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TOOLS OF RUSSIAN INFLUENCE: HOW PUTIN USES MILITARY-TECHNICAL COOPERATION, PROXIES, AND PEACEKEEPERS TO ACHIEVE HIS OBJECTIVES

by

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Under the leadership of Vladimir Putin, Russia has embarked on a massive military modernization program that it hopes will enable it to again compete with the United States as a global power. In particular, Moscow is using three rapidly deployable, low-cost military tools—military-technical cooperation, private military and security companies as proxy forces, and peacekeeping forces—to seize opportunities created by the changing geopolitical environment in order to expand Russia's reach and influence. This thesis examines these tools across a number of cases in order to answer the following questions: How is Russia using these military tools to achieve its objectives? What trends can be identified across regions? What are the implications for U.S. foreign and security policies? This thesis finds that, on the whole, Moscow is using these tools with the primary tactical goal of projecting power and rapidly exploiting opportunities to influence the outcome of events on the ground in hopes of achieving strategic success for Russia. These three tools help Moscow project power and allow Russia to gain influence while preventing escalation into open confrontation with the United States or other military powers. In response, the United States and its partners should seek to expose these activities and engage with each other on areas of mutual interest to weaken the effects of these tools.

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ABSTRACT

Under the leadership of Vladimir Putin, Russia has embarked on a massive military modernization program that it hopes will enable it to again compete with the United States as a global power. In particular, Moscow is using three rapidly deployable, low-cost military tools—military-technical cooperation, private military and security companies as proxy forces, and peacekeeping forces—to seize opportunities created by the changing geopolitical environment in order to expand Russia's reach and influence. This thesis examines these tools across a number of cases in order to answer the following questions: How is Russia using these military tools to achieve its objectives? What trends can be identified across regions? What are the implications for U.S. foreign and security policies? This thesis finds that, on the whole, Moscow is using these tools with the primary tactical goal of projecting power and rapidly exploiting opportunities to influence the outcome of events on the ground in hopes of achieving strategic success for Russia. These three tools help Moscow project power and allow Russia to gain influence while preventing escalation into open confrontation with the United States or other military powers. In response, the United States and its partners should seek to expose these activities and engage with each other on areas of mutual interest to weaken the effects of these tools.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

CAR	Central African Republic
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CSTO	Collective Security Treaty Organization
DIA	Defense Intelligence Agency
DOD	Department of Defense
EUTM-RCA	European Union Training Mission-Republic Central Africa
FACA	Armed Forces of Central Africa
FSMTC	Federal Service for Military Technical Cooperation
FSU	former Soviet Union
GNA	Government of National Accord
LNA	Libyan National Army
MINUSCA	United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic
MOD	Ministry of Defense
MP	military police
MRO	maintenance, repair, and overhaul
MTC	Military-Technical Cooperation
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
OSCE	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
PMC	private military company
PMSC	private military and security company
PSC	private security company
RFNSS	Russian Federation National Security Strategy
SAA	Syrian Arab Army
SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organization
SIPRI	Stockholm International Peace Research Institute
SMA	Strategic Multi-layer Assessment
SMRB	Separate Motorized Rifle Brigade
TRADOC	Training and Doctrine Command
UN	United Nations

UNSC	United Nations Security Council
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
YPG	Kurdish People's Protection Unit

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I. MAJOR RESEARCH QUESTION

During the Cold War, the Soviet Union placed particular emphasis on using its military capabilities to achieve its foreign policy objectives, while remaining below the threshold of armed conflict and avoiding escalation into nuclear war with the United States.[1] Indeed, use of these military capabilities was a cornerstone of the non-nuclear competition between the Soviets and the United States.[2] As William H. Mott explains in his book *Soviet Military Assistance: An Empirical Perspective*, "Military assistance, like mutual deterrence, was a permanent, prominent feature of Cold-War global competition. Washington and Moscow both sought political influence, economic benefits, and strategic advantage through military assistance."[3] To this end, the Kremlin used a variety of military means—military advisors, proxy forces, military exchange programs, arms sales and assistance, training exercises, basing agreements, and a host of other activities—as diplomatic tools of Soviet power to strengthen the Kremlin's political, economic, and military influence globally.[4]

Later, in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union, the newly established Russian Federation was left greatly weakened and in a state of economic and geopolitical turmoil. As a consequence of its weakened state, Russia disengaged from many countries with which it had had long-established military and diplomatic relations. More recently, under the leadership of Vladimir Putin, Russia has embarked on a massive military modernization program that it hopes will enable it to again compete with the United States as a global power. Now, using a variety of military tools, a resurgent Russia is seeking to take advantage of waning U.S. influence in regions across the globe—becoming

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[1] Defense Intelligence Agency, "Soviet Military Power," Soviet Military Power (Washington, D.C.: Department of Defense, 1983), 83.

[2] "Study Says Moscow Uses More Military Diplomacy: Exploit Military Growth Warn of Use of American Force," *New York Times*, September 3, 1979, https://search.proquest.com/docview/120749717/abstract/34878B42375B43C7PQ/96.

[3] William H. Mott, *Soviet Military Assistance: An Empirical Perspective* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2001), 2.

[4] Defense Intelligence Agency, "Soviet Military Power," 82–93.

increasingly involved in the Middle East, Africa, South Asia, and Latin America—to achieve its geopolitical, geostrategic, and economic objectives, all while remaining below the threshold of armed conflict. In particular, Moscow is using three military tools—military-technical cooperation (MTC), private military and security companies (PMSC) as proxy forces, and peacekeeping forces—to seize opportunities created by the changing geopolitical environment in order to expand Russia's reach and influence.

While it is clear that Russia is using these tools with some success, further research is needed to understand their scope and impact on Russia's pursuit of global influence and recognition as a great power. This thesis examines Russian activities related to the use of these tools in order to answer the following questions:

- How is Russia using these military tools to achieve its objectives?
- What trends can be identified across regions?
- What are the implications for U.S. foreign and security policies?

This in-depth analysis of Russia's use of these military tools aims to identify the intent behind Moscow's increased use of these tools and determine whether or not that use constitutes a coherent Russian strategy.

A. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH QUESTION

Russia's activities have signaled its desire to build bases of influence globally, from which it can expand its presence and enhance its image as a powerful pole in a new multipolar world order.[5] Russia's use of the aforementioned military tools is a means to achieve recognition as a great power, degrade the economic and security structures created by the West, and assert its foreign policy without constraints. After nearly three decades as the singular superpower, the United States no longer finds itself the preferred partner in a world order it was largely responsible for creating. The enterprising nature of Russian

[5] Stephen Blank, "Russia's Military Diplomacy in Africa: What Does It Mean?," Eurasia Daily Monitor, June 4, 2019, https://jamestown.org/program/russias-military-diplomacy-in-africa-what-does-it-mean/.

military-diplomatic activities reflects this shift in global power dynamics, as Russia becomes more emboldened in its engagements. Recent research conducted by the Institute for the Study of War finds that Moscow's recent increase in military-diplomatic activity has yielded over 90 military cooperation agreements signed with 73 different countries since 2014.[6] Figure 1 illustrates the extent of the geographic penetration of Russia's efforts to expand its influence in the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and Latin America. The darker shades of blue indicate agreements signed more recently. In Africa alone, the Kremlin has signed as many as twenty-eight bilateral military cooperation agreements.[7]

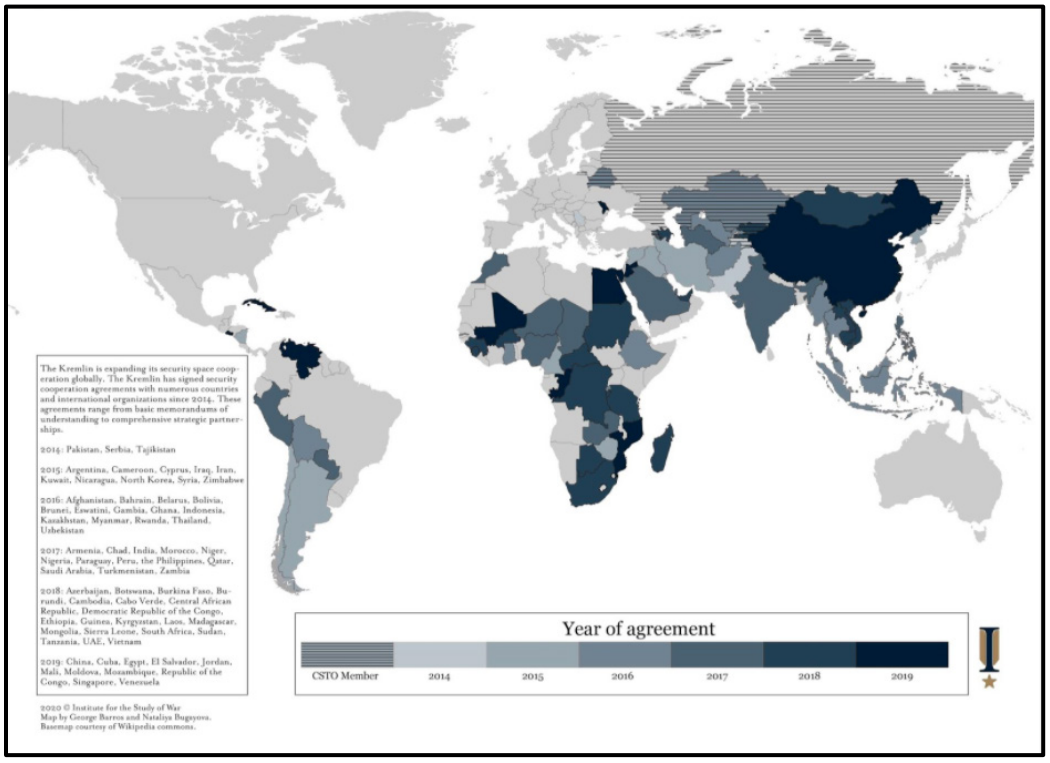

Figure 1. Russian Military Cooperation Agreements Signed Since 2014.[8]

[6] Nataliya Bugayova et al., "Russian Security Cooperation Agreements Post-2014," *Russia in Review* (blog), May 15, 2020, http://www.iswresearch.org/2020/05/russia-in-review-russian-security.html.

[7] Nataliya Bugayova and Darina Regio, "The Kremlin's Campaign in Africa" (Washington, D.C.: Institute for the Study of War, August 23, 2019), 6, http://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/kremlins-campaign-africa.

[8] Source: Bugayova et al., "Russia in Review."

Given this trajectory in Africa and other regions, there is an increasing need to understand how and why Russia integrates MTC, PMSCs, and peacekeepers into its influence-building strategy. As scholar of Soviet and Russian affairs Stephen Blank warns, "Russian deals and their consequences represent a part of Moscow's overall global and national security strategy. The sooner observers recognize this reality, the more able they will be to understand and counter these Russian probes."[9] U.S. foreign and domestic security policy must be informed by a complete picture of Russia's use of these military tools in order to accept, counter, contain, or balance Moscow's influence in those regions where it operates these military capabilities.

B. HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF MTC, PROXY FORCES, AND PEACEKEEPERS

1. Soviet Period

The first step to understanding how the Kremlin is using MTC, PMSCs, and peacekeepers across various regions to achieve its objectives is to put these tools in historical context to understand why it used them in the past. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels wrote in *The Communist Manifesto* that "Communists everywhere support every revolutionary movement against the existing social and political order of things."[10] The death of Joseph Stalin in 1953 marked a turning point in Soviet foreign policy, from calculated and pragmatic military-diplomatic assistance provided only to clients contiguous to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) to more robust and frequent assistance offered in support of national-liberation movements across the globe.[11]

Ideology may have provided the moral justification for military-diplomatic support to national-liberation movements, but it was the growth of the Soviets' military power that gave them the means to achieve their expansive vision of universal communism. This increase in military power solidified the military's role as an important instrument in the

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[9] Blank, "Russia's Military Diplomacy in Africa: What Does It Mean?," paragraph 8.

[10] Friedrich Engels and Karl Marx, *The Communist Manifesto*, 2005, chap. 4, http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/61.

[11] Bruce D. Porter, *The USSR in Third World Conflicts: Soviet Arms and Diplomacy in Local Wars, 1945–1980* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 14–26.

