#### Empirics prove deterrence works for Iran.

Martinez ’21 [Luis; ABC News Senior Pentagon Reporter since 2006. Formerly covered the State Department and the U.S. Senate for ABC News. Graduate of Columbia University. May 23, 2021; “US military presence has deterred Iranian aggression on Saudi Arabia: General”; *ABC News*; https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/us-military-presence-deterred-iranian-aggression-saudi-arabia/story?id=77857512] TDI

McKenzie said Sunday that that while the American military troop presence in the region has deterred Iranian aggression against Saudi Arabia, he believes that what is "far more important is sort of the broad spectrum of capabilities that we give them."

He cited the linking of Saudi and American Patriot missile defense systems that provide an improved early warning system should Iran launch a missile strike at Saudi Arabia.

"The point that I made today and we continue to make it all the time is: It's not actually the types of equipment that are here, it's maximizing the use of the more than 20 Patriot batteries that you do have the interoperable with us, maximizing those capabilities, so that if trouble occurred we can certainly come back in very quickly to help our Saudi friends," McKenzie said.

"I believe our posture in the theater has prevented a state on state attack from Iran," he added.

But he also acknowledged his belief that the U.S. presence in the region has not stopped Iran's proxies from carrying out attacks.

"They're under constant bombardment from Yemen, with a variety of ballistic missiles, cruise missiles and small UAS (unmanned aerial systems) they're very concerned about . We want to help them with that," McKenzie said.

According to McKenzie, in the past three months Iranian-backed Houthi forces in Yemen have fired about 100 ballistic missiles, cruise missiles and drones at Saudi Arabia.

"They're proxies of Iran, so they're under constant bombardment, so they feel that they are under attack, and they are under attack," he said.

U.S. efforts linking Saudi Patriot missile batteries with American batteries surged into Saudi Arabia have helped Saudi Arabian forces intercept a good number of the missiles launched from Yemen.

McKenzie believes it's important to maximize the capabilities of American weapon systems in the region, and he is also aware that a reduction in troop numbers could lead to Iranian provocations.

He believes the reduction of American troop levels in 2019 led to a cycle of Iranian escalatory provocations that culminated in Iran's rocket attack on Al Asad airbase in Iraq last January.

#### Iranian regional hegemony triggers nuclear war.

Libby & Feith ’22 [Lewis; Senior vice president of Hudson Institute. Former legal advisor to the US House of Representatives' Select Committee on US National Security and Military/Commercial Concerns. Department of Defense Distinguished Service Award and the Department of the Navy Distinguished Public Service Award. Magna cum laude graduate of Yale University. Harlan Fiske Stone Scholar at Columbia Law School. Douglas; Senior fellow at Hudson Institute. Distinguished Public Service Medal. Belfer Center visiting scholar at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government. Former professor and distinguished practitioner in national security policy at Georgetown University. JD (magna cum laude) from the Georgetown University Law Center. January 31, 2022; “Biden Shouldn’t Underestimate Israel’s Resolve in Face of Iranian Nuclear Threat”; *Hudson Institute*; https://www.hudson.org/research/17506-biden-shouldn-t-underestimate-israel-s-resolve-in-face-of-iranian-nuclear-threat] TDI

Washington has largely ignored the cautionary drumbeat, perhaps because Israel has threatened action before. But circumstances have changed. In the past, Iran was years from nuclear-weapons capability, and American officials credibly promised to prevent Iran from getting there, which kept Israel more evenly divided on the necessity of military action. Now, given technical advancements made since the 2015 nuclear deal, Iran may be only a few months from its goal. Mr. Biden said in June that Iran would “never get a nuclear weapon \_\_on my watch\_\_” (emphasis added). That hedge is cold comfort to the Israelis, who rightly worry that Iran, even under the restrictions of a revived 2015 deal, could soon (in three years) have nuclear-breakout capability — and, if they chose to violate those restrictions, might develop a bomb even sooner than that before they could be detected.

Israeli leaders are daily declaring they have no interest in diplomacy that only pretends to eliminate or delay the danger. As they see it, a nuclear Iran poses two life-or-death threats. One is from Iran, whose leaders routinely denounce Israel as a cancer they wish to destroy. The second is from wider nuclear proliferation, for many expect that if Iran gets nuclear weapons, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Egypt, and others will seek to arm themselves likewise.

Herein lies not just an Israeli, but a regional and worldwide nightmare: a volatile region that, absent the decision time provided by missiles that travel intercontinental distances, would be marked by dispersed nuclear weapons subject to destabilizing launch-on-warning policies. These weapons would be in the hands of technically challenged militaries that include numerous criminal and terrorist elements. Under such conditions, there would be risks of regional conflict escalating into nuclear war and of “loose nukes” falling into the hands of terrorists.

The Israelis have an interest in a peaceful solution, because the alternative — striking Iran’s nuclear facilities with military force — would likely trigger harsh retaliation. At a minimum, Israel expects that such strikes would prompt nearby Iranian terrorist proxies Hezbollah and Hamas to launch attacks, which could include barrages of tens of thousands of Iranian-provided projectiles, many precision-guided. Such barrages would cause heavy Israeli casualties, and also the deaths of American and other foreign visitors. Wider, prolonged war might ensue, spawning waves of refugees and disrupting oil supplies. Top Israelis have concluded they can endure these dreadful costs, but not the dangers of a nuclear Iran.

### link---top---2nr

#### Only deterrence works on Iran.

Ross ’22 [Dennis; Counselor at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, former U.S. envoy to the Middle East who served in senior national security positions. July 6, 2022; “The United States Needs a Better Strategy to Deter Iran”; *Foreign Affairs*; https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/middle-east/2022-07-06/united-states-needs-better-strategy-deter-iran] TDI

At a time when many U.S. friends in the Middle East are worried that the United States is withdrawing from the region, defense integration is one way to reassure them and keep Washington embedded in the area. It has the benefit not just of sharing the burden of defense but also making the existing assets of individual countries in the region count for more. The United States would not need to provide additional defensive missiles to its partners if the missiles it has already provided could be pooled effectively. The sum of these weapons truly is greater than the individual parts. And to the credit of the Biden administration, it is already working to develop the security architecture for integrated air and missile defense in the Middle East.

Finally, the United States must be prepared to respond more forcefully to attacks by Iranian proxies on U.S. forces in Iraq and Syria. Bases where U.S. forces are stationed have been targeted more than 40 times, but the United States has responded in a highly calibrated way only twice. Washington’s responses must be unexpected, and they must signal to Iranian leaders that, contrary to their assumptions, the United States is willing to use force against them. Maybe it is time to take a page from the Israeli playbook: hit Iranian — not proxy — targets in the middle of the night and don’t acknowledge it. The United States shouldn’t put Iran in a position where it must respond or lose face, but it should also make clear that it is no longer willing to tolerate these attacks.

The goal of the United States’ declaratory strategy must be to establish deterrence. The more clearly Iranian leaders understand what they could lose, the more likely they will be to seek a diplomatic alternative. Of course, the United States will also have to make clear what Iran stands to gain from such an alternative. That could be far greater sanctions relief if Tehran agrees to a longer and stronger deal. A “more for more” agreement of this kind might be possible — but only if Iranian leaders are genuinely afraid of what they could lose without one. Ironically, it seems, restoring Iran’s fear of the United States may be the only way to avoid a war, limit Iranian threats in the region, and produce an acceptable diplomatic outcome on the character of the Iranian nuclear program.

## Deterrence---ISIS

### isis deterrence---1nc

#### US military presence to counter ISIS is increasing, operationally & perceptually.

Liebermann ’23 [Owen; CNN Pentagon correspondent based in Washington DC. March 31, 2023; “US bolsters forces in Middle East following series of attacks on US troops in Syria”; *CNN*; https://www.cnn.com/2023/03/31/politics/us-bolsters-forces-middle-east/index.html] TDI

The US has bolstered its military forces in the Middle East following a series of attacks on US troops in Syria attributed to Iranian-affiliated militias, the Pentagon said Friday.

A squadron of A-10 attack aircraft are deploying to the region ahead of a scheduled deployment. The deployment of the attack aircraft was expedited by several weeks following the attacks in Syria, according to Pentagon spokesman Lt. Col. Phil Ventura.

In addition, the US ordered a carrier strike group to remain in the region to support US forces in Central Command, which covers the Middle East, and a squadron of A-10 attack aircraft to the region, Ventura said.

“We are committed to supporting the defeat-ISIS mission alongside a global coalition in Syria and prepared to respond to a range of contingencies in the Middle East if needed,” Ventura said in a statement.

The George H.W. Bush Carrier Strike Group will remain in the Mediterranean Sea under US European Command, but it will support US forces in the Middle East in the event of contingency plans and operations, Ventura said. Led by the nuclear aircraft carrier USS George H.W. Bush, the strike group also includes the guided missile cruiser USS Leyte Gulf, the destroyer USS Delbert D. Black, and the support ship USNS Arctic.

“Collectively, these actions demonstrate the United States’ ability to rapidly reposition forces across the globe and underscores that all necessary measures will be taken to defend U.S. forces,” Ventura said.

#### Operations are key to prevent ISIS resurgence.

Cook ’23 [Ellie; U.S. News Reporter based in London, U.K., Degree in International Journalism. April 17, 2023; “U.S. Special Forces Silently Hunting ISIS in Syria”; *Newsweek*; https://www.newsweek.com/isis-american-military-raid-syria-islamic-state-iraq-central-command-1794738] TDI

U.S. troops in Syria carried out a raid on Monday against a senior ISIS leader "responsible for planning terror attacks in the Middle East and Europe," according to the U.S. military.

The "unilateral" helicopter raid led to the "probable death" of the target, with two other armed individuals killed in the course of the operation on the morning of April 17, the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) said in a statement.

No U.S. troops were injured, nor any helicopters damaged in the operation, and no civilians were harmed, CENTCOM said.

In a separate press release, the U.K.-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said international forces had fired two missiles into a building housing an ISIS commander near Jarabulus, close to the Syrian border with Turkey. The operation lead to the deaths of three ISIS operatives, including a commander, and the arrest of another commander, according to this report.

A U.S. official confirmed to Newsweek that the latter report referred to the same raid announced by CENTCOM. U.S. forces have "secured the remains for DNA verification," with more details to follow pending identification, the U.S. official said.

ISIS, also known Islamic State, is designated a terrorist group by the U.S. It seized power throughout 2013 and 2014 in Syria and Iraq, and at its most powerful, the group controlled 40 percent of Iraq and around one-third of Syrian territory, according to the Wilson Center think tank. The group became notorious for high-profile executions, including beheadings, of Western captives.

However, within just a few years, ISIS lost 95 percent of its claimed territory, the think tank said.

The dangers posed by the organization, however, ensure it remains a key priority for CENTCOM. "While ISIS' territorial caliphate is defeated, they remain a transnational threat," CENTCOM said in August 2022, adding that "their desire to regenerate" and operate overseas "threatens the U.S. homeland."

Although "degraded," ISIS is still operating in the Middle East in the hopes of striking outside the region, CENTCOM Commander General Michael "Erik" Kurilla said on Monday.

U.S. forces "will continue the relentless campaign against ISIS," Kurilla said.

An estimated 900 U.S. troops remain in Syria, working with the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), although Damascus has long called for the withdrawal of the U.S. military presence.

Ridding the organization of its territorial bases in Iraq and Syria was key for stopping attacks on Westerners, according to Tom Wilson, director of policy at the U.K.-based Counter Extremism Group.

"However, even if they don't re-emerge as a serious territorial force in the Middle East, the threat of ISIS as a resurgent terrorist group, able to direct and inspire attacks remotely, has not gone away," he told Newsweek.

Western countries have largely focused their efforts on stabilizing countries and regions where ISIS "could seek to gain a footing," he said, because the group has succeeded in growing in "ungoverned and under-governed spaces that arise in conflict zones."

Islamic State and Al-Qaeda "have been strengthening their global network, working with affiliates to enhance their activities in Western countries," Wilson said.

"Islamic State is going to continue to seek to encourage others to carry out attacks on its behalf," Wilson argued. "If it does reassert itself as a force in Syria and the wider region, we should expect to see this capitalised on in the group's propaganda, bolstering its ability to inspire attacks."

Earlier this month, the Central Command said it conducted a helicopter raid in eastern Syria on April 8, capturing three ISIS targets, including an "attack facilitator" named as Hudayfah al Yemeni. On April 4, it said that U.S. forces had "conducted a unilateral strike" in Syria, killing "ISIS senior leader" Khalid 'Aydd Ahmad al-Jabouri.

In February, four U.S. personnel were wounded during a joint U.S. and SDF helicopter raid in northeastern Syria. Hamza al-Homsi, the ISIS senior leader described as the target, was killed, CENTCOM said at the time.

ISIS forces are continuing to operate in Syria in the hopes of destabilizing the U.S.-backed SDF, the Institute for the Study of War think tank said earlier this month. Militant forces are engaged in a "long-term strategic approach to re-establish a territorial 'caliphate,'" the think tank said.

#### Empirics prove.

Taddonio ’19 [Patrice; senior digital writer at FRONTLINE, Albert Schweitzer Fellowship, Best Project in Print Journalism Award, graduate of Tufts University and Columbia Journalism School's Publishing Course. August 8, 2019; “Report Warns ISIS is “Resurging” in Syria After Trump Ordered a Partial Troop Withdrawal”; *PBS*; https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/article/report-isis-resurging-syria-trump-troop-withdrawal/] TDI

A report released this week by the Department of Defense’s Inspector General indicates that ISIS continues to pose a significant threat in the Middle East.

“Despite losing its territorial ‘caliphate,’ the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) solidified its insurgent capabilities in Iraq and was resurging in Syria” from April through June, the report said.

During that time period, U.S. forces in Syria fulfilled the Trump administration’s directive to partly withdraw from the country. Military officials told the inspector general’s office that “the reduction of U.S. forces has decreased the support available for Syrian partner forces at a time when their foces [sic] need more training and equipping to respond to the ISIS resurgence,” Principal Deputy Inspector General Glenn A. Fine wrote in the opening of the report.

Military officials also said that ISIS is working to increase its power in Iraq, where the government declared victory over the group in December 2017.

The report drew in part on information provided by the Combined Joint Task Force-Operation Inherent Resolve (CJTF-OIR), the military command that carries out the U.S.-led anti-ISIS effort and coordinates with coalition partners.

Officials told the inspector general’s office that ISIS continues to function as an insurgency in both Iraq and Syria partly because forces there “remain unable to sustain long-term operations against ISIS militants.” ISIS is also “likely reestablishing financial networks in both countries,” according to officials at the Office of the DoD Deputy Assistant Secretary for Counternarcotics and Global Threats.

#### ISIS resurgence is existential.

Target ’23 [Target Media Platform; independent communication platform emphasizing Middle East issues. May 2, 2023; “Leaked documents reveal ISIS resurgence attempts”; https://targetplatform.net/en/?p=2133] TDI

Confidential US documents shared by a reserve Air Force technician in online chat groups reveal the efforts of ISIS to resurrect. According to classified documents leaked by young Air Force technician Jack Teixera, ISIS is using Afghanistan to plan its attacks. At the same time, it continues to carry out its most wicked acts, such as planning terrorist attacks, especially in Europe, while trying to regain its chemical weapons capacity. In its report on the leaked documents, the Washington Post also states that Afghanistan has become a coordination zone for the Islamic State to plan attacks in Europe and Asia.

According to intelligence, ISIS had the intention to attack places such as embassies, churches, business centers, and the FIFA World Cup tournament that took place in Qatar last summer. The report of the Washington Post also marks that the documents reveal ISIS’ persistent efforts to gain expertise in creating chemical weapons. Last year, the United Nations Investigative Team for Accountability of ISIS (UNITAD) revealed that the Islamic State used chemical weapons in Iraq. It filed the findings that ISIS used chemical weapons in the areas it controlled in Iraq and Syria between 2014 and 2019. The newly leaked assessments indicate that the terrorist organization is aiming to provide specialty again.

The top-secret statement reads: “ISIS has been developing a cost-effective model for external operations that relies on resources from outside Afghanistan, operatives in target countries, and extensive facilitation networks. The model will likely enable ISIS to overcome obstacles – such as competent security services – and reduce some plot timelines, minimizing disruption opportunities.” Last month, the commander of US Central Command (CENTCOM), General Michael “Erik” Kurilla, also publicly announced that the Islamic State Khorasan (ISIS-K), the Afghan branch of the Islamic State, could launch attacks against US interests outside Afghanistan in less than six months.

## Deterrence---Toolkit

### russia revisionist---1nc

#### Russia’s revisionist.

Klimkin et al. ’20 [Pavlo Klimkin;former Ukrainian Minister of Foreign Affairs and Head of the European, Regional and Russian Studies Program at the Ukrainian Institute for the Future in Kyiv. Volodymyr Ivanov is a Senior Fellow of the European, Regional and Russian Studies Program at the Ukrainian Institute for the Future in Kyiv. Andreas Umland is editor of the book series “Soviet and Post-Soviet Politics and Society” and a Fellow at the Ukrainian Institute for the Future in Kyiv as well as the Swedish Institute of International Affairs in Stockholm. September 10, 2020; “Putin’s new constitution spells out modern Russia’s imperial ambitions”; *Atlantic Council*; https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/belarusalert/putins-new-constitution-spells-out-modern-russias-imperial-ambitions/] TDI

[TITLE]: Putin’s new constitution spells out modern Russia’s imperial ambitions

The reset of Putin’s system also appears to confirm Moscow’s aggressive foreign policy towards the former Soviet republics, above all in terms of the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian conflict. Since launching its military intervention against Ukraine in early 2014, the Kremlin has repeatedly demonstrated a readiness to break international law. Nevertheless, throughout the six-year campaign, Moscow has continued to pay lip service to global security rules and regulations. The new-look constitution means this is no longer strictly necessary. Instead, it confirms the primacy of Russian law over any obligations stemming from Russia’s membership in international organizations. The new constitution clearly states: “Decisions of interstate bodies adopted on the basis of provisions of international treaties of the Russian Federation in their interpretation, that contradicts the Constitution of the Russian Federation, are not subject to execution in the Russian Federation.” In other words, Russian law comes first.

The most alarming amendment is probably the section which elaborates on Moscow’s right to intervene internationally in defense of loosely defined compatriots. “The Russian Federation provides support to compatriots living abroad in exercising their rights, ensuring the protection of their interests, and preserving their shared Russian cultural identity,” it states.

This new provision creates an explicit constitutional basis for the Kremlin’s aggressive actions against Ukraine and other countries of the former Soviet Union which are home to large ethnic Russian populations. Indeed, by making broad references to “Russian cultural identity”, Moscow leaves considerable room for interpretation over exactly when and where it believes it can intervene. Ultimately, it is left to the Kremlin itself to determine the boundaries of the “Russian World.”

One of the most obvious applications of this constitutionally enshrined right to “provide support” would be in defense of Russian passport holders living elsewhere in the former Soviet Union. In recent years, Russia has introduced a series of measures designed to increase the number of Russian passports issued to ex-Soviet citizens. This tactic has helped to justify Russian intervention in a number of former Soviet republics and is currently being used in eastern Ukraine to strengthen the Kremlin’s grip on the Russian-occupied parts of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts. Taken together, Russia’s new constitution and efforts to create passport protectorates throughout the former USSR will potentially enable Moscow to restrict the sovereignty of all the nations within the Kremlin’s traditional sphere of influence.

Finally, Article 67 of Russia’s new constitution is of special interest to Ukraine. This clause outlaws any discussion of returning Russian lands to foreign powers and appears to have been included specifically with Ukraine’s Crimean peninsula in mind. Russia has occupied Crimea since February 2014, when Russian troops took advantage of political ~~paralysis~~ in post-revolutionary Kyiv to launch a lightning takeover of the peninsula. By cementing Crimea’s status in the Russian Constitution, Putin clearly hopes to prevent any successors from ever revisiting the issue. This represents a huge obstacle to the future normalization of relations between Moscow and Kyiv.

Putin’s new Russian Constitution is clearly a worrisome development for countries like Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova, and now also Belarus. It confirms Russia’s transition towards authoritarianism and codifies the revisionist imperialism that has been setting the Putin regime’s foreign policy agenda for much of the past two decades.

This should serve as a reality check for members of the international community who still believe in the possibility of pragmatic compromises with the Kremlin. For the countries of the former USSR, the message is even clearer: Russia intends to reassert its dominance over the post-Soviet world and will continue to do so for as long as Putin remains in power.

### china revisionist---1nc

#### China’s revisionist.

Lin & Blanchette ’22 [Bonny Lin is Director of the China Power Project and Senior Fellow for Asian Security at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. Jude Blanchette is Freeman Chair in China Studies at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. August 1, 2022; “China on the Offensive”; *Foreign Affairs*; https://www.foreignaffairs.com/china/china-offensive] TDI

These perceptions of Western interference have put Beijing once again on the offensive. Moving forward, China’s foreign policy will increasingly be defined by a more bellicose assertion of its interests and the exploration of new pathways to global power that circumvent chokepoints controlled by the West.

WHO TELLS YOUR STORY

Beijing’s reorientation since the invasion is evident in several areas. At the highest level was China’s unveiling earlier this year of a new strategic framework, which it dubbed the “global security initiative.” Although it is still in its early stages, the GSI consolidates several strands of Beijing’s evolving conceptualization about global order. More important, it signals Xi’s attempt to undermine international confidence in the United States as a provider of regional and global stability and to create a platform around which China can justify augmenting its own partnerships. The GSI also counters what Beijing perceives to be false portrayals of China’s aggressiveness and revisionism.

Xi first outlined the GSI during a virtual speech in April. Strictly speaking, there was little new content in Xi’s speech. But in announcing the GSI, Xi was seeking to wrest narrative control on global security away from the United States and its allies in Europe and the Indo-Pacific and discourage countries from joining U.S.-led military blocs or groupings. With this initiative, Xi has put something else on the table to compete with a U.S.-led discussion about what an international order should look like after the war in Ukraine. Core to Beijing’s broader story is that China is a force of stability and predictability in the face of an increasingly volatile and unpredictable United States.

Just as important, Beijing continues to position itself as an innovator and leader in twenty-first-century global governance. Since the GSI’s initial rollout, it has become a standard item to include in meeting readouts from China’s bilateral and multilateral engagements across Southeast Asia, Africa, and Latin America, evidence that Beijing is pushing for the diplomatic normalization of its new initiative, and thus, inclusion in the vernacular of global governance. Although the GSI may not gain much traction in Tokyo, Canberra, or Brussels, it will find resonance in Jakarta, Islamabad, and Montevideo, where frustration with elements of the U.S.-led order is manifest.

Xi’s April speech also confirmed that the strategic alignment between China and Russia continues, despite Putin’s disastrous war in Ukraine. In particular, Xi included a reference to “indivisible security,” a phrase that dates to the early 1970s and negotiations between the Soviet Union and the West known as the Helsinki Process, but under Putin, has become a short-hand for Moscow’s argument that NATO expansion directly imperils Russia’s own sense of security. As Chinese officials have made crystal clear, Beijing sees a direct connection between NATO’s expanding presence in Europe and the United States’ growing coalition of security partners in the Indo-Pacific. As Le Yucheng, then a top foreign ministry official, said in a May speech, “For quite some time, the United States has kept flexing its muscle on China’s doorstep, creating exclusive groups against China and inflaming the Taiwan question to test China’s red line.” He went on: “If this is not an Asia-Pacific version of NATO’s eastward expansion, then what is?” This linkage of the Russian security environment to China’s was also a central component of the joint statement put out by Xi and Putin on February 4.

MORE AND CLOSER FRIENDS

As part of its post-invasion reorientation, China is also rapidly strengthening partnerships with countries that fall outside of the Western camp — that is, most of the “global South.” China has long sought to deepen its friendships abroad, but it is now recognizing that some countries, such as European democracies, will never stand with it when forced to choose. Referencing Ukraine, Le lamented in March that “some major countries make empty promises to small countries, turn small countries into their pawn and even use them to fight proxy wars.” Beijing does not want to face the same fate if it were to find itself in a conflict against Taiwan or any of its neighbors. As the Chinese scholar Yuan Zheng has explained, Beijing believes “that a potential proxy war is what some hawkish individuals and groups back in the U.S. are expecting to take place in China’s neighborhood.” Even if Chinese leaders are still confident about their country’s political system and its growing economic and military power, they recognize that it is still dependent on external goods and resources to fuel its development and growing military capabilities. Accordingly, Beijing is moving fast to both deepen and broaden partnerships to increase its immunity to ~~crippling~~ sanctions and to ensure that it is not alone in hard times. This includes strengthening bilateral relations with Saudi Arabia and Venezuela. In August, Venezuela is expected to host a sniper competition as part of Russia-led military exercise in the Western Hemisphere that will likely involve China, Russia, Iran, and ten other countries in a show of force against the United States.

China is also keen to cement exclusive blocs of countries that will support it — or at least not support the United States. Chief among these efforts is China’s attempt to strengthen and expand the BRICS — Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa — as an alternative developing world bloc to compete with the Quad, the G-7, and the G-20. In May, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi held a meeting of BRICS foreign ministers that included an additional nine guests, including from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. The next month, as the host of a BRICS summit, Xi advocated expanding the group and proposed new cooperative efforts on the digital economy, trade, and investment, and the supply chain. Xi also invited an unprecedented 13 world leaders to participate in a high-level dialogue on global development with BRICS countries, including Iranian President Ibrahim Raisi and Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen. Not long after, Argentina and Iran officially applied to join the BRICS group, and Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey expressed interest in doing so, as well. In July, Moscow went so far as to suggest that the group’s members “create a new world reserve currency to better serve their economic interests.”

In addition to BRICS expansion, Beijing is seeking to transform the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), which includes Russia, into a powerful bloc that can leverage deep political, economic, and military ties. China has long pushed for more SCO economic cooperation and proposed the establishment of a free trade agreement and creation of a SCO bank. Although these ideas fell flat last year, this year, in May, the SCO discussed the need for increased interactions among member states, particularly on international security and economic cooperation. As SCO formal membership expands to include Iran later this year, and potentially Belarus in the future, the organization is primed to become more assertive on the world stage. Indeed, this June, Tehran proposed that the SCO adopt a single currency and expressed hopes that the group can become a “concert of non-Western great powers.”

Within both blocs and beyond, it will be increasingly important to observe how much China, Russia, and Iran are able to deepen relations with one another and drive broader alignment among countries that are dissatisfied with U.S. leadership. Similarly, the extent to which China can leverage its close relationship with Pakistan and Saudi Arabia to build support among Muslim countries, including with the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the Gulf Cooperation Council, is another variable affecting support for China among developing countries.

BACKING UP WORDS WITH FORCE

A final component of China’s foreign policy rethink concerns military force. Beijing believes that the West is incapable of understanding or sympathizing with what it views as legitimate Russian security concerns. There is no reason for China to assume that the United States and its allies will treat China’s concerns any differently. Because diplomacy is not effective, China may need to use force to demonstrate its resolve.

This is particularly true when it comes to Taiwan, and Beijing is now more anxious than ever about U.S. intentions toward the island and what it perceives to be increasing provocations. This has led to discussion among some Chinese foreign policy analysts about whether another Taiwan Strait crisis is imminent and, if so, how China should prepare. Yang Jiechi, a diplomat who serves on China’s Politburo, has stated that China will take “firm actions”— including using the military — to safeguard its interests. At the same time, the Chinese People’s Liberation Army has engaged in more exercises near Taiwan in an effort to deter potential third-party intervention. These dynamics likely explain why Beijing is issuing unusually sharp warnings over the visit to Taiwan that Nancy Pelosi, the speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, is planning, saying that such a trip would “have a severe negative impact on the political foundations of China-U.S. relations.”

### iran revisionist---1nc

#### Iran’s revisionist.

Rahma & Qur’ari ’20 [Dr. Munir Abu & Asia; The University of Abou Bakr Belkaïd, Tlemcen, Algeria. April 2020; “Iran’s Position as a Revisionist Force in the New Balance of Power in the Middle East”; Journal for Iranian Studies, Volume 4, Issue 11] TDI

This is what revolutionary Iran has been striving for since 1979. Following Iraq’s occupation and the Arab Spring, Iran has found the appropriate time to implement its project to control the Middle East. As is known, it has an old program which is rooted in the region. It also has social, cultural, demographic and economic extensions. This enables Iran to play regional roles in various fields.[29] The determinants of the Iranian project in the Middle East region have varied. In addition, Iran plays a key and broad role at the regional level, depending on a number of tools and mechanisms enabling it to dominate in accordance with the path it has been pursuing.

The most important of these tools are the “Arab local powers” that are associated with Iran doctrinally. This project seeks to consolidate Iran’s status as a regional power to serve its ideological and intellectual interests, and to reinforce its security and preserve its political system. Among the most prominent of these “Arab local powers” are the Lebanese Hezbollah; Hamas, the Palestinian movement; and Shiite militias in Iraq. In addition, Iran strives hard to possess peaceful and military nuclear technology. It also uses “the religious marjaya in Iran,” seeking to achieve sectarian domination over Shiites and attract social segments in neighboring countries to aid its project while gaining the largest number of followers and supporters abroad and reinforcing its political influence over all Shiite sects. This constitutes an additional force serving Iran’s interests and orientations in the region. It can also incite the Shiite movements in the Arab Gulf states against their governments, by igniting a sectarian war in Iraq which may engulf all Gulf countries. Therefore, we can conclude that the Arab Gulf governments reject any military solution to the Iranian nuclear file. According to Brzezinski: “I believe that war on Iran would be an end of the United States’ current role in the world. Iraq may have been a first overview for this, but it is still recoverable if we withdraw quickly. War against Iran would halt our progress 20 or 30 years. The world will condemn us and we will lose our position in the world.”

Moreover, Iran’s greatest motive to achieve its ambitions in the region and to become a regional power – and even a global power – is to strengthen its ability to influence other various regional powers, including the Israelis, who face multiple challenges to adjust the regional balance of power in their favor.

However, Iran faces the prospect of being rejected by international and regional powers because of its expansionist behavior, and its competitors in the region may be able to limit the prospect of Iran emerging as a revisionist power in the balance of power in the region.

In the end, based on the foregoing and building on the forward-looking vision of this research, it can be said that the Middle East will remain the same in the short and medium term. In other words, conflicts and struggles will continue – especially sectarian conflict which is referred to as the “new Cold War” essentially between the two axes Sunni and Shiite and particularly after the gradual withdrawal of the United States from the region. In the short and medium term, Iran will not be able to impose itself as a revisionist force in the region. However, in the long run, the balance of international and regional powers may shift to see Iran emerge as an influential force alongside other powers such as Turkey and the Gulf states led by Saudi Arabia. Other forces may also return to the scene.

### terror impact---1nc

#### Nuclear terror is existential.

Arguello & Buis ’18 [Irma Arguello is founder and chair of the NPSGlobal Foundation, and head of the secretariat of the Latin American and Caribbean Leadership Network. She holds a degree in physics, a Master’s in business administration, and completed graduate studies in defense and security. Arguello previously worked on nuclear projects for the Argentine National Atomic Energy Commission. Emiliano Buis is a lawyer specializing in international law. He holds a PhD from the University of Buenos Aires, a Master’s in Human and Social Sciences from the University of Paris/Panthéon-Sorbonne, and a postgraduate diploma in national defense from the National Defense School. February 21, 2018; "The global impacts of a terrorist nuclear attack: What would happen? What should we do?"; *Bulletin of the Atomic Sciences*, Volume 74] TDI

A small and primitive 1-kiloton fission bomb (with a yield of about one-fifteenth of the one dropped on Hiroshima, and certainly much less sophisticated; cf. Figure 1), detonated in any large capital city of the developed world, would cause an unprecedented catastrophic scenario.

An estimate of direct effects in the attack’s location includes a death toll of 7,300-to-23,000 people and 12,600-to-57,000 people injured, depending on the target’s geography and population density. Total physical destruction of the city’s infrastructure, due to the blast (shock wave) and thermal radiation, would cover a radius of about 500 meters from the point of detonation (also known as ground zero), while ionizing radiation greater than 5 Sieverts — compatible with the deadly acute radiation syndrome — would expand within an 850-meter radius. From the environmental point of view, such an area would be unusable for years. In addition, radioactive fallout would expand in an area of about 300 square kilometers, depending on meteorological conditions (cf. Figure 2).

But the consequences would go far beyond the effects in the target country, however, and promptly propagate worldwide.

Global and national security, economy and finance, international governance and its framework, national political systems, and the behavior of governments and individuals would all be put under severe trial. The severity of the effects at a national level, however, would depend on the countries’ level of development, geopolitical location, and resilience. Global security and regional/national defense schemes would be strongly affected. An increase in global distrust would spark rising tensions among countries and blocs, that could even lead to the brink of nuclear weapons use by states (if, for instance, a sponsor country is identified). The consequences of such a shocking scenario would include a decrease in states’ self-control, an escalation of present conflicts and the emergence of new ones, accompanied by an increase in military unilateralism and military expenditures.

Regarding the economic and financial impacts, a severe global economic depression would rise from the attack, likely lasting for years. Its duration would be strongly dependent on the course of the crisis. The main results of such a crisis would include a 2 percent fall of growth in global Gross Domestic Product, and a 4 percent decline of international trade in the two years following the attack (cf. Figure 3). In the case of developing and less-developed countries, the economic impacts would also include a shortage of high-technology products such as medicines, as well as a fall in foreign direct investment and a severe decline of international humanitarian aid toward low-income countries. We expect an increase of unemployment and poverty in all countries. Global poverty would raise about 4 percent after the attack, which implies that at least 30 million more people would be living in extreme poverty, in addition to the current estimated 767 million.

In the area of international relations, we would expect a breakdown of key doctrines involving politics, security, and relations among states. These international tensions could lead to a collapse of the nuclear order as we know it today, with a consequent setback of nuclear disarmament and nonproliferation commitments. In other words, the whole system based on the Nuclear Non- Proliferation Treaty would be put under severe trial. After the attack, there would be a reassessment of existing security doctrines, and a deep review of concepts such as nuclear deterrence, no-first use, proportionality, and negative security assurances.

Finally, the behavior of governments and individuals would also change radically. Internal chaos fueled by the media and social networks would threaten governance at all levels, with greater impact on those countries with weak institutional frameworks. Social turbulence would emerge in most countries, with consequent attempts by governments to impose restrictions on personal freedoms to preserve order — possibly by declaring a state of siege or state of emergency — and legislation would surely become tougher on human rights. There would also be a significant increase in social fragmentation — with a deepening of antagonistic views, mistrust, and intolerance, both within countries and towards others — and a resurgence of large-scale social movements fostered by ideological interests and easily mobilized through social media.

### at: military scholars---1nc

#### The blob is fake and restraint doesn’t solve.

**Mazarr ’20** [Michael; senior political scientist at the RAND corporation. Summer 2020; “Rethinking Restraint: Why It Fails in Practice”; *The Washington Quarterly*, Volume 32, Article 2] TDI

There is No Sinister National Security Elite

Many restraint proponents use a second major claim to buttress their argument that US strategy is fundamentally invalid and should be radically scaled back: US overreach reflects the malign influence of a devious national security elite fired with dangerous visions of primacy and liberal hegemony. Not all restraint advocates make this argument, but it is a dominant theme in some of the literature’s most important works. Stephen Walt’s 2018 book The Hell of Good Intentions, for example, is an extended indictment of this group—including current and former US officials, congressional staff, think tank experts, and others—which he describes as a “dysfunctional elite of privileged insiders who are frequently disdainful of alternative perspectives.” 35 According to Walt, promoting an interventionist foreign policy provides jobs, status, and access to high-paid consultancies and political power to this group, which comprises an exclusive clique of insiders who attend the same schools and clubs and believe, for the most part, the same things about US power.

The historian and writer Andrew Bacevich denounces the same alleged cabal, agreeing that “the ideology of national security … serves the interests of those who created the national security state and those who still benefit from its continued existence”—interests that include “status, influence, and considerable wealth.” 36 The result is an addiction to global hegemony and military force, a tendency to seek out unnecessary enemies and commitments, and a ~~crippling~~ conformism that quashes dissent.37 US national security elites at the end of the Cold War, he argues in his most recent book, coalesced around primacy with “something close to unanimity.” 38

It is not clear how to treat such sprawling assertions when the reality—the jumble of motivations, views, relationships, and ambitions of the tens of thousands of people who comprise the national security community—is obviously so much more complex. Do all US foreign policy officials or experts support global engagement because it grants them jobs or speaking opportunities? How many actually attended the same schools or even know one another, and what effect does this have on their views? Do all of them embrace primacy, and to the same degree? Apart from collections of anecdotes, those convinced of the existence of such a homogenous elite offer no objective evidence—such as surveys, interviews, or comprehensive literature reviews—to back up these sweeping claims. “By and large,” Bacevich insists in just one example, “members of the national security elite hold the public in remarkably low regard,” citing as proof a single, dated quote from Dean Acheson.39

The real “national security elite,” of course, comprises individuals with starkly opposing opinions. Some favor nuclear arms control, some oppose it; some want more US forces in Europe, some fewer; some continue to support humanitarian interventions, whereas most are now skeptical of them. As a result, profound arguments have erupted within this group over every major foreign policy issue of the last half-century. The scholars and former government officials Hal Brands, Peter Feaver, and William Inboden explain that “intense disputes over the Korean War, the Vietnam War, détente and arms control, the opening to China, and policies in Central America and the Middle East were followed by battles over the Gulf War, NATO expansion, military interventions in Haiti, Somalia, and the Balkans, and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq—not to mention heated arguments over positions toward China, Iran, North Korea, Russia, and other issues today.” 40 Few officials or experts may rail against the broad principle of US global engagement. But on specific policy questions—whether to go to war or conduct a humanitarian intervention, or what policy to adopt toward China or Cuba or Russia or Iran— debates in Washington are deep, intense, and sometimes bitter.

To take just a single example from recent history, the Obama administration’s decision to endorse a surge in Afghanistan came only after extended deliberation and soul-searching, and it included a major, and highly controversial, element of restraint—a very public deadline to begin a graduated withdrawal.41 If one were to choose the less aggressive or interventionist side of this and a dozen other recent debates, in fact, one could assemble a reasonable facsimile of the more circumscribed foreign policy that proponents of restraint themselves suggest.

It is true that groupthink often grips tighter, and dissent ebbs, during times of crisis or war— during the crucial escalation years in Vietnam, for example, or in the weeks after 9/11. The national security community has closed ranks to an unhealthy degree at such moments. But these are exceptions, and they deeply complicate the argument for restraint: if US foreign policy excesses tend to emerge during emotionally charged crises or periods of rabid threat perception, the problem is not a relentless hegemonic impulse. It is overreaction at specific, desperate moments—something a general commitment to restraint is unlikely to cure.

# AT: DA---Deterrence

## Deterrence---1AR

### west asia deterrence---1ar

#### US military commitment to the Middle East is low now and unsustainable. Allies know it.

Alterman ’23 [Jon; Director of the CSIS Middle East Program, Zbigniew Brzezinski Chair in Global Security and Geostrategy. April 24, 2023; “Why the US Military’s Messages Are Falling on Deaf Middle Eastern Ears”; *DefenseOne*; https://www.defenseone.com/ideas/2023/04/why-us-militarys-messages-are-falling-deaf-middle-eastern-ears/385578/] TDI

U.S. military officials spend a lot of time messaging their deep relations with allies and partners in the Middle East, but Middle Eastern rulers aren’t returning the love. The problem isn’t only that they see important opportunities elsewhere, or that they have been hearing for more than a decade that the United States is seeking to diminish its focus on them and concentrate on East Asia. They also see the White House, Congress, and the American public being persistently skeptical about their security needs. Not unreasonably seeing American support as a potentially volatile variable, they are increasingly investing in more diverse relationships and preparing to live in a more multipolar world.

Much as the U.S. military tries to ignore that inconvenient fact, it needs an approach that is step with the region’s worldview, and in step with U.S. politics. If not, the whole enterprise will come crashing down.

The military starts from the premise that the pax americana that U.S. dollars and U.S. soldiers helped secure has kept the region from tipping into chaos, and they offer more of the same. But many governments in the region think that the region has already tipped into chaos, and that the United States has been a central part of the problem. They look at places like Iraq, and they argue that the United States has both abetted conflict and opened the door to Iranian domination. They look at Iran’s regional behavior and its proliferation activities, and they wonder whether the United States is too weak or too uninterested — or both — to do anything about them. When Iranian missiles and drones attacked Saudi oil infrastructure in 2019, taking half of the country’s oil production off-line, President Donald Trump said, “That was an attack on Saudi Arabia, and that wasn’t an attack on us.” The reaction did not do much to reassure the Saudis.