Kremlin's foreign policy. In a comprehensive study of the Soviet Union's use of its armed forces as a political instrument, noted Brookings Institute scholar Stephen S. Kaplan asserted that the Kremlin's extensive and confident use of conventional armed forces as a foreign policy tool was a result of Moscow's diminished insecurity about its military capabilities as a result of its increased strategic nuclear and conventional forces.[12] As a result, its military became an increasingly exportable commodity that increased Moscow's influence in areas it had never been able to penetrate before. Military theorist and political scientist Edward Luttwak posited in his book *The Grand Strategy of the Soviet Union* that, as the perception of a state's power increases in the minds of the world's political leaders, their perception of the state's proper and legitimate sphere of influence also increases.[13] Thus, once the Soviet Union achieved a great increase in military power, its actual "sphere of action also widened and many were the voices that eagerly offered justifications for its expansive conduct."[14]

Bolstered confidence and opportunism thus played a critical role in the Soviet Union's desire to project power in areas outside of its immediate sphere of influence in the USSR.[15] In *The USSR in Third World Conflicts: Soviet Arms and Diplomacy in Local Wars 1945–1980,* Bruce Porter identified three drivers behind the Kremlin's increased diplomatic and military involvement in the Third World. First was the expansion of the Soviet military industrial base after WWII. Second, the rapid decolonization of countries in the Middle East, Latin America, and Africa, regions once outside of Moscow's reach, left a power vacuum that the Soviet Union could exploit. Third, the Third World presented the Kremlin, backed by its nuclear arsenal, with an appealing opportunity to focus its growing ideological ambitions.[16]

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[12] Stephen S. Kaplan, *Diplomacy of Power: Soviet Armed Forces as a Political Instrument* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1981), 1.

[13] Edward Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Soviet Union* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983), 53.

[14] Luttwak, 54.

[15] Defense Intelligence Agency, "Soviet Military Power," 1981, 83.

[16] Porter, *The USSR in Third World Conflicts*, 5–7.

With the emergence of the Soviet Union as a superpower, the Soviets adopted a more expansive definition of power projection.[17] For the Soviets, power projection meant the continuous application of military and non-military means to foreign policy activities.[18] The Department of Defense's 1981 report titled *Soviet Military Power* described this expansive approach:

> The Soviets project power and influence through the employment of a mixture of less visible, integrated elements including the KGB, diplomats and traditional state-to-state activities, military advisers and aid, treaties and legal ties, support for terrorists and pro-Soviet guerrilla groups, economic aid, cultural, media, and educational diplomacy.[19]

Thus, Moscow's ability to project power arose from a diverse set of military tools that countered Western conceptions of power projection and challenged the West's ability to counter Moscow's influence. Noting the Soviets' expansive conception of power projection, Porter's analysis of Soviet involvement in Third World conflicts agrees with the DOD report: in addition to several hard-power capabilities like the development of a blue-water navy and the establishment of bases of support for its military activities abroad, Porter listed Soviet advisers, arms sales, and military assistance as elements of Soviet power projection.[20] The Soviets' expansive conception of power projection serves as an important precedent to understanding Russia's conception of power projection today.

2. Contemporary Russian Policy

Today, Russia is still employing military-diplomatic tools similar to those used by the Soviets, but the question remains of whether it is using them in similar ways to achieve similar objectives. Published in 2015, the *Russian Federation National Security Strategy* (RFNSS), Russia's national-level policy document, articulates its national interests and national strategic security and foreign policy priorities. In particular, the RFNSS expresses

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[17] Defense Intelligence Agency, "Soviet Military Power," 1981, 83.

[18] Defense Intelligence Agency, 86.

[19] Defense Intelligence Agency, 86.

[20] Porter, *The USSR in Third World Conflicts: Soviet Arms and Diplomacy in Local Wars, 1945–1980*, 26–65.

the Russian president's belief that global influence and strategic partnerships are an important part of, even fundamental to, the "process of consolidating the Russian Federation's status as a leading power."[21] Furthermore, a study commissioned by the U.S. Army's Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) titled "Russian Strategic Intentions: A Strategic Multilayer Assessment (SMA) White Paper" concludes that Vladimir Putin seeks, as part of a "global grand strategy," to achieve three objectives:

- Reclaim and secure Russia's influence over former Soviet nations
- Regain worldwide recognition as a "great power"
- Portray itself as a reliable actor, a key regional powerbroker, and a successful mediator . . . in order to gain economic, military, and political influence over nations worldwide and to refine the liberalist rules and norms that currently govern the world order[22]

Bettina Renz, scholar of Russian military force structures and author of the book *Russia's Military Revival*, confirms these aspirations, explaining that "Having great power status for Russia denotes international acknowledgement of its position as an important pole in the international system which, on a par with other great powers, has an equal say in important global decisions of the day. This cannot be achieved in isolation, but only in cooperation with other powerful actors."[23] Putin further articulated his position on influence by stating in the RFNSS that "The Russian Federation's objective is to acquire as many equal partners as possible in various parts of the world."[24] He further added: "In the sphere of international security Russia remains committed to the utilization of primarily political and legal instruments and diplomatic and peacekeeping mechanisms. The utilization of military force to protect national interests is possible only if all adopted measures of a nonviolent nature have proved ineffective."[25] Michael Kofman, senior

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[21] Vladimir Putin, *The Russian Federation's National Security Strategy* (Moscow, Russian Federation, Moscow, 2015), http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/OtrasPublicaciones/Internacional/2016/Russian-National-Security-Strategy-31Dec2015.pdf.

[22] Nicole Peterson, "Executive Summary," in *Russian Strategic Intentions: A Strategic Multilayer Assessment White Paper* (U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, 2019), vii–xiii.

[23] Bettina Renz, *Russia's Military Revival* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2018), 200.

[24] Putin, *The Russian Federation's National Security Strategy*, 6.