Finally, these governments believe the biggest threats to their security are internal rather than external. They are unsettled by U.S. leaders’ calls for liberalization and democratization, and well remember the Obama administration’s quick abandonment of President Hosni Mubarak after almost 30 years of U.S.-Egyptian partnership.

The Ukraine war has made this tension worse. Few of these states ever bought into the Cold War paradigm of countries bound by a higher purpose, but to them, the rise of U.S. language calling to unite democracies to fight autocracy sounds vaguely threatening.

China is another issue. The Biden administration’s National Defense Strategy emphasizes the importance of U.S. strategic competition with China, and it has a chapter whose title advises “anchoring our strategy in regional allies and partners.” Yet the report glosses over an irony: many of the most important U.S. partners in the Middle East — Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates — have also signed “Comprehensive Strategic Partnership” agreements with China. How does the United States intend to square that circle? What does it mean to be partnered with the United States, and in particular, what does partnering with the United States mean for a country that also seeks to partner with China? It is a question no one really wants to confront squarely.

China and Russia offer quick solutions to regional states’ immediate problems, unencumbered by legislative oversight or human rights concerns. Weapons, surveillance equipment, nuclear reactors, and the like are all on offer, and sweetening the pot is the Russian and Chinese argument that they seek to help countries preserve their unique values, not remake them. This is a dog whistle to authoritarianism and homophobia, intended to build Middle Eastern societies’ resentment to the West, and it works. Further, they argue there is no need to pick sides, undermining precisely the sort of close security ties that the U.S. military is trying to promote.

But the biggest challenge the U.S. military faces in the Middle East isn’t overseas, it’s at home, where the White House and the Congress aren’t behind them. Middle Eastern rulers have the leeway to defy their publics, and when their publics’ approval ratings of the United States are in the low double digits, it need not shape the bilateral relationship. But both the White House and Congress have grown sharply critical of many Middle Eastern governments and critical of seemingly endless U.S. military commitments to the region. While many Gulf governments find the Biden White House especially skeptical, it was President Trump who said U.S. engagement in the Middle East “was the single biggest mistake made in the history of our country.”

The U.S. public’s view is more complicated. Some polls suggest sustained support for a U.S. troop commitment to the region in the abstract. When presented with specific issues, such as defending Saudi Arabia from Iranian attack or protecting Syrian enclaves from the depredations of Bashar al-Assad, that support quickly withers.

Seeing this, the military is still going full speed ahead. It makes promises the rest of the U.S. government doesn’t want to keep, and it warns countries away from engaging militarily with China and Russia while arguing for understanding when they do. Pentagon officials speak privately of doing the maximum without Congressional approval, given Congressional skepticism. The CENTCOM Commander, Gen. Erik Kurilla, can talk about how the U.S.-Saudi relationship “underpins our strategy in the Middle East,” but President Biden previewed his own trip to the Kingdom, describing “a strategic partnership going forward that's based on mutual interests and responsibilities, while also holding true to fundamental American values.” It is hard to ignore the implicit ranking in Kurilla’s statement that was absent in Biden’s.

Middle Eastern governments see the space between the military and the rest of the U.S. government, and they hedge. That pushes the military to attempt an even tighter embrace. Yet, the hedge creates greater distrust in Congress and the White House, and the gap widens.

It is hard to imagine how the U.S. military can sustain a long-term strategy toward the Middle East that doesn’t have political support. Given the openness of U.S. politics, it is difficult to imagine that Middle Eastern governments will fail to notice that U.S. political support for close security ties to the Middle East is diminishing. The Pentagon may feel it needs to keep up appearances of intimacy, but partners will not, and that will drive politicians in precisely the direction that the Pentagon doesn’t want. The Pentagon sees its principal targets being governments in the Middle East, but if it wants to sustain close ties in the region, winning support from politicians at home is both more urgent and more important.

Middle Eastern governments will doubt the value of any policy the U.S. military pursues without strong and durable political backing. They will look to supplement it with other relationships, even if the U.S. military trumpets its fealty, and they wouldn’t be wrong for doing so.

#### The plan undermines Russian and Chinese strategic interests in the Middle East. Withdrawal collapses the balancing act and gives Washington a leg up in Europe and Asia.

Hoffman ’21 [Jon, research director at Democracy for the Arab World Now. “Neither Russia nor China Could Fill a U.S. Void in the Middle East.” Foreign Policy, https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/09/15/neither-russia-nor-china-could-fill-a-u-s-void-in-the-middle-east/, September 15, 2021] TDI

But these doomsday predictions fail to account for the serious limitations both Russia and China would face in the Middle East should the United States withdraw. Russia and China would have to assume a far more direct presence to secure their respective interests in the region. Yet both countries would be highly averse to creating and upholding such a security order.

First, the Middle East does not represent an existential interest to either Beijing or Moscow. Not only are both far more concerned with competition with Washington in their own immediate neighborhoods, but also both Russia and China are facing serious economic troubles in addition to highly contentious domestic environments, making power projection into the Middle East without a U.S. security guarantee very unlikely and highly risky.

Moreover, pulling back from the Middle East would provide Washington with more resources that can be directed toward strategic competition with Moscow and Beijing, an outcome that neither Russia nor China would welcome.

Both countries would also have to set about creating and upholding a new political order in the region. Russia and China have been able to make inroads in the region primarily by compartmentalizing their foreign policies in the Middle East.

They have largely refrained from taking sides in the region’s greatest geopolitical competitions—the rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran, the rift among the Gulf Arab countries, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict—and thereby avoided being dragged into these disputes. They have been able to do so because the United States, as the region’s predominant power, has built a political order in the region that relies on specific client states to reinforce the U.S. power and sideline adversaries.

If Washington were to withdraw, this delicate balancing act pursued by Russia and China would collapse, forcing Moscow and Beijing to become more intimately involved in the region’s political affairs if they sought to fill this void.

Nevertheless, the “void” argument has become politically useful for some. Regional actors, specifically those that are dependent upon the United States to uphold the security status quo from which they benefit, have increasingly turned to the “void” narrative to pressure Washington into remaining deeply engaged in the region.

Indeed, Saudi Arabia, Israel, Egypt, and the United Arab Emirates have each used outreach to Moscow and Beijing to gain leverage and concessions from the United States. This is particularly evident when examining arms sales to states in the region, as well as the notion often proffered by U.S. officials that their partners will simply turn elsewhere if not given what they ask for.

These actors often pursue deals with Russia or China to pressure the United States into providing them with what they really desire: U.S.-made equipment. This is primarily due to the fact that the ability of U.S. allies in the region to shift wholesale to alternative weapons systems is nearly impossible due to the incompatibility of Russian or Chinese arms with the American defense systems in these countries.

In 2014, following the temporary withholding of U.S. arms sales to Egypt due to the 2013 military coup, Moscow signed a $3.5 billion deal with Cairo that included not only arms and ammunition but air defense systems and aviation as well.

Likewise, to pressure the United States after it refused to sell F-35 fighter jets to the UAE in 2017, the Emiratis signed a deal to co-develop a fifth-generation fighter jet with Moscow. Later, when apprehension was growing in Washington over providing the UAE with $23 billion worth of arms and F-35 fighter jets as part of the normalization deals with Israel, UAE Ambassador Yousef al-Otaiba warned his country would have to turn elsewhere if the deal were to fall through.

Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and the UAE also turned frequently to China for armed drone sales amid U.S. reluctance to provide them with such technology. In response, the Trump administration said it would bypass Congress to push through the sale of advanced armed drones to Riyadh and Abu Dhabi.

Moving forward, U.S. policymakers should dispel the myth that Russia or China are capable—or willing—to fill a void in the Middle East if the United States were to withdraw militarily. This narrative has primarily been used by those who have their own special interests in keeping the United States deeply engaged in the region, namely regional partners who have for too long exploited this fear of losing ground to either Russia or China in order to extort concessions from Washington.

Instead of providing Moscow or Beijing with an opportunity for advancing their interests, a U.S. military withdrawal from the region would undermine those countries’ ability to maneuver without assuming the direct costs of such deeper engagement.

#### The new deal is goldilocks and solves Middle Eastern instability. US involvement is irrelevant.

Harrison & Vatanka ’23 [Ross; senior fellow at the Middle East Institute and on the faculty of the University of Pittsburgh. Alex; director of the Iran Program at the Middle East Institute. June 26, 2023; “The Middle East Might Be Moving Toward Stability”; *Foreign Policy*; https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/06/26/iran-saudi-arabia-china-middle-east-diplomacy/] TDI

Recent de-escalations suggest that the regional awareness evident in Southeast Asia in the 1960s might be taking hold in the Middle East. Talks between Iran and Saudi Arabia started in April 2021 in Baghdad, went to Muscat, Oman, and ultimately arrived in Beijing, where they culminated in an agreement that holds promise of being sustained. Other developments, such as the Abraham Accords and the emerging rapprochement between Turkey and Egypt, also suggest a trend toward normalization.

It is easy to be skeptical about the prospects for diplomacy in the Middle East. This is particularly true of the Iran-Saudi normalization, where questions about lopsided benefits for one side or another raise concerns about how long it will last. But as with Southeast Asia in the 1960s, there are forces at work in the Middle East and the world today that should temper our skepticism.

One theme of the present moment is that countries in the Middle East are making deals based on their own national interests rather than dancing to the tune of outsiders. This independence is paradoxically because of great power rivalry in the region, not despite it. With heightened rivalry between great powers, regional powers have more options and are acting more as free agents than committed allies of global powers.

For example, Israel and Saudi Arabia are showing considerable independence from the United States on issues ranging from energy policy to approaches toward Russia’s war in Ukraine. Iran, in the context of its role in supplying drones to Russia for the Russia-Ukraine war, is also feeling more confident.

Moreover, while the United States is not withdrawing from the Middle East, its allies in the Persian Gulf have come to question its reliability as a security guarantor and partner. This is having the effect of drawing them closer to, not further away from, Iran. The final straw for Saudi Arabia was the 2019 drone attacks on two oil refineries, Abqaiq and Khurais, owned by state company Aramco. These attacks were widely believed to be Tehran’s work, yet U.S. President Donald Trump’s administration did very little to respond despite its ongoing bluster toward Iran. For the Saudis, the Carter Doctrine, formulated in 1980 as a U.S. commitment to use force to defend its national interests in the Persian Gulf, had expired. This development no doubt propelled the Saudis towards amenability to negotiation with Iran. And by 2021, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Oman, too, were in full swing to broaden their dialogues with Iran.

There has been a belief in Washington that the Middle East can’t stabilize without U.S. involvement. But in the current environment it is clear the primary impetus to stabilization needs to come from the regional powers. As these recent moves toward dialogue demonstrate, a view is taking hold in the region that stabilization and de-escalation — from the civil wars in Yemen and Syria to problems in Lebanon and Iraq — require cooperation among the regional actors, with or without the United States’ involvement.

China’s new diplomatic role in the Middle East is another factor that could help sustain trends of de-escalation. Beijing eschews the U.S. approach of offshore balancing against Iran via Saudi Arabia and Israel; it sees such an approach as escalatory. Rather, China is taking a more neutral approach to regional conflicts, on the premise it will calm rather than stoke tensions.

Several Iranian sources have highlighted China’s emerging critical role as a regional stabilizer. Iranian state-run media reported that after Iran attacked Saudi petroleum assets in 2019, China warned Tehran that such acts undermine its interests, given Beijing’s energy security policy is based on unhindered import of Saudi and Gulf oil.

Beijing is the largest trade partner for both Iran and Saudi Arabia, although Chinese-Saudi trade is about six times larger than Chinese-Iranian trade. Given that China receives half its oil from the Persian Gulf, its energy security necessitates it push for policies that reduce the likelihood of a conflict between the Iranians in Tehran and the Saudis in Riyadh. It remains to be seen whether China has the heft and political will to help Iran and Saudi Arabia pursue economic integration, the sort that the European continent saw at the end of the Second World War. This will be a big test for China.

Perhaps counterintuitively, China’s diplomatic forays in the Middle East could push Washington toward diplomacy too. China’s moves might have served as the impetus for recent talk of an informal deal between Iran and the United States on the nuclear issue. Reputationally, the White House now must fight the narrative of China as a peacemaker and the United States as a warmonger that only wants to sell weapons to the Middle East.

On balance and in the short term, Riyadh stands to gain the most from China’s involvement. Riyadh wins if China can press Tehran to force the Houthis in Yemen to reach a political agreement with Saudi Arabia and stop threatening to target Saudi infrastructure, trade, and economic plans. The Saudis also win if the Iranians fail to do so, as Riyadh can then showcase to Beijing that it is the Iranians who are not serious about de-escalation.

The diplomatic resumption also has another benefit for Riyadh: In the event of a military conflict between Iran and the United States or Iran and Israel, the Saudis have now made it far less likely that Saudi Arabia will become a target of Iranian retaliation.

The short-term win for Tehran is that this agreement with Riyadh might push Saudi Arabia away from Israel, at least for now. More importantly, at a minimum, the deal can signal a new era of “cold peace” between Tehran and Riyadh, during which both sides cease to interfere in each other’s internal affairs. Both sides consider this promise of non-interference as pivotal, a message that was repeated during the June 17 visit of Saudi Foreign Minister Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud to Tehran.

These changing calculations are reflecting not just shifting realities on a regional and global level but also pressures the Iranian and Saudi ruling elites face on a local level.

#### There’s an overwhelmingly low risk of Chinese or Russian regional hegemony in the Middle East.

Gholz ’21 [Eugene, Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of Notre Dame, currently on leave as a Visiting Fellow at the Defense Priorities Foundation. He served as chair of the international security section of the International Studies Association (2019-2021) and is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations. He previously held faculty positions at the University of Texas at Austin, Williams College, the University of Kentucky, and George Mason University. His Ph.D. is from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. “Nothing Much to Do: Why America Can Bring All Troops Home From the Middle East” Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft, https://quincyinst.wpengine.com/report/nothing-much-to-do-why-america-can-bring-all-troops-home-from-the-middle-east/, June 24, 2021] TDI

Some fear the possibility of an extra-regional power establishing hegemony in the Middle East — notably, that a great power like China or Russia would ally with a country within the region, build military bases, and flow enough military power into the Middle East to dominate it. The challenges that the United States has faced trying to control events in the Middle East in recent decades should create substantial skepticism that another foreign military power with much weaker and less experienced power-projection forces than the United States could create a regional military hegemony, a more difficult mission than the United States’ unsuccessful effort. Furthermore, China and Russia have much less air and sealift capacity to support such an expedition, and neither enjoys the “Command of the Commons” that facilitates such power projection.52 Finally, despite Russia’s military ties to Syria and the much-debated possibility of a growing Chinese-Iranian relationship, there is little indication that a major Middle Eastern power is interested in forging an offensive military alliance with either extra-regional power.53 Such an alliance, if backed by real military capabilities and deployments of the hundreds of thousands of foreign troops that would be needed to bid for regional hegemony, would present a major change to the international security environment that would require significant rethinking of U.S. national security policy. But that potential could not evolve rapidly, and without the threat of a sudden shift in dynamics, there is no reason for pre-commitments or preventive responses. The United States (and other countries around the world) could consider such a situation if and when it started to evolve, developing a new strategy for that possible future scenario as its contours became clear. For now, the threat of an extra-regional Middle Eastern hegemon — whether Russia or China — is negligible in any reasonable military analysis of the region.

### china deterrence---1ar

#### Political neutrality and soft power thump. The scale of US soft power is impossible for Beijing to match, and Chinese naval developments in the Middle East are entirely useless.

Simon ’21 [Steven, Senior Analyst at the Quincy Institute. He studied theology at Harvard and public policy at Princeton before government service at the State Department and the NS.. “China and the Persian Gulf in the Aftermath of a U.S. Withdrawal.” Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft, https://quincyinst.org/report/china-and-the-persian-gulf-in-the-aftermath-of-a-u-s-withdrawal/#what-do-the-gulf-states-want-from-china, September 21, 2021] TDI

The prospect that China might displace U.S. influence on the Arab side of the Gulf is another source of anxiety. At present, decision makers in Saudi Arabia and the UAE do not believe China is an adequate substitute for the tacit security guarantee the United States has long provided — even as Arab Gulf states fear these guarantees are waning. In part, this skepticism stems from China’s involvement with Iran, which extends back decades, and an assessment of China’s capacity for sustained military operations in the Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf. Chinese bases or base access in the region — in Djibouti to the west and Gwadar to the east — could serve as linchpins for a more active, continuous Chinese naval presence in the region. And Chinese commercial investment in Gulf port facilities could, in theory, complicate U.S. use of these facilities if host governments were to see such interference as in their interest. But for the time being, defense-cooperation agreements negotiated in the early 1990s, and, in the case of Oman, in 1979, afford the U.S. Fifth Fleet unimpeded access to these facilities. The situation is more complicated regarding Chinese investment in the Israeli port of Haifa, which the U.S. Sixth Fleet uses.16 Although it is inconceivable that Israel would ever join with China against the United States, China’s financial and possibly operational involvement in port operations raises counterintelligence challenges that Washington  must take into account.

In other words, China is a power with growing military potential in the Middle East, but Beijing’s neutrality on regional political rivalries, its still-modest military capabilities relevant to the region, and its dominant focus on trade and investment above hard security concerns suggest that it is unlikely to step into anything approaching the past U.S. role in the region.

The sheer scale of U.S. investment, trade, and soft-power projection on the Arab side of the Gulf will be difficult for China to match in the foreseeable future. Gulf Arab states vie for the presence of U.S. universities, U.S. and French museums, and other cultural assets. English-language competence is on the rise, and younger Gulf Arabs are far more likely to favor Western institutions of higher learning over Chinese ones. Perhaps the best proxy for Gulf Arab elites’ understanding of where their interests lie is the amount they spend on lobbying in Washington, despite China’s outreach, oil purchases and investment. As signals of America’s weakening military interest in the Gulf proliferate, these influence operations are likely to grow.17

Perhaps the best proxy for Gulf Arab elites’ understanding of where their interests lie is the amount they spend on lobbying in Washington, despite China’s outreach, oil purchases and investment.

The fundamental issue for Washington is how China’s investment in its blue-water capabilities would combine to improve its position in a war with the United States in the Gulf region. Especially to be noted are its investments in capital ships but also in submarine warfare; its development of infrastructure ashore to support sustained operations, as well as movable offshore mooring and bunkering installations; its growing experience in at-sea sustainment, and increasing military-to-military exchanges in the context of its naval deployments in the Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf.18

The implicit question is which country will control the oil resources of the region in a crisis. In a prolonged conflict, conventional strategic thought would assume that China’s reliance on Persian Gulf oil and its perceptions of U.S. oil requirements would impel it to seize control of regional oil installations. Under this conception, steps China is taking now to expand its presence in the Persian Gulf and Indian Ocean are meant to lay the basis for control of vital infrastructure and oil in wartime. On its face, this is a serious worry for the United States.

But upon closer examination this thinking seems overdrawn. In the event of a war triggered, for argument’s sake, by a Chinese assault on Taiwan, China would have access to its strategic petroleum reserve, which is now nearing current capacity at about 550 million barrels.19 Low oil prices have made stockpiling a worthwhile effort. China imports approximately 10 million barrels per day.20 Thus, even if it failed to expand capacity in the run-up to a conflict, and imposed no domestic rationing during a conflict, Beijing’s fuel reserves would keep China going for almost two months, assuming Chinese refineries are not destroyed. Moreover, Russia would likely sell China enough oil to maintain industrial output, at least some consumer demand, and military operations. Russia and Saudi Arabia, it is worth noting, routinely trade places as China’s top oil supplier.21

A war, moreover, would be intense. Losses on both sides would be severe. Most of the action would take place in the western Pacific. Despite the rapid expansion of China’s surface fleet, the Chinese navy would need to deploy most of its vessels to the combat zone for the primary mission of blocking a U.S. attempt to defend Taiwan, while keeping some vessels as a reserve, should attrition begin to hamper its operations. Under these conditions, it seems unlikely that China would allocate precious fleet assets to secure access to oil that is available in necessary quantities from other sources. The United States, in any event, would likely get priority access to Gulf bases from signatories to defense-cooperation agreements, or, if impeded, would seize it. Chinese forces in the area would be extremely vulnerable to U.S. attack, especially from land-based tactical aircraft and long-range standoff weapons.

Thus, the Chinese currently calculate that they lack sufficient power to secure Middle Eastern oil states. Chinese leaders, such as Hu Jintao in 2013,  have spoken about a Malacca Dilemma, alluding to the vulnerability of Chinese trade transiting the strait between the Malay Peninsula and Sumatra to interdiction by an adversary and, by implication, the need to divert combat power to preserve access to the Strait of Malacca should the U.S. attempt to close it off.22 But they do not yet seem to have focused on this threat. They would be far more concerned about a U.S. attempt to blockade their key ports in wartime, especially since oil tankers could go around the strait if the United  States tried to close it. The Chinese navy, however, intends to keep its oar in; Russia, China and Iran intend to conduct a naval exercise in the international waters of the Persian Gulf or Arabian Sea sometime in late 2021or early 2022.

#### China cares about energy, trade, and the BRI, not hard power or hegemony.

Simon ’21 [Steven, Senior Analyst at the Quincy Institute. He studied theology at Harvard and public policy at Princeton before government service at the State Department and the NS.. “China and the Persian Gulf in the Aftermath of a U.S. Withdrawal.” Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft, https://quincyinst.org/report/china-and-the-persian-gulf-in-the-aftermath-of-a-u-s-withdrawal/#what-do-the-gulf-states-want-from-china, September 21, 2021] TDI

Drivers of Chinese behavior

China’s engagement in the Persian Gulf is motivated primarily by four factors: maintaining access to energy resources; expanding market access for trade and investment, especially in infrastructure, manufacturing, and telecommunications; developing infrastructure projects for its Belt and Road Initiative; and demonstrating its great-power status. It is equally important, however, to understand what is not driving Chinese policy in the region: Beijing entertains no desire to replace the United States as the guarantor of regional security, to intervene in regional conflicts and choose sides among protagonists, or to engage in military operations to protect Chinese interests. In short, China wants to enjoy the economic benefits of engagement without the security and diplomatic responsibilities.

What does China want from the Gulf states?

What China wants from the Gulf states can be summed up in three words: petroleum, profits, and prestige. Beijing has essentially embraced a neo-mercantilist and transactional approach — that is, it seeks to reap the monetary rewards of economic relations without incurring the security and military risks of trying to solve or even ameliorate any of the region’s deep-seated political, social, and geopolitical problems. This delicate balancing act approach, the “gain without pain,” has to date served Chinese interests well. Paradoxically, it is both a source of and a constraint on China’s influence, and whether China can sustain its posture of strict neutrality remains to be seen. But as long as the balance in Beijing’s tool kit is heavily skewed toward the use of soft economic power rather than hard military power, China, reflecting its immense market, sovereign wealth fund, and technological and engineering prowess, will increasingly become an economic powerhouse in the region while remaining on the military and diplomatic sidelines. So long as China’s interests are safeguarded, this approach is unlikely to change if the U.S. military withdraws from the region.

#### Beijing won’t risk antagonizing Russia or entangling alliances by extending security commitments.

Simon ’21 [Steven, Senior Analyst at the Quincy Institute. He studied theology at Harvard and public policy at Princeton before government service at the State Department and the NS.. “China and the Persian Gulf in the Aftermath of a U.S. Withdrawal.” Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft, https://quincyinst.org/report/china-and-the-persian-gulf-in-the-aftermath-of-a-u-s-withdrawal/#what-do-the-gulf-states-want-from-china, September 21, 2021] TDI

Fears that China will emerge as the new regional hegemon upon the departure of U.S. forces from the region, while understandable, are unwarranted. In the first instance, the Chinese seem to be following George Washington’s advice and avoiding entangling alliances. China imports most of its Gulf energy supplies from Saudi Arabia and Iran, and Beijing has designated both countries “comprehensive strategic partners.”25 But Beijing has studiously avoided taking sides in their conflicts or taking actions that would antagonize one side or the other — for example, by building bases or deploying forces in either country.26 In selling weapons to Saudi Arabia, China has been careful to avoid provoking a negative reaction from Iran.27 As long as China remains scrupulous about maintaining this even handed attitude, it will eschew security commitments to either country. This assessment will hold as long as most Gulf states are willing to do business with China. Absent concerns that the United States can easily intimidate these states to cut off their energy and trade relations with China, the Chinese have few incentives to take on a major military-security role.

Beijing has no interest in risking a conflict with Washington. The Chinese are at a serious disadvantage in power-projection capability vis-à-vis American military forces based in the Gulf and, further afield, in the eastern Mediterranean and in NATO countries. Neither can it hope to develop security relationships such as those the United States has cultivated with Saudi Arabia (notwithstanding current strains in U.S.–Saudi ties) and the other GCC states over the last few decades, or to duplicate the infrastructure the United States has available in the region for basing, staging, and training. Of course, if China succeeded in “flipping” the Arab Gulf states it would simply inherit U.S. facilities in much the same way the Soviets inherited Cam Ranh Bay upon the U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam, or the U.S. inheritance of Bagram Air Base from the Soviets after overthrowing the Taliban in 2001. But as suggested earlier, these states are not likely to flip. Nor would Beijing take any actions in the region that would weaken its partnership with Russia outside the greater Middle East. China and Russia will continue to compete for arms sales with Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE, but Beijing will try to avoid pursuing its interests at Moscow’s expense.

If the Gulf countries sought enhanced military relations with China following the U.S. military retrenchment in the region, the odds are better than even that, aside from selling more arms, Beijing would likely demur to extending security commitments. Indeed, it is hard to see a constellation of interests that would compel China to significantly ramp up military operations in the Middle East. China, after all, was for decades unwilling to commit military resources to shore up its unstable Afghan neighbor. A disruption in its oil supply from the Persian Gulf would be unlikely to foster a different calculus.

### russia deterrence---1ar

#### Middle Eastern states couldn’t care less, and scarce resources decrease Russian influence. Syria is not indicative of hegemonic ambitions in the Gulf.

Connable & Wasser ’18 [Ben, senior political scientist at the nonprofit, nonpartisan RAND Corporation and a retired Marine Corps intelligence and Middle East Foreign Area officer. His work focuses on irregular warfare issues and intelligence methodology, & Becca, policy analyst at the nonprofit, nonpartisan RAND Corporation, where her primary research areas include wargaming, international security, and US defence and foreign policy in the Middle East. “The Limits of Russian Strategy in the Middle East” RAND Corporation, https://www.rand.org/blog/2018/05/the-limits-of-russian-strategy-in-the-middle-east.html, May 10, 2018] TDI

In the nearly three years since Russia's intervention in Syria, Moscow has managed to prevent regime collapse. To some, this intervention along with increased economic and political engagement throughout the region represented Russia's return to the Middle East and an attempt to recapture the level of regional influence once enjoyed by the Soviet Union. To others, the intervention signaled a new strongman approach to the Middle East: a newly interventionist Russia might be willing to intervene in other countries where it holds interests, such as Libya. Both lines of thought establish Russia as a potential kingmaker and spoiler in the Middle East, a central actor potentially capable of rivaling Western influence. But there is danger in extrapolation from the Syria operation and analysts should be cautious in lending too much significance to this renewed activity. While Russia does have a long-term strategy in the Middle East, it is freighted with significant restraints and constraints.

Moscow's approach in the Middle East may appear arbitrary as it lacks a clear ends-driven approach, focuses on the short-term, and seems, at least superficially, to be ruthlessly opportunistic and transactional. But this seemingly tactical, short-term approach does constitute a strategy. Arguably this strategy is well-suited to the post-Soviet Russian state. In a previous paper, we found that Russia's long-term intent is to maximise short-term economic, military and political advantages in the Middle East while reducing the short-term advantages and opportunities of its adversaries. Presenting its foreign policy as secular, transactional and non-ideological has given Russia greater freedom to engage competing actors like Saudi Arabia and Iran. Ideological neutrality increases the number of available opportunities for influence, economic investment, and if necessary, disruption. This resource and opportunity-dependent approach allows Moscow to exploit available chances brought about by the Middle East's unpredictable dynamics while limiting costs and commitments. Russia's flexible approach also stands in stark contrast to those of the US, UK and other Western states.

But Russia's Middle East strategy holds clear limitations and has real practical drawbacks. When Russia's resources and opportunities are scarce and engagements with Middle Eastern states decrease, influence will decrease accordingly. Absent deeper commitments, Russia is beholden to other actors, dynamics and events to create windows of opportunity. When Russian interests move into alignment with another actor, short-term deals are easy, often low-risk and fruitful. But the value of these deals is limited. Russia may offer an alternative to the West—and specifically to the US—but it is not necessarily an attractive alternative. Non-ideological, quid-pro-quo relationships do not tend to generate longstanding allies. In fact, Russia has no true, consistent allies in the Middle East. Russia can influence and shape outcomes in the region, but it cannot set or control a dominant agenda unless it risks unilateral intervention: it also wants for global allies it can rely on to help sustain its interests or obtain objectives in the Middle East. At best, Russia can sustain a few existing relationships and influence state behaviour, make money on the margins, and complicate Western policy options in the region.

Syria represents both the benefits of the tactical and transactional approach and the limits of Russian policy and capability. In Syria, Russia prevented the collapse of the regime of President Bashar al-Assad at a relatively small cost. It has also reinforced its presence in the Levant, rebuilt its naval and air bases, and arguably made a significant dent in the Sunni extremist threat to the homeland. Mutually beneficial arrangements with Iran and Lebanese Hezbollah have generated favourable short-term results in northern Syria. But safe disengagement looks increasingly more difficult and unlikely. More to the point, Syria is the only country in the Middle East that has a consistent strategic relationship with Russia. Even this relationship is shaky. Nothing that has taken place in Syria should be extrapolated beyond its borders.

Elsewhere in the region, Russia has leveraged its non-ideological strategy to generate a number of temporary wins. For instance, Moscow has been able to bolster relations with Israel while simultaneously deepening military cooperation with Iran. But the inherent contradictions overlooked in non-ideological engagement prevent confidence-building with leaders who tend to view the region through primordialist lenses: they desire long-term commitment and consistency to preserve a stable status quo. Our workshops revealed that key leaders in the Middle East see engagement with Russia as a threat to Western partnership; as a temporary, second-best alternative to the US; or as a practical necessity to gain short-term economic or security benefits. Quid quo pro demands in these relationships are ruthless and the connections are ultimately ephemeral. It is not clear how Russia's tactical gains in the Middle East can be translated into long-term strategic success.

This makes clear the greatest limitation of Russia's regional strategy: it is not Russia, but the Middle Eastern states themselves that determine the depth of their relations with Moscow and therefore the outcomes of any Russian activities in the region. Just as Russia seeks to engage in the Middle East for its own benefit—whether driven by economics or a desire for prestige—these states also seek to use Russia to their advantage. There is little potential strategic cost to Middle Eastern states for disengagement from Russia; short-term, transactional relationships can be turned on and off at will. Therefore, it is the Middle Eastern actors that hold primacy in the relationship and have the agency to determine the viability and success of any Russian strategy, both in the short and long term.

### iran deterrence---1ar

#### A reduction in forces won’t cause war with Iran.

Gholz ’21 [Eugene, Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of Notre Dame, currently on leave as a Visiting Fellow at the Defense Priorities Foundation. He served as chair of the international security section of the International Studies Association (2019-2021) and is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations. He previously held faculty positions at the University of Texas at Austin, Williams College, the University of Kentucky, and George Mason University. His Ph.D. is from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. “Nothing Much to Do: Why America Can Bring All Troops Home From the Middle East” Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft, https://quincyinst.wpengine.com/report/nothing-much-to-do-why-america-can-bring-all-troops-home-from-the-middle-east/, June 24, 2021] TDI

Iran is the country that Americans most often think of as posing a threat to dominate the Middle East, but its military lacks key capabilities to make a hegemonic bid. The most important feature of the Iranian military is its emphasis on unconventional warfare, especially in the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, essentially a second military force that receives more resources than Iran’s traditional military.40 Some of the unconventional warfare techniques are more public relations sizzle than real military capabilities: photo ops of fast speedboats circling and volley fires of modestly accurate ballistic missiles — or photoshopped facsimiles of such spectacles.41 Yet other special warfare capabilities are real, if limited, allowing the IRGC and the Quds Force to meaningfully support allies in various Middle Eastern civil wars and to help the Iranian regime maintain political stability at home.42 These capabilities might make Iran relatively well placed to handle some of the requirements of post-conquest occupations, although Iran’s Persian and Shi’a characteristics would simultaneously exacerbate the difficulty of interactions with many conquered locals. But experience in internal politics also comes with other disadvantages. Advancement to military leadership positions in Iran can depend significantly on politicking and religious loyalty rather than on merit, and some military leaders actually spend substantial effort on running the various businesses that the military owns, which account for a significant fraction of the Iranian economy — rarely, if ever, a feature of first-class offensive potential.43 Iran’s best military forces are neither trained nor equipped to defeat rival militaries and seize control of territory.

Meanwhile, Iran’s conventional military has struggled for decades. In some ways, it is impressive that Iran has managed to keep any of its equipment operating through intense economic sanctions that include spare parts embargoes and export controls on military and dual-use products. But maintenance, upgrades, and even the ability to minimally equip a large force are still problems for Iran. When the domestic Iranian arms industry announces a new, innovative piece of equipment, it is often cobbling together working bits of old equipment to produce a chimera that at least keeps some tanks or helicopters in the field; production volumes are necessarily limited.44 Even if diplomatic circumstances change, allowing Iran to purchase some of the modern equipment that it would need for major offensives, it would need to assimilate the new equipment, learn to use it to its full potential, and overcome profound internal barriers that have limited the Iranian military’s ability to pull off combined-arms operations in the past.45 For example, Iran has for years supposedly been about to take delivery of advanced Russian S-400 mobile air defense systems, but even if it does, the Iranian military will need to learn to use them, in a combined arms fashion, in the difficult circumstances of moving for military offensives.46 Iran’s leadership would also always be tempted to reserve the advanced air defenses for high-value targets at home, notably political leadership and nuclear facilities. And even if Iran’s policy changed and it made a major commitment to investing in its conventional forces, the organizational division between the IRGC and the conventional military would continue to severely hamper strategic planning and operational effectiveness.47 Turning Iran’s military into an offensive force capable of threatening to establish regional hegemony would be a major, expensive, politically wrenching, long-term project.

### isis deterrence---1ar

#### ISIS resurgence is impossible. If it is, the Middle East isn’t key.

Boussel ’23 [Pierre; French columnist and researcher specializing in the Arab world, associate fellow at the Foundation for Strategic Research. June 13, 2023; “ISIS keeps dwindling in Syria”; *GIS Reports*; https://www.gisreportsonline.com/r/syria-isis-terrorism/] TDI

Once centralized around a leader and a Shura Council, ISIS now looks like a weakened organization. International counterterrorism forces have taken out its head four times and now the leadership structure struggling to revive itself. The most recent leader, Abu al-Hussein al-Husseini al-Quraishi, is or was an unknown. Turkey claimed on April 30, 2023, to have killed him in an anti-terrorist operation, but doubt remains. What exists now may be a collective leadership rather than reliance on a single leader. The aim of such an organizational model would be to evade anti-terrorist strikes while sending a message of resilience to the fighting base. This is a victory for the West, which has succeeded in structurally weakening the group and establishing the idea that any activist who rises to a position of responsibility will sooner or later be eliminated.

The organization maintains the appearance of a pyramidal structure. Arrests have enabled the identification of several functions: head of sector, head of intelligence, head of a sleeper cell, head of a training camp, planner of attacks, logistics manager, messenger, information office operator and fighters. There is no evidence, however, of a strong top-down command. Even at its peak, efficiency was rarely found in flashy organizational charts, which were mostly for show.

Disjointed leadership, declining terrorist incidents

Although forced to constantly reorganize, thereby remaining weak, ISIS maintains two operational hallmarks: a willingness to carry out massive attacks and a penchant for hyper-violence. Its attack on a prison in the northeastern Syrian city of Hasakah in 2022 was indicative of its deadly ambitions. The operation, with perhaps 300 prisoners released and 346 attackers killed, shows that the group has not given up on its excesses and has not learned any lessons. It faces a recruitment problem in rebuilding its ranks and building loyalty and professionalism. The Hasakah attack, spectacular as it was, confirmed the limits of its capacity.

The United Nations has reported a decline in ISIS attacks in Syria, an assessment confirmed by the Global Coalition Against Daesh, which has recorded a 55 percent drop in operations in 2022. While these figures present an undeniable reality, it is important to stress that they do not include failed or aborted operations nor the small-scale violence that takes place daily in the triangle of Palmyra-Deir Ezzor-Abu Kamal, where physical threats, robberies, kidnappings, assassinations and the planting of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) are common. ISIS still has the capacity to cause damage through unorthodox attacks, including from opportunistic actions such as the escape of 20 or so prisoners who took advantage of disorganization due to the earthquake of February 6, 2023, to escape from Rajo prison in northwestern Syria. They are likely to join the group’s cells.

Combining large-scale attacks with neighborhood harassment is likely indicative of a disjointed chain of command, between a leadership obsessed with large-scale warfare and autonomous cells running their small businesses through a mixture of gangsterism and theological tinkering.

Middle East is no longer an ISIS growth area

The group’s propaganda, available in 23 languages, produces supposedly spiritual sermons. The beheading videos remain, but they are fewer in number and far less scripted than before. Terror campaigns have declined significantly. ISIS no longer uses them as an overall strategy, but as an ad hoc tactic, both brutal and to the point.

Members cold-bloodedly slaughter civilians who have no theological or military interest. Since February, ISIS has killed around 100 civilians picking truffles in the Homs and Hama areas. The mushrooms provide small revenue to the poorest of the poor. Militants steal their harvests and put them on the market. Flocks of sheep are slaughtered to terrify the rural population and force them to declare their allegiance. The typical arrangement is safety for the villagers in exchange for donations of money and supplies to ISIS fighters.

Russia and the United States are conducting counterterrorism operations in the Syrian Desert, the U.S. forces being by far the most active. They work tirelessly to eliminate the organization’s key operatives like Hudhayfah al-Yamani, an operations planner, or, more recently, Mahmoud al-Hajj, head of intelligence and recruitment. These men, who are supposed to be experienced in clandestine life, made serious security errors that allowed them to be traced. The leader of ISIS’s Iraqi branch, Abu Sarah al-Iraqi, was killed in February, demonstrating once again the failure of the security services to protect their leaders.

The story of the neutralization of one ISIS leader, Abu al-Hassan al-Hashemi, is enlightening. As per usual practice, upon its arrival in the Syrian town of Jasim in 2022, the group began by eliminating local elites and setting up a Sharia court that sentenced residents to death. But the residents quickly allied themselves with opposition groups. Clashes broke out. When the beleaguered ISIS asked the people of neighboring Busra al-Sham for help, the response was negative. The fighting proved fatal for Mr. Hashemi and his security detail.

ISIS is holding out because the Levant, which includes part of Syria, is central to its theological discourse. Adherents believe it is where the Mahdi will establish the Kingdom of God at the end of time. But the specter of a split looms. Tensions that were underplayed during the organization’s heyday are now coming to the fore.

Structural tensions played out when the Syrian branch renewed its leadership without informing its Iraqi counterpart. A lack of unity and common goals became evident when the Iraqi branch refused to take part in the attack on al-Hasakah prison in 2022. The Iraqi branch also blames the Syrians for the bloody experience of the caliphate.

According to a former activist who defected from the group, there is an “urgent need to reposition the organization.” Indeed, the Middle East is no longer a growth area for ISIS. Cells attempting to operate in Israel have been dismantled. The Libyan branch, led by Abdulsalam Darkullah, has retreated to southwestern Libya’s Fezzan in the Acarus mountains. The commander is infiltrating fighters into the refugee flows reaching the Schengen area to carry out operations in Europe, taking advantage of a lull in the vigilance of European security services partly because of Russia’s war on Ukraine. There is nothing to suggest Mr. Darkullah’s aims will succeed.