[25] Putin, 6.

research scientist and expert on Russia for the Center for Naval Analyses, asserts that Russia believes its role and status in international affairs is relative to the United States' role and status and that this is why Moscow "is on a perpetual quest for recognition."[26]

Russia's foreign policy objectives express the same priorities as its national security objectives. In 2016, Vladimir Putin approved the *Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation*, which articulates an assertive foreign policy that Putin believes is necessary to achieve Russia's objectives to "ensure national security, sovereignty and territorial integrity, and strengthen the rule of law and democratic institutions; to create a favorable external environment that would allow Russia's economy to grow steadily and become more competitive and would promote technological modernization as well as higher standards of living and quality of life for its population."[27] These foreign policy objectives are driven by Moscow's perception that there is an inextricable link between its being recognized as a great power and its sovereignty. In a book chapter entitled "Russia's Pursuit for Great Power Status and Sovereignty," Russian foreign policy expert Anne Clunan makes the case that understanding Russia's perception of this connection between its status as a great power and its sovereignty "is, therefore, critical to explaining Russian security conceptions and behaviour."[28] Likewise, Dmitri Trenin, Director of the Carnegie Moscow Center, summarizes the challenges that Russia faces as a country by pointing to its innate and deep-rooted need to be recognized as a great power as a pre-condition for its sovereignty and security:

> Also, in qualitative terms, Russia's twenty-first century role in international affairs is a shadow of its twentieth- or even nineteenth-century self…Great-power status is less the whim of Russian rulers and more a necessity for a traditionally lonely country and a critical condition for its survival. Today, Russia can still claim the status of a great power, but in a different sense

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[26] Michael Kofman, "Drivers of Russian Grand Strategy" (Stockhom: Stockholm Free World Forum, April 23, 2019), 3, https://frivarld.se/nyheter/ny-briefing-drivers-of-russian-grand-strategy/.

[27] Vladimir Putin, *Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation* (Moscow, Russian Federation, Moscow, 2016), 2, www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/official_documents/-/asset_publisher/CptICkB6BZ29/content/id/2542248.

[28] Anne L. Clunan, "Russia's Pursuit of Great-Power Status and Security," in *Routledge Handbook of Russian Security*, ed. Roger E. Kanet, 1st ed. (Routledge: Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge, 2019), 5.

> than before, with Russia no longer a hegemon or a world leader. Nevertheless, Russia is one of the few countries in the world that instinctively refuses to submit to others' hegemony, dominance, or leadership. Both Russian political elites and Russian society as a whole value Russia's sovereignty above the benefits, economic and otherwise, of ceding sovereignty and are able to defend Russia's sovereignty by political and military means—a rare thing in international affairs. Indeed, few other states are prepared to stake out such a position to preserve their freedom of action.[29]

Thus, though geopolitical and geostrategic conditions have changed, Russia again seeks to achieve objectives similar to those it pursued during the Cold War. As a great power, the Soviet Union had a large repertoire of military tools to employ as part of a coherent military diplomacy strategy to compete with the United States and achieve its objective of great power status. However, today, Russia has a much more limited set of tools at its disposal. The extent to which Russia is continuing to use similar tools—in particular MTC, PMSCs, and peacekeepers—in similar ways to achieve its objectives remains a subject of debate among scholars.

C. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Military-Technical Cooperation (MTC)

As it did during the Cold War, Moscow again has been institutionalizing military-technical cooperation as a critical tool in its military-diplomatic strategy. Indeed, the corporate strategy of Rosoboronexport—Russia's state-owned arms export agency—bluntly asserts that its primary objective is the "consolidation of Russia's military and political foothold in various regions across the globe."[30]

Russia uses the term military-technical cooperation to describe the military-diplomatic interaction between the Russian Federation and foreign governments relating to the sale and transfer of Russian weapons, military equipment, and associated

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[29] Dmitri Trenin, "It's Time to Rethink Russia's Foreign Policy Strategy," Carnegie Moscow Center, accessed April 29, 2019, https://carnegie.ru/commentary/78990.

[30] Rosoboronexport, "Corporate Strategy," Official Site, accessed September 1, 2019, http://roe.ru/eng/.

technology.[31] Activities associated with MTC include the bilateral or multilateral military cooperation agreements that underpin the sale and transfer of Russian arms and technology and set the terms—both economic and security-related—of the relationship between Russia and the recipient state; the civilian and/or military trainers necessary to accompany the equipment transfers; the advisers who are necessary to translate technical capability into operational effectiveness; bi-lateral training exercises that serve to enhance interoperability with recipient countries; and joint arms and technology expositions that serve to demonstrate the latest Russian arms and technology available for sale.

There is broad scholarly consensus that arms sales as a major component of MTC are a powerful influence-building tool at the Kremlin's disposal. The literature on the Kremlin's use of arms sales is centered on its utility as a political or economic instrument; however, few scholars have addressed the complex logistics of executing MTC agreements, including the deployment of trainers and advisers that translates MTC into geopolitical or geostrategic success or failure. In a Naval Postgraduate School thesis titled "Arms Sales in the Age of Putin: For Politics or Profit," Major (USMC) Andrew Reaves makes a case that arms sales are an effective political tool used by Russia to build influence in areas like India, the Middle East, and China.[32] In another scholarly paper entitled "The Tactical Side of Russia's Arms Sales to the Middle East," Anna Borshchevskaya, a senior fellow at the Washington Institute writing for the Jamestown Foundation, essentially agrees with Maj. Reaves that arms sales have been a geopolitical success for Putin in the Middle East.[33] She also notes that, as sales have increased year by year, arms sales have been an economic win for Russia.[34] Since the beginning of Russia's massive military assistance effort in Syria, Russia has been able to showcase its military capabilities to the world,

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[31] "Keynote Areas of FSMTC of Russia Activities," Official website, accessed September 1, 2019, http://www.fsvts.gov.ru/eng12.html.

[32] Andrew R Reaves, "Russian Arms Sales in the Age of Putin: For Politics or Profit?" (master's thesis, Monterey, CA, Naval Postgraduate School, 2018), 147, http://hdl.handle.net/10945/59571.

[33] Anna Borshchevskaya, "The Tactical Side of Russia's Arms Sales to the Middle East," in *Russia in the Middle East* (Washington, D.C.: The Jamestown Foundation, 2017), 16, https://jamestown.org/program/tactical-side-russias-arms-sales-middle-east/.

[34] Borshchevskaya, 2.

which has resulted in an increase of arms sales and requests for sales across the Middle East.[35] Borshchevskaya thus highlights a key impact, although subtle, of MTC in the Middle East—the global perception of Russia's enhanced power projection capabilities—but this research focuses on the arms sales and not the accompanying elements of MTC. Thus, further research is needed to understand Russia's methods and application of MTC agreements and the benefits afforded to Russia via the presence of its advisors and long-term agreements with its clients.