## Deterrence---Toolkit

### status-seeking---top---1ar

#### Russia and China are status-seeking, not revisionist.

Larson & Shevchenko ’19 [Deborah Warch Larson; professor of political science at the University of California, Los Angeles. Stanford University, 1982. Alexei Shevchenko; Professor of Political Science at California State University, Fullerton, doctorate in Political Science from UCLA. December 2019; “Lost in Misconceptions about Social Identity Theory”; *International Studies Quarterly*, Volume 63, Issue 4] TDI

Dissatisfied with their relative standing in the world, China and Russia are challenging the US-dominated liberal order. China has built and militarized artificial islands in the South China Sea to gain control over a strategic waterway. Russian President Vladimir Putin annexed Crimea from Ukraine and meddled in the 2016 US elections. These recent actions by China and Russia appear to have a common denominator — the desire to assert their status as global great powers (Larson and Shevchenko 2019, 198, 202–3). Could US accommodation of Chinese or Russian status ambitions help channel their behavior in a more constructive direction?

The rationale for status accommodation is that attempts by established powers to obstruct the rise of a state such as China are apt to provoke a backlash in the form of heightened nationalism, military buildups, or geopolitical rivalry. This is rooted in the psychological insights of social identity theory (SIT), which argues that impermeable status barriers, combined with the perception of unfair treatment and the possibility of change in the status hierarchy, will motivate a lower-status group to challenge the status quo (Tajfel 1978a, 1978b; Tajfel and Turner 1979). Steven Ward (2017) argues that the case for status accommodation rests on shaky scholarly ground. Ward contends that scholars who draw this connection (Larson and Shevchenko 2010, 2014b, 2019) have misused the psychological theory and presents an alternative explanation of status competition in international relations (IR), which he claims is more consistent with SIT. In Ward’s version of SIT, impermeable elite group boundaries only affect individuals who try to leave their group for a higher-status one; impermeability does not influence the behavior of groups. Thus, instead of being motivated by anger or hostility at persistent status denial, states pursue geopolitical competition because they have the capability to do so and the international community values advanced weaponry and overseas possessions as indicators of status.

To refute the argument that persistent status denial leads to conflict, Ward discusses “most likely” cases for the IR version of SIT — Germany’s Weltpolitik before World War I and Japanese foreign policy in the interwar period. In neither case, he asserts, was geopolitical competition driven by reactions to status barriers thrown up by the established powers.

Ward’s narrow critique misses the meaning and real-world implications of SIT. Most crucially, he overlooks the psychological dynamics of why lower-status groups choose to challenge the status quo — their frustration and anger over being denied the chance for status advancement, their unfair treatment by society, and the illegitimacy of the status hierarchy. In what follows, we will first present the basic propositions of SIT. We will then highlight several of Ward’s principal misconceptions, errors that could mislead researchers and have disastrous policy implications.

Social Identity Theory Propositions

SIT was developed in the 1970s by Henri Tajfel and his colleagues at the University of Bristol in the United Kingdom to correct for the reductionism of US social psychology, which attributed such intergroup phenomena as prejudice to the characteristics of individuals (Hogg and Abrams 1988, 12– 13). One insight of SIT is that individuals have both a personal identity and a social identity, derived from the social groups to which they belong (Tajfel 1978a, 41–43).

Because a person’s social group membership constitutes part of the self, members want their group to have a “positively distinctive” identity. Unfavorable comparisons with a similar reference group threaten collective self-esteem and may lead to the adoption of an identity management strategy. The choice of strategy depends on beliefs about the permeability of group boundaries and the legitimacy and stability of the status hierarchy (Tajfel and Turner 1979, 40). If lower-status group members believe that boundaries between social groups are permeable, they may try to “pass” into a higher-status group (Tajfel and Turner 1979, 43) — a mobility strategy. Although Ward insists that mobility is limited to individuals, in his original theoretical statement, Tajfel (1978a, 94) refers to the lower-status group strategy of becoming “more like the superior group,” with the aim of “cultural, social, and psychological assimilation of the group as a whole.” In order for this to take place, there would have to be a “breaking down of the barriers preventing the group from obtaining improved access.” In their analysis of identity management strategies, Blanz et al. (1998, 700) report that there is “no consensus among social identity theorists on the conceptualization of assimilation as either an individual or a collective strategy.”1

In international politics, when states perceive that elite group boundaries are permeable, states seek social mobility through emulation of the values, practices, and norms of the higher-status states in order to be admitted to elite clubs (Larson and Shevchenko 2010, 71–73; 2014a, 38–40; 2014b, 271) or a more prestigious social category such as middle power (Gilady 2018, 113–18).

When the status hierarchy is perceived as secure, that is, legitimate and stable, the lower-status group cannot even conceive of any alternatives to the status quo (Tajfel 1978a, 87). Under these conditions, the lower-status group may reduce unpleasant feelings of inferiority by engaging in social creativity, that is, reinterpreting their situation. A social creativity strategy may (1) identify a new dimension on which the in-group is superior, (2) reevaluate an existing characteristic as positive, or (3) choose an even lower-status group as the target of comparison (Tajfel and Turner 1979, 43). In international relations, social creativity frequently entails reframing a negative characteristic as positive or finding a new dimension on which the state is superior (Larson and Shevchenko 2010, 73). For example, the Chinese Communist Party now celebrates Confucianism as an element of Chinese culture, although Mao Zedong condemned the philosophy as feudalistic. But when the lower-status group begins to regard its position as illegitimate and the status hierarchy as changeable, it may adopt a strategy of social competition (Tajfel and Turner 1979, 45–46). Social competition seeks to “reverse the relative positions of the in-group and out-group on salient dimensions” (Tajfel and Turner 1979, 44). To achieve this goal, social competition “aims to equal or outdo the dominant group in the area on which its claim to superior status rests” (Larson and Shevchenko 2010, 72). Ward (2017, 826) mistakenly claims that the Larson and Shevchenko application of SIT restricts social competition to military and economic competition, but it can assume various forms. For example, during the Cold War, the Soviet Union sought to “catch up and surpass” the United States in economic production, modernization, culture, and standards of living, as well as military power (Larson and Shevchenko 2014a, 39; 2019).

Misconceptions about SIT

Ward’s (2017, 822–23) reason for contending that impermeable group boundaries do not play any role in SIT is that only individuals have the unpleasant experience of being denied the opportunity to join a higher-status group. However, according to SIT, impermeable boundaries cause individuals to identify more strongly with their in-group and to act as group members (Tajfel and Turner 1979, 35; Ellemers 1993; Bettencourt et al. 2001). Ward’s account also downplays the importance of the legitimacy of the status hierarchy, which is central to SIT. Impermeable group boundaries combined with the perceptions of the illegitimacy of the status hierarchy and the possibility of change can turbocharge social competition (Turner and Brown 1978; Ellemers 1993; Bettencourt et al. 2001). Lower-status groups will “lash out” at the illegitimacy of their status (Hornsey 2008, 214; Tajfel and Turner 1979, 45– 46). As Tajfel (1978b, 52) observes, “a combination of illegitimacy and instability would become a powerful incitement for attempts to change the status quo.” The role of illegitimacy in encouraging challenges to the higher-status group distinguishes SIT from alternative explanations. For example, Wohlforth (2009) argues that uncertainty about which state will prevail due to uneven distribution of power increases the likelihood of status competition. Renshon (2017, 57–58) argues that states that receive less status than they believe they deserve are likely to take military action because it provides dramatic, visible, and unambiguous evidence of the state’s power and resolve.

Ward (2017, 825–26) claims that Larson and Shevchenko’s interpretation of SIT does not adequately distinguish mobility from competition. However, this assertion stems from misreading the fundamentals of SIT, where social competition clearly refers to seeking relative advantage over the out-group (Turner 1975), not “acquisition of consensually valued attributes,” as Ward asserts. Social competition is a zero-sum game. One group cannot be better unless another is worse (Brown and Ross 1982, 156–57). The higher-status group’s identity is threatened by the challenger, and it will attempt to hold on to its position by any means available (Tajfel 1978, 88; Tajfel and Turner 1979, 38, 45–46; Brown and Ross 1982). Although social creativity does not try to compete directly with the out-group, but merely to win recognition in a different domain, and thus is not subject to zero-sum logic, it may also result in conflict if the higher-status group refuses to recognize alternative criteria for status or the lowerstatus group’s preeminence on that dimension. When this happens, SIT predicts “intense hostility in intergroup attitudes and . . . marked discrimination in intergroup behavior” (Tajfel 1978, 97). Brown and Ross (1982) finds that lower-status group members expressed anger and hostility toward the higher-status group’s belittling of its achievements. In short, “when a group’s action for positive distinctiveness is frustrated, impeded, or in any way actively prevented by an out-group, this will promote overt conflict and hostility between the groups” (Tajfel and Turner 1979, 46).x

Ward’s discussion of historical cases does little to strengthen his overall argument since it is not clear why Wilhelmine Germany or interwar Japan are “most likely” cases for SIT. If neither state faced obstacles to its status ambitions before adopting imperialist policies, then by definition SIT is not relevant. Moreover, Ward does not demonstrate that China and Russia are similar to the cases of Germany or Japan in the variables that caused them to engage in geopolitical rivalry. Thus, it is hard to see how one can draw inferences from these two historical cases about the policy implications for dealing with a rising China and a resurgent Russia.

Conclusion and Policy Implications

Ward concludes that the United States should try to convince China and Russia of the high costs or futility of status competition. SIT and empirical research, however, suggest that US efforts to frustrate the status aspirations of China and Russia will generate intense frustration and resentment (Deng 2008, 60), resulting in a backlash, analogous to Russia’s reaction to the West’s rejection of its efforts to be accepted as a player after the end of the Cold War, but potentially more dangerous given China’s increased military spending and enhanced naval capabilities (Larson and Shevchenko 2019, 248–51). Rather than trying to impede their efforts to gain increased influence, which could lead to military conflict, SIT implies that the United States should reinforce efforts by Russia or China to achieve status through social creativity in nongeopolitical areas, such as establishing new institutions or clubs, mediating international conflicts, or controlling proliferation. Successful status accommodation should be a continuing process and could involve formal summits, working groups, or strategic dialogues. Instead of containment, the goal would be social cooperation, where the United States, Russia, and China acknowledge each other’s achievements or preeminence in different issue areas, specialize in particular issues, or share leadership roles (Larson and Shevchenko 2010, 95; 2019, 249–50). Ward (2017, 831–32) confuses status accommodation with “appeasement” but this is yet another misconception about SIT. In fact, SIT implies that a status accommodation strategy should be supplemented with continuing investments in shaping perceptions of the stability and legitimacy of the status hierarchy to avoid contributing to Russian or Chinese beliefs that they can change their position unilaterally. This means that the United States should preserve its overall military and economic power and alliance networks. It should also ensure international support for its global leadership by resisting unilateralist temptations and by promoting universal rules.

### status-seeking---russia---1ar

#### Russia is status-seeking, not revisionist.

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In this essay we outline a theoretical framework for explaining ostensible shifts and vacillation in Russia's foreign policy. Realism would expect Russia to assert its predominance in neighboring areas where it would come into conflict with the United States and China. Liberals would attribute Putin's anti-American stance to his return to authoritarianism and domestic repression and the corresponding need for an external enemy. A review of Russia's actions since the end of the Cold War, however, does not lend support to either power or domestic politics as the main source of variation in Russian foreign policy. Instead, Russia's stance toward the United States has been strongly influenced by the degree of external validation of its self-image as a great power. Russia is striving for enhanced global recognition while at the same time retaining its national identity. Russia reacts strongly, at times emotionally, to perceived humiliation and disrespect. We argue that a better understanding of Russia's status concerns is essential not only to understand Moscow's volatile behavior but to encourage its cooperation in global governance.

Our theoretical argument derives from social identity theory (SIT) (Hogg and Abrams, 1988, Tajfel, 1978, Tajfel, 1982, Tajfel and Turner, 1979) in social psychology, which argues that social groups strive for a positively distinctive identity and offers hypotheses concerning the identity management strategies used by groups to enhance their relative position. Extrapolating the identity management techniques predicted by SIT to status-seeking in the international arena, we argue that states may enhance their relative standing by imitating more advanced states (strategy of social mobility), trying to displace the higher-ranked state (strategy of social competition), or finding a new arena in which to be superior (strategy of social creativity). Emotions accompanying aggrieved status (in particular anger and vengefulness) can explain the intensity of social competition as well as the breakdown of social creativity efforts. We apply these theoretical insights to Russian status-seeking since the end of the Cold War as a plausibility probe.

1. Explaining Russia's assertiveness

What explains Russia's abrupt shifts and prickly sensitivity to alleged slights and insults? Available theoretical explanations account neither for the pattern of changes in Russian policy, nor for the tone of grievance frequently adopted by Russian elites.

Russia's increased assertiveness might be viewed as the inception of long-awaited “balancing” against U.S. predominant power. Russia's opposition to U.S. initiatives in the United Nations (U.N.) could be described as “soft balancing,” that is, coalition-building and diplomatic bargaining within international institutions to constrain the dominant power (Layne, 2006). On the other hand, a genuine balancing strategy for Russia would entail competition with the United States for predominant influence in Eurasia while forming an anti-U.S. coalition with China and other non-Western states, as advocated by Russian Eurasianists, but Russia has avoided commitments to these states (Tsygankov, 2008, Tsygankov, 2014). An even more pessimistic interpretation argues that Moscow is trying to overturn the post-Cold War order, restore its position as a global superpower, and reassert control over its lost empire in a modern guise (Bugajski, 2009, Lucas, 2014). While Russia's takeover of Crimea and its behavior during the 2014 Ukrainian crisis seem on the surface to validate this “offensive realist” reading of Russian foreign policy, Russia's determination to prevent further enlargement of NATO and its demand for a droit de regard (historically, an intrinsic aspect of great power status in international politics), should not be confused with imperial expansionism. Russia's aspiring for greater regional influence may lead to spoiler behavior, but not full-scale revisionism.

Others charge that Russia's assertiveness reflects the “energy superpower” strategy, an effort to use Russia's energy exports as an instrument of power and prestige (Baev, 2008, Goldman, 2008). It is difficult to see how Russian elites could reasonably expect to carry out such a policy, given Russia's greater dependence on the European energy market (for two-thirds of its foreign exchange revenue) than Europe's on Russian gas (about 25 percent of their imports) (Trenin, 2007, p. 107). Relative changes in the market price of oil and gas are imperfectly correlated with Russia's overall stance toward the West. Russia's recent chilly relations with the United States coincide with the emergence of U.S. shale gas, which has lowered the market price of gas (Herszenhorn and Kramer, 2013).

Another explanation rooted in the liberal tradition and popular among prominent Russia watchers views anti-Westernism in Moscow's foreign policy as an attempt to distract public attention from the growing centralization of Russia's domestic politics and shift towards authoritarianism, camouflaged as “sovereign democracy” or discourse about national specificity (Shevtsova, 2007, Shevtsova, 2010). Despite his anti-American rhetoric, though, Putin has continued the policy of allowing U.S. military and supplies to transit through Russian territory to and from Afghanistan and has cooperated on important geopolitical problems such as removing chemical weapons from Syria and negotiating the future of Iran's nuclear program.

A number of scholars have attributed the deterioration of Russian relations with the United States and Europe to Russia's desire to recover its status as a great power and reaction to perceived humiliations by the United States, going back to the 1990s when Russia's wishes on international security issues were ignored (Stent, 2014, Sakwa, 2011, Simes, 2007, Trenin, 2006, Tsygankov, 2008). Building on that insight, we attempt to place Russia's status aspirations within a well-developed theoretical framework from social psychology that relates social groups' desire for status to their strategies for achieving a positively distinctive identity — Social Identity Theory (SIT) (Larson and Shevchenko, 2003, Larson and Shevchenko, 2010; Clunan, 2009).

The next section discusses SIT and a typology of strategies by which states can improve their international standing. We also introduce complementary research on emotions evoked by disrespect for status, depending on the target's attribution of responsibility. In the third section, we apply this framework to the Russian elite's 1990s status frustrations. The fourth section analyzes Putin's social creativity strategy, and the fifth discusses Putin's emotional reaction to the U.S. failure to accept Russia as an equal. The sixth section reviews why President Obama's efforts to redress some of Russia's status grievances failed, only to provoke more intense anger from Russia and anti-American rhetoric.

2. Identity, status and emotions

According to SIT, social groups strive to attain an identity that is both positive and distinctive (Tajfel and Turner, 1979, Turner, 1975). Similarly, states are concerned with intangible needs for positive self-esteem and recognition as well as power and wealth. A group assesses its relative standing through comparison to a reference group, one that is similar but slightly superior (Brown and Haeger, 1999). If the group's standing is inferior on important dimensions, it may decide to pursue an identity management strategy.

The group may try to emulate a higher status group (social mobility), compete with it for preeminence (social competition), or establish excellence in a different area (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). Applied to international relations, states may enhance their relative standing by imitating more advanced states, trying to outdo the higher-ranked state, or finding a new arena in which to be superior.

To be successful, a strategy of social mobility requires that elite group boundaries be permeable to new members (Ellemers et al., 1990, Tajfel and Turner, 1979). If elite group boundaries are impermeable (Ellemers, 1993) and the status hierarchy is perceived as unstable or illegitimate, groups may turn to social competition (Turner and Brown, 1978). Social competition aims at besting the higher-status group in its own domain, striving to be better on some comparative dimension (Turner, 1975). Similarly, states engage in social competition when they strive to have the most destructive weapons, acquire more clients than the other, display advanced weapons in parades, intervene militarily against a weaker power, prevent the other state from achieving particular goals or act as a spoiler to block collective efforts to restore regional stability.

If existing status distinctions appear to be legitimately based, or at least durable, groups may try to establish a new area in which to be superior — social creativity. Groups may reevaluate what is ostensibly a negative trait as positive, as in the “gay pride” movement. Or groups may identify a new area in which they are better than the established group (Lemaine, 1974). The concept of “Asian values” — stressing that these states are more harmonious, orderly, and communitarian than the individualistic and materialistic West — is an example of this. States may use social creativity to achieve prestige on criteria other than those conventionally associated with being a great power (military capabilities or economic weight) such as regional leadership, diplomatic influence, economic growth rate, cultural achievements, or norm entrepreneurship.

For a social creativity strategy to succeed, the higher-status group must accept the new value dimension as positive and acknowledge that the lower-status group does indeed stand out on this dimension (Tajfel, 1978, p. 96–97) The higher-status group is more likely to acknowledge the out-group's accomplishments if it believes that its own position is legitimate and secure (ibid., pp. 89–90).

Refusal by the higher-status group to recognize a group's status claims shows disrespect (Wolf, 2011), which is likely to result in an escalation of inter-group competition (Tajfel, 1978: 89–90) and increased hostility from the lower-status group (Brown and Ross, 1982). Having one's self-esteem or dignity reduced is humiliating (Saurette, 2006).

Reactions to perceived humiliations and slights are likely to exhibit intense emotions. SIT provides a link between individual-level psychological theories of emotion and collectivities such as states. SIT holds that when individuals identify with a group, they experience actions toward the group as if aimed at them personally — similar to emotions experienced when a favorite soccer team wins or loses. Members react emotionally to events that thwart or further group goals (Sasley, 2011, Smith, 1993, Smith, 1999).

Maintaining or improving group status is a fundamental goal. When a group loses status, the emotions experienced depend on the perceived cause of this loss. When the group perceives that its own actions were responsible for loss of status, it will experience shame and embarrassment (Kemper, 1978, p. 61). When others are perceived as responsible for loss of status — through humiliation, withholding approval or deference, denial of expected benefits — the group will display anger (Kemper, 1978, p. 128). The emotion of anger or irritation often leads to offensive action tendencies against the out-group (designed to harm either verbally or physically in retaliation for injuries to dignity and prestige). Belief that the in-group is strong increases the level of emotion and the likelihood of offensive action (Mackie et al., 2000). Anger is elicited by perception of injustice or illegitimacy. The purpose of an offensive reaction is not merely to deter repeated humiliations in the future, but to restore power and status, to return the situation to a desired state of affairs (Shaver et al., 1987; pp. 1077–1078).

A lower-status group may experience malicious pleasure or Schadenfreude at the misfortunes or failures of a higher-status group, which is perceived to have mistreated it (Leach et al., 2003). Vengefulness is prompted by others' unfair denial of status, and is intended to restore actors to their rightful positions (Barbalet, 1998, p. 136). Unlike anger, which is an acute emotion, vengefulness may endure over an extended period of time, motivating retaliatory action on an occasion far removed from the original provocation (Mackie et al., 2000). The influence of both anger and vengefulness on status-seeking efforts can be illustrated by Khrushchev's desire to get back at the Americans for years of humiliating over flights of Soviet territory by spy planes. When the Soviets shot down a U-2 spy plane less than two weeks before the 1961 Paris summit, Khrushchev decided not to disclose the Soviet downing of the plane, wait for the United States government to come up with a false cover story about the missing plane, and then embarrass Washington by revealing it to be false (Taubman, 2003, p. 446, 455, 458). After exposing President Eisenhower's equivocation, Khrushchev demanded a personal apology, ending the summit before it began (Fursenko and Naftali, 2006, p. 290).

A focus on status-seeking, as well as the emotions accompanying failure to win respect, helps to explain some of the shifts in Russian foreign policy, beginning with the abandonment of Russia's immediate post-Cold War policy of trying to integrate with the West, as we discuss below.

3. Yeltsin's diplomacy: from social mobility to social competition

The collapse of the Soviet Union threatened both the value and distinctiveness of Russia's identity. Russia suffered profound internal and external identity crises, exacerbated by the difficulty of adjusting to the rapid decline in its status and loss of its position as a superpower (Hopf, 2002, Trenin, 2002). At the root of difficulties in post-Cold War relations between Russia and the West was Russia's self-conception as a great power and the West's refusal to accept that status.

In the early 1990s, Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev and other Russian liberals pursued a strategy of social mobility, aspiring to be admitted to higher-status Western clubs such as GATT, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Group of Seven (G-7), and even the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (CIS, 1992). The Clinton administration, however, held off admitting Russia into elite Western clubs until it was a stable, capitalist democracy (Stent, 2005, p. 265). The U.S. decision in early 1994 to enlarge NATO to include former members of the Warsaw Pact indicated that Russia would not be admitted into “civilization,” just as it appeared to be playing by the rules (Aron, 1998, p. 33). As consolation, Russia was invited into the Partnership for Peace, established in 1994 supposedly as a transition to NATO membership, although it was unlikely that Russia would ever graduate (Trenin, 2011, p. 104). Negotiations for Russia's membership were prolonged by insistence that Russia should have a special status, above the other Eastern European states (Light, 1996). Although Russia was a member of the Contact Group on the former Yugoslavia, beginning in August 1995, NATO carried out sustained bombing of Serbian positions in Bosnia over Russia's fervent and loud opposition, prompting heated rhetoric from Boris Yeltsin about igniting “the flames of war in Europe” (Lynch, 2001, p. 16).

Widespread dissatisfaction with Kozyrev's concessions to the West led to his replacement as foreign minister by Yevgeny Primakov (Tsygankov, 2006, pp. 83–84; Trenin, 2002, pp. 273–275). From 1996 to 1999, Primakov used “multipolar” diplomacy to restore Russia's status by forming diplomatic partnerships to check the United States, a strategy of social competition (Pushkov, 1998, Pushkov, 2000). Primakov tried to mediate on Iraq and Kosovo to establish Russia's centrality as a key player (Lo, 2002, pp. 89–90, 107–108, 142). In the end, Primakov's balancing strategy did not restrain the United States from enlarging NATO or carrying out military action against Iraq and Yugoslavia (Tsygankov, 2006, p. 106). The use of NATO to bomb Yugoslavia, bypassing the United Nations Security Council where Russia had a veto, was regarded as particularly humiliating (Baranovsky, 2000, p. 454–455), marking the end of the strategic partnership between Russia and the West for many Russian elites (Antonenko, 2007). Russian elites were particularly concerned that NATO had abandoned its traditional defensive strategy, asserting the right to carry out military actions outside its area of responsibility in the name of humanitarian intervention (Torkunov, 2000). The change in Russian foreign policy was symbolized by the “Primakov loop” (Trenin, 2011, p. 105): when he learned of the Kosovo bombing, Primakov ordered his plane, which was headed toward the United States, to turn around in midair (Goldgeier and McFaul, 2009, p. 253). Russians sought to regain respect and to throw the U.S. off balance by sending 200 Russian peacekeepers to capture the airport of Pristina before NATO troops arrived, risking a dangerous military clash between U.S. and Russian soldiers (Talbott, 2002, pp. 342–347).

At the end of the 1990s, Russian efforts to regain great power status seemed to be doomed to failure, with Moscow viewed as an angry anachronism in world politics, making empty threats. Although Russia was invited to join the G-7 in 1997, largely to mitigate Yeltsin's humiliation over NATO's enlargement, the organization was still “G-7 plus Russia,” because Russia was only admitted to the political side rather than to the conference of finance ministers (Talbott, 2002, p. 124, 237). The West declined to accept Russia as a member of the elite clubs of NATO and the EU, although Russians believed that their representatives should be at least co-chairs (Trenin, 2006). In addition to the scope and complexity of economic and political reforms required for Russia to be accepted, social mobility would have entailed Russia's imitation of the higher-status Western states, a humiliating position for a former superpower.

To add insult to injury, Russia's image was further damaged by Yeltsin's numerous health problems and frequent erratic behavior fueled by too much alcohol during foreign trips and dealings with foreign dignitaries. As Clinton's former Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott (2002) reveals, U.S. officials sometimes took advantage of Yeltsin's drinking problem to gain more concessions from Russia — perhaps a perfect metaphor for the Russian perception of its relations with the U.S. during the 1990s.

By the turn of the millennium, optimistic expectations that Russia would become a partner with the West were replaced with disillusionment and the belief that Russia's interests had been ignored. Contrary to Yeltsin's and others' assumption that Russia would assume the status of a coequal superpower with the United States, Russia was treated by the United States as a defeated state and “junior partner” (Pushkov, 2007, Simes, 2007). The gap between Russia's self-image as a great power and its reception by the West evoked anger and frustration among Russian elites. In this case, however, Russia did not pursue social competition, but sought to achieve prestige in a different area than geopolitical might.

4. Putin's social creativity

Widespread realization of the futility of social competition encouraged the formation of a new foreign policy strategy, one based on a more accurate and realistic assessment of the post-Cold War status hierarchy. Efforts at competing with the United States had been humiliatingly fruitless, only accentuating Moscow's inferiority to Washington. Russia's possession of Soviet status markers such as nuclear weapons and a permanent seat in the U.N. Security Council were increasingly irrelevant in a unipolar world where the United States was able to act unilaterally. Primakov's diplomatic balancing and partnerships with other major powers merely registered Russia's current low standing while failing to generate new sources of Russian prestige and legitimation in the post-Cold War system. In addition to its weak economy and declining military, in contrast to the Cold War, Russia lacked a militant anti-Western ideology that might have attracted followers. In an era of peace between the leading international powers, geopolitical competition (the most visible manifestation of social competition in the past) remained largely subdued (Jervis, 2002). After recovering from the shock of unipolarity and having restored a modicum of economic and political stability in the early 2000s, Russian leaders themselves realized that they did not wish to change the international system but to achieve a higher status position within it. Accordingly, Yeltsin's successor, Vladimir Putin decided to seek status by identifying new areas where Russia could assume a prominent role — a strategy of social creativity.

Not surprisingly in light of Russia's stunning decline in the 1990s, Putin's principal foreign policy goal upon his election at the end of 1999 was to restore Russia's great power status (Hanson, 2004, Lo, 2003, Mankoff, 2009, pp. 23–24). Putin seized the opportunity provided by the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks against the United States to reframe Russia's identity as a partner with the West in the war on terror and to align with the United States (Lo, 2003, pp. 124–125, 128–129). President George W. Bush and Putin declared their relationship a “strategic partnership.” Russia shared with the United States valuable political and military intelligence about international terrorists, allowed U.S. planes to fly over Russian territory, acquiesced to U.S. military bases in Central Asia, participated in international search and rescue missions, and gave increased assistance to an anti-Taliban force in Afghanistan, the Northern Alliance (Aron, 2002). Before the 2001 November U.S.–Russia summit, Putin privately compared his relationship with Bush to that between Franklin Roosevelt and Winston Churchill during World War II (Baker and Glasser, 2005, p. 135). This attempt at becoming a partner with the United States, however, required validation by the United States.

5. Aggrieved status, emotions, and a crisis for social creativity

For social creativity to be successful, the dominant power must accept the aspiring state's efforts to attain recognition in a new area. The Bush administration, however, did not regard Russia as an equal partner (Hanson, 2004, p. 173; Shevtsova, 2007, p. 230), as became apparent with Bush's failure to consult with Putin before invading Iraq, a former Soviet client where Russia had substantial financial stakes (Balmforth, 2003). Instead of showing respect for Russia's status as a regional power, with a droit de regard in the post-Soviet space, the Bush administration supported “color” revolutions in Georgia (2003), Ukraine (2004), and Kyrgyzstan (2005), regime changes that were perceived as humiliating interference in Russia's backyard. The Ukrainian “Orange Revolution,” in particular, was a shock and personal slap on the face for Putin, who had staked his personal reputation on victory for the pro-Russian candidate, only to see the election results overturned as fraudulent by the Ukrainian opposition and the West (Shevtsova, 2007, p. 230, 237–238, 240; Lo, 2008, p. 94; Mankoff, 2009, p. 117, 119, 123; Judah, 2013, pp. 84–86).

Putin complained about the lack of respect showed to Russia, as in December 2004 when he compared the United States to a “strict uncle in a pith helmet instructing others how to live their lives,” and in 2006 when he referred to the United States as wolf “who knows who to eat and is not about to listen to anyone” (Shevtsova, 2007, p. 233). In his emotional and bellicose February 2007 Munich address, Putin accused the United States of having “overstepped its national borders in every way,” as evidenced by the “economic, political, cultural, and educational policies it imposes on other nations” (Putin, 2007). At a Victory Day celebration in May 2007, Putin even obliquely compared U.S. policies to those of the Third Reich (Kramer, 2007a, Kramer, 2007b).

As the literature on status, power, and emotions would predict, emotions of anger and vengefulness associated with not receiving due recognition led to offensive reactions, which were amplified by perceptions of the increased strength of the lower-status party. Russian elites were more confident in making claims to great power status given the increase in the price of oil from $27 a barrel in 2000 to $130 a barrel by mid-2008 (Stent, 2008, p. 1092). As the minister of defense Sergei Ivanov wrote in 2006, “Russia has now completely recovered the status of great power that bears global responsibility for the situation on the planet and the future of human civilization” (Tsygankov, 2008, p. 49).

Russia reacted harshly to U.S. plans to deploy elements of its missile defense system, ostensibly directed at Iran, on Polish and Czech territory in 2007 — including threatening to withdraw from the 1987 Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces Treaty — in part because the missile interceptors could be the basis for a larger system undermining Russia's nuclear deterrent (RFE/RL Newsline, 2007) but primarily because Russia had once again been excluded from a major European security decision, contrary to the prerogatives of a great power (Economist, 2007b, p. 70). The Russians felt that the United States had violated its commitment not to deploy significant conventional military forces on the territories of states recently added to NATO, part of the 1997 Russia-NATO Founding Act. The choice of the Czech Republic and Poland as the site of the initial deployment heightened Russian ire over NATO's enlargement (Pikayev, 2009, Slocombe, 2008). Nevertheless, at the June 2007 G8 summit in Heiligendamm, Germany, Putin offered to allow the United States to use the radar at Azerbaijan as part of a joint missile defense system, adding a newly built radar to the offer at a follow-up summit with Bush in Kennebunkport, Maine (Economist, 2007a). The United States rejected Putin's offer of cooperation on the grounds that the radars were not technically suitable. A month later, Putin suspended Russian cooperation with the Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty (Kramer and Shanker, 2007) and in August, he resumed regular strategic bomber patrols over the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans (Kramer, 2007a, Kramer, 2007b).

Russia's desire to assert its comeback on the international stage was encapsulated in the Russia–Georgia War (Sherr, 2009, pp. 204–207). On August 7, Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili launched an artillery attack followed by ground invasion of the South Ossetian capital of Tskhinvali, killing several Russian peacekeepers. Saakashvili had hoped to seize South Ossetia as a fait accompli, before Russia had time to react. Russian troops subsequently occupied important towns of Georgia, apart from South Ossetia, and the Russian Air Force destroyed much of Georgia's military infrastructure to teach the Georgians a lesson (Trenin, 2011, p. 30).

Putin felt that Russia's status as a great power was threatened. Putin intervened in Georgia primarily to reassert Russia's predominant interest in the area, which was endangered by the possibility of imminent membership for Georgia and Ukraine in NATO. Saakashvili's foreign policy priorities were for Georgia to join Western security and economic structures and to reassert control over the breakaway provinces of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Viewing Saakashvili as a model democratic reformer (even after his November 2007 crackdown on the political opposition), the Bush administration encouraged his efforts to restore Georgian territorial integrity instead of acting as an honest broker in resolving the “frozen conflict” (Cooley and Mitchell, 2009). In April 2008, the NATO Summit at Bucharest promised Ukraine and Georgia eventual membership in NATO (not a membership action plan), although Putin had joined the summit for the first time to express his objections in person, informing Bush that this was a “red line” for Russia (Cooper et al., 2008, Asmus, 2010, pp. 134–135). The NATO-Bucharest decision, a compromise between the French-German and U.S. positions, achieved the worst of both worlds, angering the Russians without satisfying the Ukrainians or Georgians (Trenin, 2011, p. 28).

In addition to anger, vengefulness was an important factor in Russia's response to Georgia's attempt to take over the disputed provinces. In February 2008, the West had recognized Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence without UN approval, an action that Putin had strongly opposed. Russian diplomats had drawn comparisons between Kosovo and the Georgian provinces of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. If Kosovo could be independent, why not the breakaway provinces of Georgia (Antonenko, 2007)? Georgian President Saakashvili was also aware of the parallels, cautioning EU leaders and U.S. officials that Russia was likely to retaliate against Georgia if Kosovo were allowed to secede from Serbia without Russian approval, but Western diplomats assured him that Russia was bluffing (Asmus, 2010, p. 100).

Shortly after the Georgian war, Russia recognized South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent states, although none of the other states in the Commonwealth of Independent States followed suit, including even Belarus. Russia's emotional response to Georgian defiance was costly. Although Russia easily won the war, foreign capital flight damaged the Russian economy, as the benchmark Russian Trading System index fell by nearly fifty percent (Kramer, 2008a, Kramer, 2008b).

From the Georgian war onward, Russia would no longer tolerate further expansion of NATO or expansion of U.S. influence into states of the former Soviet Union. Russian President Medvedev (2008) affirmed Russia's “privileged interests” in the post-Soviet space. As noted by Lukyanov (2012), for Russia the war “was something approaching psychological revenge after a 20-year geopolitical retreat, proof that Moscow can say no.”

6. Anger mismanagement

The Obama administration's policy to “reset” relations with Russia, inaugurated in February 2009, was based in part on redressing injured Russian prestige and national pride. The term “reset” implied that the Obama administration was jettisoning aspects of President Bush's foreign policy that were most objectionable to Russia, such as wooing countries in the post-Soviet space or placing missiles and radars in former members of the Warsaw Pact, while cooperating with Russia on issues of common interest. For Russian leaders the major appeal of the “reset” policy was the promise of a more equal relationship with Washington. Since its possession of a sizable nuclear arsenal is one of the few remaining areas where Russia and the U.S. are equals, the Russian side was pleased that Obama initiated negotiations for a new START agreement, signed in spring 2010 and promptly ratified by the U.S. Senate and Russian Duma (Goldgeier, 2009, p. 23). START negotiations emerged as an important vehicle for restoring Russia's status as at least a “quasi-superpower” (Economist, 2009, p. 23). Russian leaders reciprocated by agreeing to open up an air corridor, allowing up to 4500 flights per year of U.S. troops and equipment to Afghanistan. By spring 2011 twenty percent of American cargo and fifty percent of U.S. troops transited through Russia (Economist, 2011). The Obama administration refrained from directly criticizing Russian treatment of dissidents or human rights (Baker, 2009a).

The Russian leadership was also relieved by Obama's September 2009 decision to put on the back burner another humiliating issue — deployment of the U.S. missile defense systems in Eastern Europe–in favor of a four-phased system in which the first phase would consist of smaller missile interceptors based on ships and aimed at Iranian missiles (Baker, 2009b). During her July 2010 tour of the former Soviet states, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton emphasized that the United States would maintain good relations with Russia as well as with Georgia, Ukraine, and Azerbaijan (Economist, 2010b).

Russian foreign policy moved in a more constructive and pragmatic direction, as reflected in improvement of previously tense relations with Poland and the Baltics, settlement of the marine border with Norway, greater reliance on soft power instruments in its relationship with post-Yushchenko Ukraine, and presentation, as Medvedev termed it, of “a smiling face to the world” (Interfax, 2010). In addition to appreciation of the status accommodation aspects of the “reset,” Moscow's cooperation was motivated by recognition of the dangers of dependence on natural resource exports and the need to diversify, a realization that was brought home by the 2008–2009 financial crisis, and a goal that would require cooperation with the West to obtain foreign investment and technology. Cooperation between Russia and the United States reached its height in spring 2010, when Obama and Medvedev signed the New START Treaty in Prague (Baker and Bilefsky, 2010); U.S., French, and British troops were invited for the first time to participate in Moscow's annual May 9 Victory Day parade to commemorate victory over Nazi Germany in World War II (Economist, 2010a; Barry, 2010); and Russia reached agreement with other permanent members of the U.N. Security Council on the most severe sanctions yet against Iran's nuclear program. Moscow later canceled the sale of advanced S-300 ground-to-air missiles to Iran (Sanger and Kramer, 2010).

Despite these promising beginnings, in 2011–2012 the reset entered a period of diminishing returns, largely because the policy was focused on obtaining agreements on particular issues, without connection to a larger vision for the relationship. As observed by Thomas Graham (2011), a former senior director for Russia in the Bush White House, the problem with the “reset” was that it never had a coherent answer for “what the two countries should aspire to now so as to foreclose a return to dangerous geopolitical rivalry and hold open the promise of mutually advantageous strategic partnership,” (Russia Profile Experts, 2011). Aiming to assuage some of the symptoms of Russia's anger and frustration, the reset ultimately failed to address the root causes of Moscow's grievances over its loss of status. As a recent study of U.S.–Russian relations notes, “a central Russian objective has been to regain its status as a great power and be treated as an equal by the United States — a goal that was constantly frustrated” (Stent, 2014, p. xi).

In June 2011, the NATO-Russia Council, created in 2002 for joint projects and cooperation, rejected Moscow's idea of a joint anti-missile system in favor of two separate systems linked by information exchange. To add to the humiliation, the U.S. and its NATO allies turned down Russia's demands for legally binding guarantees and technical limitations to ensure that future European ABM systems would not be directed against Russia (Ivanov, 2011). In a replay of the 2007 dispute, Russia reacted angrily to Obama's decision to proceed with a European missile defense system that would entail putting missile interceptors in Romania and Poland, including warning of a possible preemptive strike against missile defense sites (Clover and Dyer, 2012).

In his May 9, 2012 speech commemorating the anniversary of victory over Nazi Germany, President Putin, elected in March, declared that Russia had “a great moral right” to the respect of other nations, because of its role in defeating Nazi Germany. He informed President Obama that he would not be attending the G-8 summit meeting that the U.S. president had moved to Camp David — so that Putin would not feel excluded from the subsequent NATO summit in Chicago — because he was needed in Moscow to help select the new cabinet (the responsibility of Prime Minister Dmitri Medvedev) (Cooper and Barry, 2012). This was a snub, perhaps in retaliation for Obama's failure to attend the Asia–Pacific Economic Cooperation meeting in Vladivostok. Humiliated and angered by the 2011–2012 domestic protests accompanying Putin's return to presidency, Putin's team once again invoked the threat of Washington-sponsored “color revolutions,” at one point directly blaming the U.S. Department of State and Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton for sponsoring the opposition movement (Anishchuk and Gutterman, 2013; Trenin, 2013a).

Even the triumph of Russia's 2012 admission into the WTO, after two decades of negotiations, was marred by Russian status grievances. Russian political circles were predictably enraged by the decision of the U.S. Congress to replace the obsolete Cold War-era Jackson–Vanik amendment (which conditioned trade relations with the USSR on freedom of Jewish emigration) with the December 2012 Sergey Magnistky Rule of Law Accountability Act (which denied visas to Russian officials implicated in “gross human rights violations” and froze their U.S. assets), viewing it as intolerable interference in their domestic affairs (Herszenhorn, 2012).1 According to Alexei Pushkov, chair of the Russian Duma's international affairs committee, the Magnitsky Act reflected American “pure double standards.” Russia was castigated for its human rights practices while authoritarian partners of the U.S., including China, continued to get a pass from Washington (Weir, 2013).