2. Soviet Proxy Forces and Russian Private Military and Security Companies (PMSCs)

A well-known tool in the Kremlin's Cold War power-projection toolkit was the use of proxy forces to augment and complement its other power projection capabilities.[36] The Angolan civil war and Ethiopia's war with Somalia are notable historic examples of the Soviets' use of proxy forces, particularly Cubans. A capable proxy force and client of the Soviet Union, Cuba served as a rapidly deployable force that often proved decisive in tactical operations and thus a critical factor in influencing the outcome of many Third World conflicts.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia no longer had the global communist ideology nor the money to maintain its network of client states. Therefore, Russia lost an effective tool that enabled it to carry out military-diplomatic activities abroad. However, it appears that a different kind of proxy force is again in vogue in Russia, as PMSCs have increasingly become the proxy tool of choice for the Kremlin. Leading the discussion of Russian PMSCs is Sergey Sukhankin of the Jamestown Foundation, who, in his article "War, Business, and Ideology: How Russian Private Military Contractors Pursue Moscow's Interests," concludes that Russian PMSCs have emerged as a "formidable and

[35] Borshchevskaya, 6.

[36] Defense Intelligence Agency, "Soviet Military Power," 1981, 88–89.

much sought after foreign policy instrument for the Kremlin."[37] According to Sukhankin, then–Prime Minister Putin stated that "such companies are a way of implementing national interests without direct involvement of the state."[38] PMSCs have thus become a key instrument of the Russian state that allows it to retain sufficient plausible deniability. This ambiguity about who directs and controls PMSCs creates asymmetric advantages for Moscow: in the article "NATO, Russia and Private Military Security Companies: Looking into the Dark Reflection," Christopher Spearin, a professor at the Royal Military College of Canada, concludes that the difficulty for NATO in providing an adequate response to Russian PMSCs is "understandable because Russia's reliance on PMSCs is consistent with grey-zone approaches which inherently make it difficult to name and shame."[39] This thesis will build on the limited but growing body of scholarly research on this topic by analyzing the activities of Russian PMSCs to understand how they are being used to achieve Moscow's objectives.

3. Russian Peacekeeping Activities

Today, peacekeeping activities are an important foreign policy tool for the Kremlin, and one can find references to their importance in key Russian policy documents like the RFNSS, Foreign Policy Concept, and the Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation. According to the Russian Ministry of Defense's website, "It is worth noting that today the role and importance of peacekeeping activity is increasing in development of the Russian Armed Forces. After the Russian Armed Forces reformed, our military units have become more prepared to participate in international peacekeeping operations – both in order to

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[37] Sergey Sukhankin, "War, Business and Ideology: How Russian Private Military Contractors Pursue Moscow's Interests," *War By Other Means* (Washington, D.C.: The Jamestown Foundation), March 20, 2019, https://jamestown.org/program/war-business-and-ideology-how-russian-private-military-contractors-pursue-moscows-interests/.

[38] Sergey Sukhankin, "'Continuing War by Other Means': The Case of Wagner, Russia's Premier Private Military Company in the Middle East," in *Russia in the Middle East* (Washington, D.C.: Jamestown Foundation, 2018), 29, www.jamestown.org.

[39] Christopher Spearin, "NATO, Russia and Private Military and Security Companies," *The RUSI Journal* 163, no. 3 (May 4, 2018), https://doi.org/10.1080/03071847.2018.1494676, 69.

maintain peace and security in conflict zones and protecting the interests of Russia and the lives of its citizens."[40]

Though key Russian documents highlight the prominence of peacekeeping in Russia's international activities, its use of this tool receives little scholarly attention. Most literature surrounding Russian peacekeeping activities focuses on the period after the collapse of the Soviet Union and on particular Russian peacekeeping activities in the former Soviet Union (FSU) and the Balkans—primarily the former Yugoslavia, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, and Moldova. Nevertheless, the scholarly literature on that period allows us to draw conclusions about several aspects of Russian peacekeeping activities. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia has been involved in peacekeeping in three main ways. The first method is its participation in UN peacekeeping missions as military observers.[41] The second path is through regional organizations such as the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), and NATO as in the case of Bosnia.[42] Lastly, Russia unilaterally sent peacekeepers to intervene in Abkhazia, the breakaway region of Georgia that contains ethnic Russians. Anthony Kellett notes that Russia did seek and receive a CIS mandate four-months after the intervention but still considers Russia's peacekeeping intervention "a fiction of a CIS operation."[43]

Russian peacekeeping activities do not conform to the internationally recognized standards set forth by the UN, namely impartiality of the peacekeeping force, consent of the country receiving peacekeepers, using only the minimum force necessary, and UN

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[40] "Peacekeeping Operations," MOD Mission, accessed April 28, 2019, https://eng.mil.ru/en/mission/peacekeeping_operations.htm.

[41] John Mackinlay, "Introduction," in *Regional Peacekeepers: The Paradox of Russian Peacekeeping* (Geneva, Switzerland: United Nations University Press, 2002), 9, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ebook-nps/detail.action?docID=253812.

[42] Anthony Kellett, "Soviet and Russian Peacekeeping 1948–1998: Historical Overview and Assessment," *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 12, no. 2 (June 1999): 1–47, https://doi.org/10.1080/13518049908430389.

[43] Kellett, 22.

control over peacekeeping forces.[44] John Mackinlay claims that Russia's peacekeeping activities are significant in that they reflect a "uniquely Russian approach to Russian problem [s]";[45] after the Cold War, he says, UN peacekeeping was in a state of confusion and suffered from a lack of clarity regarding what peacekeeping was and should be.[46] Given this confusion, Mackinlay asserts, it is hard to assess whether Russia's actions in the FSU are legitimate.[47] Likewise, both Anthony Kellett in *Soviet and Russian Peacekeeping 1948–1998: Historical Overview and Assessment* and Mackinlay agree that although Russian peacekeeping deviated from accepted norms established by the UN, its activities could be seen as similar to American peacekeeping operations.[48] Kellett takes this notion further, claiming that "Among the permanent five, [members of the UN Security Council] there has been enough similarity in peacekeeping practices between Russia and the United States to suggest that there is a variant of peacekeeping that is peculiar to superpowers."[49]

The Kremlin sees Russian peacekeeping as linked to its vital national interests, specifically its status in international affairs as a great power. Maxim Shashenkov claims that the political philosophy of the Russian government links Russia's ability to "effectively maintain peace in the FSU with status and prestige in international affairs."[50] Shashenkov argues that in order to sustain great power status, Russia "must ensure peace

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[44] Rebecca J. Johnson, "Russian Responses to Crisis Management in the Balkans: How Nato's Past Actions May Shape Russia's Future Involvement," *Demokratizatsiya* 9, no. 2 (Spring 2001): 292–309, http://search.proquest.com/docview/237204120/abstract/FAC119B45AF545F0PQ/1; Maxim Shashenkov, "Russian Peacekeeping in the 'Near Abroad,'" *Survival* 36, no. 3 (September 1, 1994): 46–69, https://doi.org/10.1080/00396339408442750; Lena Jonson and Clive Archer, eds., *Peacekeeping and the Role of Russia in Eurasia* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996); Isabelle Facon, "Integration or Retrenchment? Russian Approaches to Peacekeeping," in *Major Powers and Peacekeeping: Perspectives, Priorities and the Challenges of Military Intervention*, 1st ed. (London, UK: Routledge, 2006), 18.