Russia responded tit for tat, first with a bill targeting political nongovernmental organizations receiving financial support from the United States and prohibiting U.S. adoptions of Russian orphans. The latter provision was ostensibly designed to protect Russian children from abuse by American parents, but attracted much opposition within Russia, including from some members of Putin's cabinet (Economist, 2013). A day after the United States released the name of Russian officials subject to sanctions Russia provided its own list of eighteen current and former U.S. officials who would be barred from entering Russia. A spokesperson for the Russian Foreign Ministry, Alexander Lukashevich, commented that the United States must realize that it cannot conduct its relationship with Moscow “in the spirit of mentoring and undisguised diktat” (Barry, 2013).

Putin's resentment over the West's use of Russia's March 2011 abstention, rather than a veto, of a UN SC resolution 1973, allowing the NATO air campaign against Gaddafi's troops in Libya, to promote “regime change” in that country contributed to Russia's falling out with the West over the civil war in Syria, which broke out in 2012 (Economist, 2012). Tellingly, Putin initially signaled his willingness to cooperate with the U.S. in stopping the war and leading the post-conflict peace process, but insisted that this should be a cooperation of equals, a condition which Washington, despite the reset rhetoric, refused to accept (Trenin, 2013b). By saying “no” to Western intervention in Syria and by supporting Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in his military campaign against rebels Putin aimed at restoring Russia's status as an “indispensable power” in global politics and earning the respect of China and other rising powers (Baev, 2013).

Russian status concerns and related emotions were prominently on display in the summer 2013 Russo-American spat over the fate of Edward Snowden, a former National Security Agency contractor, who fled the United States to Hong Kong and later to Moscow after exposing the U.S. government's wide-ranging communications surveillance programs. While attempting to avoid damaging relations with Washington (Putin publicly demanded that Snowden stop leaking information damaging to the U.S. national security as a pre-condition of his stay in Russia), the Russian side ultimately could not afford to succumb to American pressure to extradite Snowden due to considerations of prestige. The decision to grant Snowden temporary political asylum in Russia was influenced by “Russian irritation at the U.S. presumption that the American justice system's demands must be honored but that Washington is free to criticize and impugn the activities of Russian courts and law enforcement” (Gvosdev, 2013). The Russian response was also in part driven by vengefulness. Putin could not resist the temptation to embarrass the U.S. by exposing the hypocrisy of American democratic rhetoric and by positioning Russia as a genuine protector of civil liberties. As Putin declared, tongue-in-cheek to the laughter and applause of his audience in May 2014, “Russia is not a country that extradites fighters for human rights” (Kremlin.ru, 2014). In the end, Russian (and American) status concerns wound up contributing to a new low point in the relationship, leading to the U.S. decision to cancel the Obama–Putin meeting originally planned at the sidelines of the September 2013 G-20 summit in St. Petersburg, the first time an American president had called off a bilateral summit in decades (Baker and Meyers, 2013).

An opportunity for cooperation with the United States, however, unexpectedly presented itself when it became clear in September 2013 that the Obama administration faced the likelihood of failing to secure congressional authorization for punitive military strikes against Syria. Russian diplomats seized the moment by promoting a plan to place Syria's chemical weapons under international control, thus helping the U.S. to save face by embracing a diplomatic solution to the crisis and at the same time enhancing Russia's prestige as a world power broker (Baker and Gordon, 2013).

This episode of social creativity, however, could not prolong the life of the “reset” relationship. In addition to halting further expansion of NATO, since the 2008 war with Georgia Russia has resisted the extension of the European Union's economic domain to the former Soviet sphere. Moscow's distrust of the European Union was further provoked by the European Union's Eastern Partnership Program, which was presented as a “civilizational choice” for post-Soviet states — a characterization likely to be regarded as an insult by Moscow. At the same time, Putin, who had previously included Russia within the European cultural sphere, started positioning Russia as a unique civilization, a genuine repository of traditional Christian values in contrast to the moral decadence of contemporary Europe (Merry, 2014, Aron, 2014). Moscow applied pressure on Moldova, Armenia, and Ukraine not to sign association and free trade agreements with the EU (which could disrupt those countries' economic ties with Russia) in favor of joining a Russia-led customs union, the first step in Putin's ambitious project for a Eurasian Union, an economic and civilizational project separate from the West (Herszenhorn, 2013).

As the Russian political class was basking in the triumph of the successful 2014 winter Olympics games in Sochi — the most expensive Olympic Games in history, designed to celebrate Russia's resurgence as a great power and Putin's personal vanity project (Herzenhorn, 2014) — the biggest crisis in Russia's relationship with the West since the end of the Cold War struck. When the Ukrainian president Viktor Yanukovich, who had earlier declined to sign the EU partnership agreement under Russian pressure, was toppled by the street protest movement and fled in the evening of February 21, 2014, Putin immediately perceived his ouster as yet another “orange revolution.” He treated it not only as a geopolitical threat (since it raised the possibility of Kiev's reneging on the 2010 agreement that allowed Russia to station its fleet in Crimea until 2042), but also as a personal humiliation, which this time, a full decade after the first one, he was determined not to tolerate. While Russia undoubtedly had contingency plans for sudden instability in Ukraine, as some Western analysts pointed out, Putin's subsequent behavior can better be explained as “fundamentally driven by psychological impulses and highly emotional responses” to the crisis (Mendelson and Harvey, 2014), an “angry and ad hoc” reaction to the situation in Kiev (Sakwa, 2014).

The presence in the provisional Ukrainian government of several ultra-nationalists (a few of whom had publicly praised Nazism and embraced the legacy of Stepan Bandera, the Ukrainian World War II nationalist leader who fought with the Nazis against the Soviet army) and their immediate call for rescinding the status of Russian as a second language, later vetoed by the interim president, along with other anti-Russian measures, gave Putin the ground to denounce the new provisional regime as illegitimate, extremist, Russophobic, and pro-fascist (Kramer, 2014).

Within a week, Russian special operations forces and troops secured control over strategic locations across the peninsula, while the Crimean parliament, partially disbanded and partially voting in the presence of the masked gunmen who were under control of Sergei Aksyonov, alias “Goblin,” known for his connections with the mafia, declared independence from Ukraine and scheduled a referendum on joining Russia (Reuters, 2014). Moscow first manipulated and then was quick to recognize the fraudulent results of the referendum. On March 18, 2014, Putin and Crimean leaders signed a treaty of accession making Crimea and the city of Sevastopol (the location of the Russian Black Sea Fleet) parts of the Russian Federation (Meyers and Barry, 2014).

Putin's address to the country's political elite before signing the accession treaty was emotional and defiant in the face of the threat of Western economic sanctions and Russia's expulsion from the G-8. Putin emphasized that after the Soviet collapse, the Russian people became “one of the biggest — if not the biggest — divided nation in the world” and pledged to protect the rights of compatriots abroad. He appealed to Russian history, pride, and glory, but also to shame over losing the former superpower status by calling the loss of Crimea after the collapse of the Soviet Union an “outrageous historical injustice” which Russia had to accept because it was simply too weak to protect its interests. He scorned the West for accusing Russia of violating international law and invoked the right of nations to self-determination to justify Russia's actions in Crimea. If Ukraine could secede from the USSR and Kosovo Albanians were permitted by the West to separate from Serbia, then citizens of Crimea had the right to join with Russia. The Russian president also revisited several themes of his 2007 Munich speech, lamenting the loss of stability in international politics after the end of bipolarity and accusing the United States of attempting to rule by force. He recited the list of state grievances over not being treated as an equal partner, ranging from the enlargement of NATO and the 1999 bombings of Belgrade to the threat of sanctions over Crimea and continuing restrictions on Russian import of technologies and exports. In short, in his view, Western behavior constituted a return to the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth century policies of containment, which Russia could no longer tolerate. By recognizing the interim Ukraine government, which quickly emerged after the departure of Yanukovich, the United States and the EU had crossed a “red line.” “Russia found itself in a position it could not retreat from. If you compress the spring all the way to its limit, it will snap back hard.” Like other countries Russia had its “own national interests that need to be taken into account and respected” (Putin, 2014).

After taking over Crimea, Russia engaged in spoiler behavior designed to humiliate and destabilize Ukraine by providing military, economic, and political support to the pro-Russian separatists in the Ukraine's south-east, the majority of whom were Russian citizens, led by two former FSB (Federal'naya Sluzhba Bezopasnosti, the successor to the KGB) officers, Alexander Borodai and Igor Girkin (with the nickname Strelkov), who later resigned (Buckley, 2014). Russia's overarching goal was probably to force the Ukrainian authorities to accept federalization of the country, which would have weakened Kiev's control over the southeast and eliminated the very possibility of future Ukrainian membership in NATO (Fenenko, 2014). Moscow remained defiant when faced with the threat of Western economic sanctions, Russia's de-facto expulsion from the G-8, and international outrage over the July 17, 2014 destruction of Malaysian Airlines Flight 17 with 298 passengers on board over eastern Ukraine — a tragedy attributed to the pro-Russian separatists' inability to distinguish between a military target and a civilian passenger jet, but also potentially implicating Russia, which was suspected of delivering powerful anti-aircraft missiles to the rebels (MacFarquhar, 2014).

With the remnants of Russia's social creativity supplanted by what one journalist dubbed “the ideology of ressentiment” over the loss of “imperial greatness” (Remnick, 2014, p. 61), U.S.–Russian relations increasingly appeared to be an escalating rivalry, analogous to the nineteenth century Great Game between Russia and Britain for influence over Central and South Asia — except for the asymmetric character of the twenty-first century version — with the U.S. and Russia competing for influence over such states as Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia (Trenin, 2014). According to historian Geyer (1987, p. 205), the Great Game for Russia was motivated by considerations of prestige and the desire to at least appear to be a great power.

Karaganov (2014), an influential Russian foreign policy expert, suggested a more troubling historical analogy to a Western-imposed “velvet-gloved version of the Versailles policy” which “by pushing Russia into the periphery of global politics” had unleashed “a kind of Weimar syndrome in Russia, a great nation whose dignity and interests were trampled underfoot.”

7. Conclusion

Although the danger of military conflict among major powers has dramatically receded in the post-Cold War era, states continue to compete for status and prestige. The desire for status is particularly acute for Russia, which suffered a catastrophic decline in its position in the 1990s and has viewed itself as a great power for centuries. Consistent with psychological research and theory, Russia responded emotionally to perceived humiliation.

The Russian takeover of Crimea and the 2014 Ukrainian crisis illustrate the risk that continued Russian bitterness over its loss of great power status could lead to a return of geopolitical competition. As Deng (2008, p. 292) observes in his study of Chinese status concerns, “withholding due status recognition based on zero-sum power politics logic and negative stereotype-driven categorization is a recipe for a traditional great-power struggle.”

Perceived humiliation and status dissonance better account for twists and turns in Russia's relationship with the West than more conventional power or interest-based explanations. Russia was obstructionist and vocal in opposing U.S. policies in the late nineties, when Russia's economy was on the verge of collapse. Since late 2011, Russia has been assertive and anti-Western, despite lower energy prices and lessened European dependence on Russian gas. Contrary to the idea that Russia's policy reflects cold calculation of consistent national interests, Putin's emotional rhetoric and defiant reaction to Western criticism discourages needed foreign investment in Russia's economy. Periods of U.S.–Russian cooperation have coincided with efforts by U.S. policymakers to show respect for Russia as an equal partner, as in the initial phase of the reset policy. At the same time, Russian elites are hypersensitive, and may overreact to perceived insults that were not intended as such. Domestic politics within the United States is a complicating factor, as the Obama administration was unable to prevent passage by Congress of the Magnitsky Act.

The literature on identity, status and emotions suggests that isolation and exclusion of emerging great powers will evoke anger, vengefulness, and competition to supplant the dominant powers. Continued indifference to Russia's great power aspirations, especially in the former Soviet space, will encourage Russian elites' sense of injury and humiliation, possibly leading to further conflict.

### russia defense---1ar

#### No Russia war---framing it as likely causes it.

Carpenter ’19 [Ted Galen; senior fellow for defense and foreign policy studies at the Cato Institute, received his Ph.D. in U.S. diplomatic history from the University of Texas. November 2019; “Comparing the Soviet and Russia ‘Threats’”; *NATO: A Dangerous Dinosaur*, Chapter 3] TDI

Despite the shrill warnings of some NATO members and hawkish types in the United States, the great "Russia Threat" appears to be highly exaggerated. True, Russia is still a significant regional power militarily and economically, but it is not a global power or even a credible candidate to be a regional hegemon. The Kremlin would have difficulty executing anything more than a very limited expansionist agenda, even if it has one.

Russia lacks the economic and military wherewithal for conducting a vast wave of aggression and territorial conquest. The difference in economic and demographic features between the USSR and Russia is massive. The Soviet Union was the world's number two economic power, second only to the United States. Russia has an economy roughly the size of Canada's, and it is no longer ranked even in the global top 10.2- Even taking into account purchasing power parity, Russia is still a second-tier economic player that is not in the same league as leading economic powers such as Japan, China, and Germany — much less the United States. It also has only three-quarters of the Soviet Union's territory (much of which consists of nearly empty Siberia) and barely half the population of the old USSR.

If those limitations were not enough, it has a shrinking population afflicted with an assortment of public health problems, especially rampant alcoholism.2U TCF days Russia is merely a first-tier regional power with limited extra regional interests and reach. It is not by any stretch of the imagination a superpower. All of these factors should make clear that Russia is not a credible global rival, much less an existential threat to the United States and its democratic system. Russia's power is a mere shadow of the Soviet Union's. True, Putin has sought to rebuild and modernize Russia's military, and has had some success in doing so.22 Russia's navy once again includes some modern vessels, and the air force is now flying modern, and even some cutting-edge, aircraft. Putin's regime also has focused on developing and deploying long-range, precision- guided weapons and is pursuing considerable military research and development efforts, especially with respect to hypersonic aircraft and missiles.

Even those trends must be put into perspective, however. The restoration and modernization follow a decade of military decline and decay during the 1990s under Boris Yeltsin. Moreover, Moscow's 2018 military budget was a modest $63.1 billion.22 Not only was that amount dwarfed by the gargantuan U.S. military budget of $643.3 billion, but it is also far less than China's $168.2 billion and only slightly more than India's $ 5 7.9 billion or France's $ 53.4 billion.2- Perhaps most significant, in contrast to the robust annual increases in U.S. spending levels, Russia's military spending is declining, not rising.2Z The 2017 budget was $69.2 billion, some $6.1 billion greater than the subsequent budget. That is an odd trend for a government that supposedly harbors vast offensive ambitions.

The only undiminished source of clout is Moscow's large nuclear arsenal. Of course, nuclear weapons are the ultimate deterrent. But they are not very useful for power projection or warfighting, except in the highly improbable event that a country's political leadership is eager to risk national and personal sui- cide.22 And no evidence whatsoever suggests Putin and his oligarch backers are suicidal. Quite the contrary, they seem wedded to accumulating ever greater wealth and perks.

Finally, Russia's security interests actually overlap modestly with America's — most notably the desire to combat radical Islamic terrorism. If U.S. leaders did not insist on pursuing provocative, intrusive policies such as expanding NATO to Russia's border, undermining longtime Russian clients in the Balkans (Serbia) and the Middle East (Syria), and excluding Russia from key international economic institutions (such as the former Group of 8 (G-81, now G 7), there would be relatively few occasions when important American and Russian interests collide.

A fundamental shift in U.S. policy is needed, but that requires a major change in America's national psychology. For more than four decades, Americans saw (and were told to regard) the Soviet Union as a mortal threat to the nation's security and its most cherished values of freedom and democracy. Unfortunately, a mental reset did not take place when the USSR dissolved and a quasi-democratic Russia emerged as one of the successor states. Too many Americans, including political leaders and policymakers, act as though we are still confronting the Soviet Union at the height of its power and ambitions.

That obsolete view is causing multiple problems. Writing in 2016, Dimitri K. Simes, president of the Center for the National Interest, concluded that Western actions had produced an ominous situation. "Russia today is increasingly an angry, nationalistic, elective monarchy, and while it is still open for business with America and its allies, its leaders often assume the worst about Western intentions."

As he noted, that unhappy situation was not inevitable. "Vladimir Putin's Russia is not a superpower, and its top officials are realistic about their country's military, geopolitical and economic limitations. Russia does not have a universal ideology predicated on the West as an enemy. " Richard Betts likewise cautions that the West is overreacting to an (inflated) perception of a Russian threat. "Russia's intentions constitute no more of a threat than its capabilities," he concludes. "During the twentieth century, there were intense territorial conflicts between the two sides and a titanic struggle between them over whose ideology would dominate the world."

Those considerations no longer apply, but the United States and its NATO allies act as though little or nothing has changed. It will be the ultimate tragic irony if, having avoided war with a messianic, totalitarian global adversary, we now stumble into war because of an out-of- date image of and policy toward a conventional, declining regional power. Yet unless U.S. leaders change both their mindsets and their policies toward Russia, especially their policy regarding NATO, that outcome is a very real possibility.

#### Russia’s so weak after Ukraine---troops, equipment, reputation, economics and weapons production.

Pifer ’22 [Steven; nonresident senior fellow in the Arms Control and Non-Proliferation Initiative, Strobe Talbott Center for Security, Strategy, and Technology, and the Center on the United States and Europe at the Brookings Institution, and an affiliate of the Center for International Security and Cooperation at Stanford University. December 8, 2022; “The Russia-Ukraine war and its ramifications for Russia”; *Brookings*; https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-russia-ukraine-war-and-its-ramifications-for-russia/] TDI

While a tragedy for Ukraine, Putin’s decision to go to war has also proven a disaster for Russia. The Russian military has suffered significant personnel and military losses. Economic sanctions imposed by the EU, United States, United Kingdom, and other Western countries have pushed the Russian economy into recession and threaten longer-term impacts, including on the country’s critical energy sector.

In November, Milley put the number of dead and wounded Russian soldiers at 100,000, and that could fall on the low side. A Pentagon official said in early August Russian casualties numbered 70,000-80,000. That was more than three months ago, and those months have shown no kindness to the Russian army. Reports suggest that newly-mobilized and ill-trained Russian units have been decimated in combat.

The Russian military has lost significant amounts of equipment. The Oryx website reports 8,000 pieces of equipment destroyed, damaged, abandoned, or captured, including some 1,500 tanks, 700 armored fighting vehicles, and 1,700 infantry fighting vehicles. Oryx advises that its numbers significantly understate the true nature of Russian losses, as it counts only equipment for which it has unique photo or videographic evidence of its fate. Others report much heavier losses. U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin commented that the Russian military had lost “staggering” numbers of tanks and other armored vehicles, adding that Western trade restrictions on microchips would inhibit production of replacements.

As a result of these losses, Russia has had to draw on reserves, including T-64 tanks first produced nearly 50 years ago. It reportedly has turned to tanks from Belarus to replenish its losses. To augment its own munitions, Russia has had to purchase attack drones from Iran and artillery shells from North Korea. As the Russian military has drawn down stocks of surface-to-surface and air-to-surface missiles, it has used S-300 anti-aircraft missiles against ground targets. The Russian defense budget will need years to replace what the military has lost or otherwise expended in Ukraine.

Poor leadership, poor tactics, poor logistics, and underwhelming performance against a smaller and less well-armed foe have left Russia’s military reputation in a shambles. That will have an impact. Over the past decade, Russian weapons exporters saw their share of global arms exports drop by 26%. Countries looking to buy weapons likely will begin to turn elsewhere, given that Russia’s military failed to dominate early in the war, when its largely modernized forces faced a Ukrainian military armed mainly with aging Soviet-era equipment (that began to change only in the summer, when stocks of heavy weapons began arriving from the West).

As Russia went to war, its economy was largely stagnant; while it recorded a post-COVID-19 boost in 2021, average real income fell by 10% between 2013 and 2020. It will get worse. The West has applied a host of economic sanctions on the country. While the Russian Central Bank’s actions have mitigated the worst impacts, the Russian economy nevertheless contracted by 5% year-on-year compared to September 2021. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development expects Russia’s economy to contract by 3.9% in 2022 and 5.6% in 2023, and a confidential study supposedly done for the Kremlin projected an “inertial” case in which the economy bottomed out only in 2023 at 8.3% below 2021. One economist notes that the West’s cut-off of chips and microelectronics has devastated automobile, aircraft, and weapons production, with the output of cars falling by 90% between March and September; he expects a long run of stagnation.