[45] Mackinlay, "Introduction," 9.

[46] Mackinlay, 4.

[47] Mackinlay, 4.

[48] Anthony Kellett, "Soviet and Russian Peacekeeping 1948–1998: Historical Overview and Assessment," *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 12, no. 2 (June 1999): 1–47, https://doi.org/10.1080/13518049908430389, 38.

[49] Kellett, 38. For additional commentary on similarities between Russian and Western peacekeeping see Domitilla Sagramoso, "Russian peacekeeping policies" Chapter 2 of *Regional Peacekeepers: The Paradox of Russian Peacekeeping*

[50] Shashenkov, "Russian Peacekeeping in the 'Near Abroad,'" 50.

and stability in regions or countries where no other power has the same influence."[51] In the 1990s, peacekeeping was seen by Russian political scientists and military strategists as an acceptable way for Russia to use its armed forces as a preemptive measure to achieve the Kremlin's political aims: to prevent instability along its borders, protect the interests of ethnic Russians abroad, and prevent the rise of political regimes unfriendly to Moscow.[52]

The literature on contemporary Russian peacekeeping (post-2001) is underdeveloped and exhibits several gaps, raising a number of questions: how has peacekeeping doctrine and theory evolved under the Putin regime? How have peacekeepers been employed in conflicts areas like Georgia, Ukraine, Syria, and in numerous countries in Africa? How has peacekeeping as a military-political activity evolved under Vladimir Putin, specifically since Russia's 2008 military modernization efforts? And how is peacekeeping used to achieve the Kremlin's geopolitical and geostrategic objectives? A rigorous analysis of Russian peacekeeping activities, force structures, and objectives is needed to close that gap.

D. THESIS STRUCTURE AND RESEARCH DESIGN

This thesis analyzes three military-diplomatic tools that Moscow uses to gain influence abroad—MTC, PMSCs serving as a modern proxy force, and peacekeepers—by analyzing a series of comparative case studies in which Russia has employed or is currently employing these tools. Country case studies have been selected to provide representative qualitative data on each military tool, illustrating how Moscow uses these tools as a group of instruments to achieve its objectives. The analysis is intended to highlight the tactical activities and operational implications of these tools, as well as identify trends that may help inform U.S. policy and strategy recommendations.

The main difficulty in undertaking a study about Moscow's use of these tools is the matter of accuracy. The author has made every attempt to evaluate source material to use only verifiable and accurate information, but the contemporary nature of these topics is

[51] Shashenkov, 50.

[52] Shashenkov, 50.

such that the majority of the sources on the matter are journalistic, which makes the reliability of the information difficult to determine. The author has taken steps to confirm facts using multiple sources or previously sourced material from respected scholars and journalists. Additionally, as a non-Russian-speaking researcher, the author had to rely on the hard work of scholars and analysts who are translating Russian-language sources into English. In order to focus the study, the scope of this research is limited to the Putin era. However, on occasion, material from the post-Soviet era has been included to add context.

The thesis is organized as follows: The current chapter provides an introduction and background to the research questions, scope and design of the current research, and information about the existing body of literature on the matter. Chapter II analyzes how Moscow uses MTC in Venezuela, Egypt, and Vietnam. It seeks to offer the reader information that goes beyond the narrow scope of arms sales analysis, which has been extensively researched, in order to provide a more holistic approach to understanding Russian MTC by considering the importance of maintenance and repair facilities, technical experts, trainers, and advisers, all of which often accompany Moscow's arms sales contracts, examining the role they play in translating MTC into an influence-building asset. Chapter III investigates how Russia employs PMSCs as a proxy force that can effectively secure Russia's economic, geostrategic, and geopolitical objectives.[53] This chapter reviews three cases where Russia has employed PMSCs: Syria, Libya, and the Central African Republic (CAR). These cases represent countries where significant domestic conflict threatens regional security and stability, the results of which have significant political, security, and economic benefits for the victors and those who support them. Lastly, Chapter IV provides analysis of the emergent use of peacekeepers as another tool in Russian foreign policy. It analyzes the evolution of Russian peacekeeping activities in three post–Soviet era conflict zones—Georgia, Ukraine and Syria—with particular emphasis on the potential for conflict escalation with other nations, such as Turkey and the U.S. This chapter offers an in-depth review of the military units Moscow uses to conduct peacekeeping activities today. These case studies and military units represent a sampling

53 "War, Business and Ideology."

of the wide range of Russian peacekeeping activities to illustrate when and how Russia uses this tool to achieve its foreign policy objectives in the Putin era. Chapter V concludes this thesis by providing a summary analysis of the findings of the research and identifies policy implications in order to provide recommendations on how best to deal with Moscow's use of these tools if and when the United States encounters them.

E. POTENTIAL EXPLANATIONS AND HYPOTHESES

This research seeks to describe the activities, identify trends, and assess the implication of Moscow's use of the three aforementioned military tools. Is Russia employing these tools to achieve great power status or might arms "sales"—often made at bargain prices and with generous credits—in part be a cover for Putin's effort to sustain his military-industrial complex, despite relatively flat demand at home? Perhaps Russia's increased military-diplomatic activity is an attempt to conceal domestic weakness from the international community. Such weaknesses include economic weakness, geopolitical isolation, declining populations, decrepit infrastructure, and corruption, which serve to undermine Russia's aspirations for great power status. Moreover, as Bettina Renz notes, "the Kremlin's quest to gain great power recognition through the display of military power has been a double-edged sword. As lessons from the past reveal, pursuing status on military might alone, while remaining weak in other areas and especially in the economic realm, has not been sustainable and never led to lasting results."[54] Appearing strong while concealing weaknesses has historical precedence during the Soviet Union, and Russia could again be attempting to mask domestic weakness by using its military tools to make itself appear as a great power.