### status-seeking---china---1ar

#### China’s status-seeking, not revisionist.

Murray ’19 [Michelle; Associate Professor of Political Studies; Director of Global Initiatives at Bard College. PhD in International Relations at University of Chicago. 2019; “Identity, Insecurity, and China’s Place in the World”; *The Struggle for Recognition in International Relations: Status, Revisionism, and Rising Powers*; Accessed Online via University of Michigan Libraries] TDI

China’s view of, and future place in, the international order are importantly connected to its experiences during the Century of Humiliation and the dual concepts of national humiliation and national rejuvenation that constitute its self-understanding. The Century of Humiliation began with the first Opium War in 1839, when Britain forced China to open its ports to the opium trade, and did not end until the success of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in the civil war of 1949. During this time, China was the target of repeated international interventions, lost large pieces of its territory to Western powers and Japan, saw the collapse of its millennia old imperial system, and was torn apart by internal uprisings.44 According to the national humiliation narrative, the first Opium War represents a distinct turning point in Chinese history, when a powerful and successful ancient civilization was forced into a semi-colonial position at the hands of foreign interventions. National humiliation is an active part of contemporary Chinese collective identity. It serves as an important resource for those cultivating Chinese nationalism, unifying the Chinese people against foreign others who perpetrated these past humiliations and legitimating the CCP, the party seen as leading China’s reemergence as a major power.

The Century of Humiliation, however, is not just about recounting a particular interpretation of the past. Rather, it actively informs beliefs about how the world works and is used to interpret the dynamics of international relations today.45 Specifically, the national humiliation narrative constructs China’s self-understanding and its place in the international system, shaping its interests and aspirations as a rising power. First, the narrative of national humiliation represents China as a victim of Western subjugation. When articulated in the context of current international relations, this representation works to breed suspicion of outside actors, including the United States, and gives an emotional valence to seemingly inconsequential interactions. For example, in 2001 a US spy plane collided with a Chinese fighter jet over the South China Sea, sparking an international incident and inflaming tensions between China and the United States. As the incident played itself out, it became apparent that “resolving this problem did not involve military retaliation or economic reparations so much as symbolic recognition: China demanded a public apology from the United States.”46 Thus, understood through the prism of national humiliation, interactions with the West are always contextualized in a history where China suffered humiliating losses at the hands of Western expansion, and where Western power is, in and of itself, the instrument of that subjugation.

Second, the narrative of national humiliation constructs Chinese understandings of its military power and that of the United States by imposing a moral subtext to power politics. Building from its treatment during the Century of Humiliation, the international community’s actions toward China are viewed as unjust, reinforcing suspicion of foreign powers’ intentions.47 Within this frame, a self–Other dynamic is created, whereby Chinese history is reimagined as one of benevolent hegemony, when China governed and projected its influence in peaceful ways. This is positioned in contrast to the use of force and coercion common to Western hegemony. Today these self–Other representations guide Chinese understandings about the purpose and meaning of Chinese and American power. In China’s eyes, its burgeoning military power is consistent with its history and thus is not threatening. These representations are at work in Chinese rhetoric that characterizes its growing power as its “peaceful rise.” As Zheng Bijan argued, China’s rise will be different than that of previous major powers, as “China will transcend ideological differences to strive for peace, development, and cooperation with all countries of the world.”48 At the same time, US foreign policy is contextualized within this narrative by reference to Western aggression during the Century of Humiliation. Since the end of the Cold War, the United States has more forcefully criticized China’s human rights record, undermined its bid to host the 2000 Olympics, increased arms sales to Taiwan, and strengthened its presence in the region.49 While US foreign policy has been couched in the language of engagement, many in China view this as a simple euphemism for containment.50 This is especially the case with the Obama administration’s recent “strategic rebalancing,” known popularly as the “pivot to Asia.” As a consequence, any attempt by the United States to contain or limit Chinese power is seen as an act of misrecognition and an unjust and aggressive attempt to subjugate China once again.

Finally, the narrative of national humiliation highlights China’s “historical experience with territorial loss and intrusion,” thus placing the maintenance of sovereignty at the center of China’s national identity.51 The Century of Humiliation is understood to be representative of a loss of sovereignty, where outside forces were able to expose the state’s weakness and delegitimize its institutions. Therefore, any perceived infringement of China’s sovereignty is read through the lens of national humiliation and understood to be an existential threat to China’s security. Importantly, these threats are not material in nature, for China’s physical security is not in doubt. Rather, they represent a symbolic threat, suggesting that China continues to be vulnerable to outside influence. Moreover, sovereignty is the cornerstone of the current international order. Thus any perceived violation of sovereignty is understood to be another subjugation of China, refusing it the rights and privileges that other states in the system enjoy.

This narrative of national humiliation operates alongside the goal of national rejuvenation, which provides the motivation for China’s contemporary foreign policy interests. If national humiliation recounts the losses China suffered at the hands of the West and Japan, national rejuvenation promises to restore for China the status it lost during the Century of Humiliation. In articulating China’s self-understanding in these terms, China’s major power status is understood as a right: respect that China should regain by virtue of its former status as a great nation.52 Thus, China’s rise to major power status is not about obtaining something new or a gaining an advantage over others, but rather as a “restoration of fairness.”53 These discourses of humiliation and rejuvenation infuse Chinese foreign policy, shaping a range of behaviors from its voting record in the United Nations Security Council to its regional relationships to its burgeoning leadership role in the global economy.

Constructing China’s (Un)Peaceful Rise

China’s rise, guided by the twin narratives of national humiliation and rejuvenation, is likely inevitable. What this means for the international order will be a function of China’s interactions with the United States and the representations that animate that relationship. US foreign policy toward a rising China is often cast as a choice between engagement and containment. So-called “optimists” call for increased engagement by integrating China deeply into the global economy and institutional architecture of the international order, whereas “pessimists” see future security competition as an inevitable outgrowth of Chinese power and advocate a policy of containment.54 Both containment and engagement strategies, however, are built off of assumptions about China’s material needs and do not pay sufficient attention to China’s distinct identity needs. Thus, both approaches risk exacerbating China’s dilemma of social insecurity, and constructing China’s unpeaceful rise.

Proponents of containment do not have a sanguine view of China’s rise and argue that as China grows more powerful it is likely to lead to an intense security competition with the United States.55 Containment is a straightforward application of realist understandings of international politics, and presumes that under all conditions China will seek to overturn the international order and thus its power must be preemptively checked. China is motivated, as are all emerging major powers, by security and the related desire for power. In this view, the anarchic structure of international system forces states seeking only security to behave aggressively toward one another in an attempt to gain more power and alter the international status quo. Rising powers are revisionist powers.56 China’s economic power and influence will be the springboard for military dominance in the region because economic power is the basis of military power. China is building a blue-water navy that will allow it to project naval power well beyond the Chinese coast “from the oil ports of the Middle East to the shipping lanes of the Pacific, where the United States Navy has long reigned as the dominant force.”57 Moreover, China’s integration in regional politics is indicative of its growing influence. As it becomes less susceptible to American economic pressure, China will have increasing leverage over weaker Asian countries and the United States.58 In short, while China is not in a position to militarily challenge the United States at the present, a much more powerful China should be expected to take increasing steps to push the United States out of the Asia–Pacific region and challenge the terms of the US-led international order.59 Therefore, US foreign policy must be reoriented to contain the impending threat that China poses to the United States’ security and economic interests.

Containment, however, is based on the faulty assumption that China harbors revisionist intentions. It is not an impartial assessment of actual Chinese objectives and therefore runs a real risk of producing a self-fulfilling prophecy.60 The more militarily aggressively the United States behaves, the more threatened China will feel and thus the more likely it will be to respond aggressively to the United States. A potentially severe security dilemma is almost certain to emerge and intensify through a containment strategy, therefore reproducing international relations’ fraught history with power transitions. Moreover, containment is a deterrent strategy, designed to raise the costs of Chinese expansionism and in doing so to limit Chinese power. Deterrent strategies assume that revisionist intentions emerge within states — not from their interactions with other states, and thus ignore China’s recognition-needs. But, as the struggle for recognition highlights, treating a socially insecure state as if it were greedy will only exacerbate its insecurity, fuel its interest in revisionism, and construct China’s unpeaceful rise.

### status-seeking---iran---1ar

#### Iran’s not revisionist.

Nham ’15[Winnie; Research Manager, Rising Powers Initiative for the Sigur Center for Asian Studies at George Washington University. February 2015; “Return of Defensive Realists in Tehran”; *Rising Powers Initiative*; http://www.risingpowersinitiative.org/wp-content/uploads/PolicyBrief\_Feb2015\_Iran.pdf] TDI

2013 Elections: Return of the Defensive Realists

With regard to Iran’s current foreign policy debates, the 2013 elections served as a pivotal moment; it marked the comeback of the defensive realist camp, that had been at the helm of Iran’s foreign policy and security prior to Ahmadinejad’s 2009 election. While President Rouhani ultimately was seen as a candidate of moderation and reform, almost all of the presidential candidates would have brought Iran toward the center, a sign that people were ready to move on from the polarizing politics that occurred after the 2009 elections and harsh crackdown that followed. Rouhani promised pushbacks against a securitized environment and economic improvements. He also explicitly linked Iran’s economic issues with its foreign policy, discussing Iran’s nuclear centrifuges as both an economic and foreign policy issue in an unprecedentedly frank manner.

How has Rouhani fared since the elections? In practice, the Rouhani team differs little from the Ahmadenijad administration in terms of their emphasis on nationalism, because in a sense, every post-revolution group in Iran is nationalist. The regime draws strength from a strong post-revolutionary insistence on sovereignty, “national honor,” and a refusal to acquiesce to the demands of “arrogant and meddling powers,” as referred to in Iranian discourse. Rather, the difference in the new administration is mostly tactical – instead of talking about foreign enemies, the new team talks about domestic reconciliation and support as the main source of strength in Iran’s foreign and security policy. This in turn has affected Iran’s views and posture on important issues concerning its regional role and relations with the United States.

Regional Ambitions

In terms of regional ambitions, the Rouhani team – which Farhi terms as defensive realists – differs from the Ahmadenijad team – or offensive realists – in that they do not view the entire Middle East region as an important playground. Rather, the focus is more on what could be considered Iran’s civilizational sphere of influence- the Persian Gulf, South Asia, and Southwest Asia. The rise of ISIS in the past year has led Iran to feel vindicated in terms of the key role it can play in bringing about security, while also forcing outside players that have been engaged in the containment of Iran to understand the important role Iran can play. Nonetheless, neighboring states have observed Iran warily, fearing that Tehran’s hegemonic aspirations would be unleashed if the U.S. abandons its containment policy in the region.

U.S.-Iran Relations

In dealing with the United States, the Rouhani administration has gone aggressively after a nuclear deal, based on the argument that Iran’s regional ambitions cannot be fulfilled without resolving its thorny relationship with Washington. Offensive realists and many other hardliners in Iran have long argued that the United States will never come to terms with the Islamic republic, and therefore, Iran’s prominence in the region has to come through resistance and the establishment of policies that would show America’s weakness in the region. Both offensive and defensive realists agree that the United States is in decline in the Middle East; however, defensive realists argue that despite its relative decline, Washington still has enough power to sanction Iran to the extent that it already has. Thus, defensive realists accept the fact that American influence in the region remains strong and will continue for some time, and argue for “dealing” with the United States in a non-confrontational manner.

### iran defense---1ar

#### No Iran war.

Jenkins ’20 [Brian Michael; senior adviser to the president of the RAND Corporation. Author of numerous books, reports, and articles. Former chair of the Political Science Department at RAND. January 6, 2020; “All-Out U.S.-Iran War Is Unlikely. But Low-Level War Expected to Continue”; *RAND*; https://www.rand.org/blog/2020/01/all-out-us-iran-war-is-unlikely-but-low-level-war-expected.html] TDI

The American drone attack that killed Iranian Gen. Qassem Soleimani last week is the latest move in a low-level war between Iran and the United States that has been waged with varying degrees of intensity for over 40 years — and is likely to continue long into the future. Some people fear that recent events will escalate the long conflict into a costly all-out war between the two countries. Others may welcome what they see as the necessary and inevitable showdown leading ultimately to regime change in Tehran.

The killing of Soleimani — the most prominent military figure in Iran and close to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei — can be seen as an escalation and will almost certainly provoke Iranian retaliation. President Trump's boast of ordering the killing of Soleimani may further increase pressure on Iran to respond. But although Iranian retaliation for Soleimani's killing and counter-retaliation by the United States seem likely — and politically advantageous to both governments — Tehran and Washington have good reasons to inflict limited pain without engaging in a full-scale war.

Iran has little interest in beginning an all-out war in which Iran itself would suffer major damage. While Iran's leaders describe Soleimani as a martyr, the regime does not seek martyrdom. The United States must expect some immediate spontaneous terrorist attacks, but Iran's leadership takes a longer view. Its paramount objective is survival. And while the Trump administration may want to deter the Iranians from creating politically dangerous situations for the U.S. government and distract attention from the president's own domestic political problems, Trump has made clear his opposition to becoming involved in another costly Middle East war. Indeed, he claims that killing Soleimani was necessary to prevent a war.

The past may be prologue to the future. Iran is a master of hybrid warfare. It has used proxies and its own covert operatives to carry out kidnappings and terrorist bombings, sabotage ships at sea and oil facilities on land, blow up embassies, and assassinate government officials. Its reach is global. Iran can operate on the cyber battlefield as well to torment the United States without offering a clear-cut justification for war. And Iran is well aware of President Trump's domestic political problems and America's election cycle. Iran has already forced the United States to evacuate diplomats from Iraq, warn U.S. citizens to get out of Iraq, and deploy thousands of additional troops to the Middle East. It can try to create additional crises that draw the United States into further military commitments.

The Iranian regime can also create problems for America's few remaining allies in the region—Israel, Saudi Arabia, and other Gulf monarchies. It can persuade America's increasingly worried allies elsewhere to distance themselves from Washington. America's adversaries will benefit. At the other end of the spectrum, Iran may further accelerate its nuclear weapons program. And if it has not already done so, American military threats could persuade Iran to initiate a parallel clandestine effort to quickly fabricate and secretly deploy a crude nuclear device as a deterrent or instrument of revenge if the regime is overthrown.

Without risking an all-out war, Iran's leadership can distract attention from its own domestic problems, provoke widespread fear and alarm among Americans as well as U.S. allies, and weaken the United States. One can understand the apprehension in Washington when Iraqi militias and mobs under Iranian control stormed the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad last Tuesday. Any assault on a U.S. diplomatic facility can turn into another Benghazi, where in 2012 Libyan terrorists murdered the ambassador and three other Americans. From a domestic political perspective, the worst thing to happen would be the takeover of an American embassy in Baghdad or elsewhere that resulted in a protracted hostage crisis—a repeat of the 1979 takeover of the U.S. Embassy in the Iranian capital of Tehran.

Many blame President Carter's landslide defeat in the 1980 presidential election on his administration's inability to rescue or negotiate the release of the 52 American hostages held by Iranians for 444 days. The episode taught American presidents that extended hostage situations are politically dangerous. We do not know what Gen. Soleimani was planning when he was killed while meeting with the head of the militia forces behind the assault on the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad. The militia leader was also killed by the American drone. But everyone in government knows the history. Taking over embassies crosses a red line for any administration.

Iran has a long history of low-level war with the United States, going back to the creation of the Islamic Republic in the 1979 revolution that replaced the government of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, who had maintained good relations with the United States. The hostage crisis in Tehran was just the first of many anti-American actions by the revolutionary government. Over 30 years ago, Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps exploited discontent among Lebanon's Shiites to field proxies who were responsible for the 1983 bombing of the Marine Barracks in Lebanon, in which 241 U.S. service members died.

Iranian-supported Shiite militants also carried out a series of assassinations and kidnappings of Americans and others in Lebanon, creating political crises in Western capitals throughout the 1980s. President Ronald Reagan's administration was politically wounded by the scandal that resulted from the revelation that it had secretly sold arms to Iran in exchange for Iran's assistance in bringing about the release of American hostages. But as some American hostages were released, more Americans were kidnapped.

Iran continues to engage in “detainee diplomacy”—holding American citizens and dual nationals as currency for future negotiations. The regime might step up its kidnappings in the wake of the killing of Soleimani. From Tehran's perspective, its actions against Washington were in response to continued American hostility, as well the continued U.S. presence in the Middle East. Decades ago Iran's leadership saw its arch foe Iraq as an American puppet and believed that the United States encouraged Iraqi President Saddam Hussein to invade Iran in 1980. Initially neutral in the contest, the United States later tilted toward Iraq, removing it from its list of state sponsors of terrorism and thereby facilitating the shipment of arms and other forms of assistance to Baghdad.

When Iraqi aircraft attacked Iranian oil facilities, Iran retaliated by attacking Kuwaiti ships carrying Iraqi oil. Kuwait appealed to the United States for assistance. Kuwaiti tankers were reflagged as U.S. vessels and were escorted in the Persian Gulf by U.S. warships. Iran responded to this by secretly mining the gulf, and some of the reflagged vessels were damaged. The United States retaliated by attacking Iranian vessels and oil platforms that were being used by Iran's Revolutionary Guards to coordinate the Iranian campaign. The secret war continued into the 1990s. FBI investigators concluded that Iran had instigated the bombing of Khobar Barracks in Saudi Arabia in which 19 American airmen were killed; nearly 500 others in the Air Force were injured by a gigantic truck bomb.

Iran also supported anti-American Shiite militias during the U.S. occupation of Iraq, which were responsible for more than 600 American deaths. Hezbollah had Iranian support when it launched a new wave of terrorist attacks on Israeli and Jewish targets worldwide. The attacks began after Imad Mugniyah—a senior Hezbollah operative called a legend by Soleimani and the man responsible for the kidnappings of westerners in Lebanon and terrorist attacks on American and Israeli targets—was killed by a bomb. The Hezbollah campaign included bombings and assassinations. In 2011, Iranian operatives were also reportedly involved in a plot to assassinate the Saudi Arabian ambassador to Washington with a bomb that would certainly have also killed Americans.

That's a long list of Iranian actions in its low-level war with the United States, and unfortunately, the list is likely to get longer.

But it would be surprising if Iranian leaders—despite all their threats following the killing of Soleimani—decided to go further and risk a full-fledged war with the United States that would devastate their country and might end with the overthrow of their regime. The danger comes more from miscalculation than madness.

### terror defense---1ar

#### No nuke terror.

Fettweis ’19 [Christopher; associate professor of political science at Tulane University in New Orleans. He holds a doctorate degree from the University of Maryland–College Park specializing in political psychology and US foreign policy. Spring 2019; “Pessimism and Nostalgia in the Second Nuclear Age”; *Strategic Studies* *Quarterly*, Volume 13, Issue 1; https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/Portals/10/SSQ/documents/Volume-13\_Issue-1/Fettweis.pdf] TDI

Finally, despite the string of bleak and terrifying projections from a variety of experts, nuclear weapons have remained well beyond the capabilities of the modern apocalyptic terrorist. The great fear of the SNA literature, that scientific knowledge and technology would gradually become more accessible to nonstate actors, has remained only a dream. Nor does there appear to be a great reservoir of fissile material in the world’s various black markets waiting to be weaponized.58

Just because something has not yet occurred does not mean that it cannot or will not occur eventually. However, it is worth noting that the world has not experienced any close calls regarding nuclear terrorism. Forecasting future unique events is a necessarily dicey enterprise, but one way to improve accuracy is to examine events that have already or almost happened. Given the many complexities involved with nuclear weapons, especially for amateurs as any terrorists would almost certainly be, it is not unreasonable to expect a few failures, or near misses, to precede success. While it is possible that we might not know about all the plots disrupted by international law enforcement, keeping the lid on nuclear near misses would presumably be no small task. As of this writing, the public is aware of no serious attempts to construct, steal, or purchase nuclear weapons, much less smuggle and detonate one. “Leakage” does not seem to be a problem, yet.59

The uniformly pessimistic projections about the second nuclear era have not, at least thus far, been borne out by events. Post–Cold War trends have instead been generally moving in directions opposite to these expectations, with fewer nuclear weapons in the hands of the same number of countries and none pursuing more. Why, then, does nuclear pessimism persist? What are the roots of the current fashionable unwillingness—or even inability—to detect positive patterns in nuclear security?