However, this thesis posits that while the obfuscation of domestic weaknesses may play a role in Russia's increased military-diplomatic activities, the evidence suggests that the primary driver is more likely to be Moscow's effort to increase its global military presence and build bases of influence in regions where U.S. influence is declining. According to Russian foreign policy expert James Clay Moltz, "Great powers often seek

[54] Bettina Renz, *Russia's Military Revival* (Cambridge, UK ; Polity Press, 2018), 192.

to build spheres of influence when they believe their power is on the rise."[55] After successful military-diplomatic support to the Assad regime, increased military-diplomatic activity in other regions is almost certainly a sign that Moscow is once again confident in its military capabilities and looking to move into regions such as Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East, where it can compete with the United States for geopolitical, geostrategic, and economic influence. Therefore, the author hypothesizes that Russian activities are strategic, intentional policy decisions driven primarily by political motives (i.e., gaining influence at the United States' expense); using these three military tools, Russia is effectively probing for opportunities to build influence in practical and lasting ways.

[55] James Clay Moltz, "Great Power Competition Lecture Series" (Naval Postgraduate School, August 7, 2019).

II. MILITARY-TECHNICAL COOPERATION IN THE AGE OF PUTIN

Military-technical cooperation (MTC) is an essential instrument of Russia's foreign policy. Moscow has deftly achieved significant strategic gains by leveraging MTC to bolster its geopolitical and geostrategic interests. In its 2015 National Security Strategy, Moscow emphasized the vital role of MTC in national security and its importance as an instrument of its foreign policy, stating that "National defense is ensured based on…the expansion of international military and military-technical cooperation."[56] Rosoboronexport, Russia's state-owned principal export agent for MTC, presented a clearer picture of the role of MTC in Moscow's foreign policy, stating that "MTC with other countries has turned into a special area of foreign trade, which stands at the junction of global politics and global arms trade. Important goals of Russia's foreign trade relations with other countries today include reinforcement of the country's military and political foothold in various regions of the world."[57] MTC thus forms a key pillar of Russia's strategy to expand its influence with partner nations.

At the core of Russia's MTC activities are its arms sales, and much analysis has been devoted to understanding the impact of such sales on Russia and the recipient nations, primarily focusing on the financial, geostrategic, or geopolitical conditions under which the deals happen. However, other aspects of military-technical cooperation, such as the facilities, maintenance, sustainment logistics, military advisers, and technical trainers, which are required to translate the arms sales into military capability for the MTC partner and influence for Moscow, garner less attention. An examination of Moscow's MTC relationship with three countries—Venezuela, Egypt, and Vietnam—reveals how Moscow has used these aspects of MTC to achieve its objectives and bolster its influence throughout the world. As demonstrated by these case studies, Moscow uses MTC as an effective political instrument by employing it to rapidly seize geopolitical and geostrategic opportunities, often to the indignation of the West. In addition, Moscow is also using MTC

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56 *The Russian Federation's National Security Strategy*, 8.

57 Rosoboronexport, "Corporate Strategy."

to protect its influence amidst changing regional power dynamics through a methodical penetration of the recipient country via joint ventures for manufacturing weapons and repair parts and establishing regional maintenance centers.

President Putin is using the rapid and penetrative effects of MTC at venues like the 2019 Russian-African Summit to create geopolitical success. A notable outcome of the summit was the number of MTC agreements reached between Moscow and many African countries.[58] In a high-level meeting with the Commission for Military-Technical Cooperation with Foreign States in December 2019, Putin reiterated the strategy of speed and penetration in order to capitalize on the geopolitical opportunities presented at the Russian-African Summit:

> Based on the results of the summit, I would like to ask you to analyze the numerous proposals we have received for military-technical cooperation, paying attention to their commercial value and applying flexible delivery and payment methods. In addition, timely maintenance and good repairs are among the key parameters of the competitiveness of military products. We never stop talking about this. We should stay close to the client and redouble efforts to increase the number of maintenance service centers in the clients' countries. But we must also consider a new field – the establishment of joint ventures to produce spares for our equipment abroad. It is an extremely important sphere, which calls for expanding the rights of parties to military technical cooperation and amending the legal framework correspondingly.[59]

MTC gives Moscow a key advantage in conveying its message that it is a reliable security partner that puts the needs of its partners over economic self-interest and the opinions of other powers. It is an influence-building strategy that has its roots in the Soviet era, when Moscow often used MTC to expand its spheres of influence and undermine U.S. influence and interests abroad.

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58 "Arms, Oil and Influence: What You Need to Know About Russia's First-Ever Africa Summit," *Moscow Times*, October 24, 2019, sec. news, https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2019/10/24/arms-oil-and-influence-what-you-need-to-know-about-russias-first-africa-summit-a67885.

59 "Corporate Strategy."

A. BACKGROUND OF SOVIET-ERA MTC

The end of WWII left Moscow with a vast military-industrial complex. The massive amounts of leftover war materiel gave Moscow a readily available surplus of arms to sell in competition with the United States. During the Cold War, secrecy and complete state monopoly over MTC relations with foreign countries characterized Soviet MTC.[60] Moscow invested in supporting countries with military equipment, advisers, and technicians as a method to counter U.S. influence and parlay its materiel support into geopolitical and geostrategic success. Moscow often provided arms and equipment as part of "concessional economic arrangements," essentially aid packages to the recipients,[61] which ultimately enabled the Soviet Union's rise to become the world's second-largest arms exporter.[62]

However, MTC served more purposes than simply buying influence. It also served as a crucial method to test Soviet logistics capabilities and power projection potential. In most conflicts, the Soviet Union sourced its arms from across the USSR and Warsaw Pact and distributed them via multiple shipping methods, including air, land, and sea. In one notable case, during the 1973 Yom Kippur War between a Soviet-supported Egypt-Syria coalition against the United States–supported Israel, the Soviet Union established an air-sea supply bridge from the USSR to Egypt and Syria to rapidly replace heavy Arab losses in tanks, surface-to-air missiles, and fighter aircraft.[63] To establish this supply bridge, Moscow needed extensive diplomatic cooperation with various countries to secure basing and overflight agreements to enable the transportation of men and materiel across increasingly greater distances. Such operations allowed Russia to expand its reach and influence in a coordinated and credible manner, enhancing its image as a world power.

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60 Sergey Kortunov, "The Influence of External Factors on Russia's Arms Export Policy," in *Russia and the Arms Trade*, ed. Ian Anthony (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1998), 93.

61 Kortunov, 93.

62 Bruce D. Porter, *The USSR in Third World Conflicts: Soviet Arms and Diplomacy in Local Wars, 1945–1980* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 5–6.

63 Porter, 133.

Arms sales were just one aspect of MTC that the Soviet Union used to demonstrate to its adversaries not only its technological capability but also its power projection capacity. Another aspect of its power projection was the proliferation of military advisers to distant battlefields.[64] These advisers were employed in various ways and to great effect. They performed duties that ranged from equipment technicians and mechanics to tactical advisers who accompanied the partner's forces on the battlefield or advised military leadership on military strategy and the conduct of combat operations. It was not uncommon to find advisers from the USSR, Warsaw Pact countries, and Soviet allies like Cuba conducting various advising missions in the same country.[65] Moscow's employment of advisers moved beyond the strictly tactical role that one associates with advisers into a broader strategy of obfuscation, deniability, and political influence. Advisers gave Moscow the benefit of a political presence in the supported country and also served as a rich source of intelligence: advisers could observe and report firsthand information back to Moscow to help in its attempts to further enhance its policies in the host country.[66] Thus, Moscow could leverage a cadre of highly skilled and well-trained experts to translate its arms and equipment packages into geopolitical success, all the while maintaining a level of deniability about the full extent of its participation in conflicts abroad. As Sergey Sukhankin notes, "the institution of 'military advisors' formed the security pillar of Soviet methods of non-linear warfare against the West."[67]

At the end of the Cold War, Russia's military-industrial complex fell into disarray. Many of the USSR's weapons and equipment manufacturers were now located independent states, which severely degraded Russia's capability and capacity to manufacture quality arms. Also, rampant corruption, poor economic conditions resulting from an abrupt transition from a command economy to a market economy, and a military-industrial complex left in turmoil all contributed to the steady decline of the Russian arms industry

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64 Porter, 53–54.

65 Edward George, *The Cuban Intervention in Angola, 1965–1991: From Che Guevara to Cuito Cuanavale* (New York, NY: Frank Cass, 2005).

66 Porter, 203–5.

67 Sukhankin, 294.

in the years immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union. To ensure the survival of Russia's defense industry and help Russia compete with its main rivals—the United States, United Kingdom, and France—in the global arms trade, President Boris Yeltsin attempted to re-exert state control over MTC with foreign countries. The Russian military doctrine of 1993 codified MTC's role within Moscow's national security conception, and in 1994, Yeltsin officially made the process of MTC with foreign governments directly accountable to him.[68]

Three phases of structural changes marked the Yeltsin administration and, according to Baidya Basu, were "characterized by a separate model in each phase."[69] The first phase was the Liberal Multi-Actor Phase, characterized by confusion and disarray as the MTC system was trying to balance decades of conditioned behavior under state monopoly with responding to the freedom of a market economy. There were problems with pricing, product quality, and accountability, which ultimately led to corruption and theft.[70] The second phase was the "Centralized Uni-Actor Phase," which commenced in 1993, when Yeltsin created the State Corporation for Exports and Imports of Armaments and Military Equipment (Rosvoorouzhenie) to centralize the process of importing and exporting armaments. A year later, Yeltsin further consolidated state control over MTC when he created the ministerial-level State Committee for MTC, which reported directly to him.[71] However, significant challenges related to a weak central government and struggling economy hampered Russia's MTC. The late nineteen-nineties ushered in the "Centralized Multi-Actor Phase," the final phase of the Yeltsin years.[72] In 1997, through a presidential decree, Yeltsin strengthened the state's control of MTC by elevating the status of the Rosvoorouzhenie into a "federal state unitary enterprise" and authorizing two

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[68] Baidya Bikash Basu, "Russian Military-technical Cooperation: Structures and Processes," *Strategic Analysis* 25, no. 3 (June 1, 2001): 438–39, https://doi.org/10.1080/09700160108458967.

[69] Basu, 440.

[70] Basu, 440–41.

[71] Basu, 441.

[72] Basu, 442.

more firms, Promexport and Rossiyskiye Tekhnologii, to operate in the area of MTC.[73] Rosvoorouzhenie was responsible for managing the arms export contracts with foreign countries and coordinating contract execution between the various state and private enterprises;[74] Promexport handled the logistics sustainment of the armaments, such as spare parts and service support.[75] To protect Russian intellectual property, Rossiyskiye Tekhnologii managed the export licensing of weapons technology. This new structure created a more efficient division of labor and more effective state control over MTC functions and activities.

However, it was not until Vladimir Putin came to power in 1999 that Russia began its ascent back to its place as one of the world's top arms exporters. As of 2018, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) reported that Russia was the second-largest arms exporter in the world behind the United States.[76] In 2000, not long after he was elected president, Vladimir Putin sought to consolidate full control of MTC under the authority of the president. The consolidation process began by merging Rosvoorouzhenie and Promexport into a single conglomerate called Rosoboronexport and merging Rossiyskiye Tekhnologii into Promexport.[77] He further consolidated his authority by placing colleagues and friends in critical positions within the newly created organizations.[78] The measures put into place over the last twenty years of the Putin regime have sought to vertically align the entire MTC process under the power of the president. This series of laws and presidential decrees has enabled Putin to tamp down internal competition among Russia's arms manufacturers and make MTC a more powerful influence-building tool. As such, in 2004, a dedicated federal executive body, the Federal Service for Military-Technical Cooperation (FSMTC), was created to oversee all MTC

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[73] Basu, 442.

[74] Basu, 442.

[75] Basu, 442.

[76] "International Arms Transfers and Developments in Arms Production," SIPRI Yearbook 2019, accessed August 23, 2019, https://www.sipri.org/yearbook/2019/05.

[77] Basu, "Russian Military-Technical Cooperation," 447.

[78] Basu, 447.

between Russia and foreign countries on behalf of the president of the Russian Federation. Figure 2 shows the current structure of Russia's MTC system. Of note is the vertical integration of the MTC system achieved through the creation of the FSMTC.

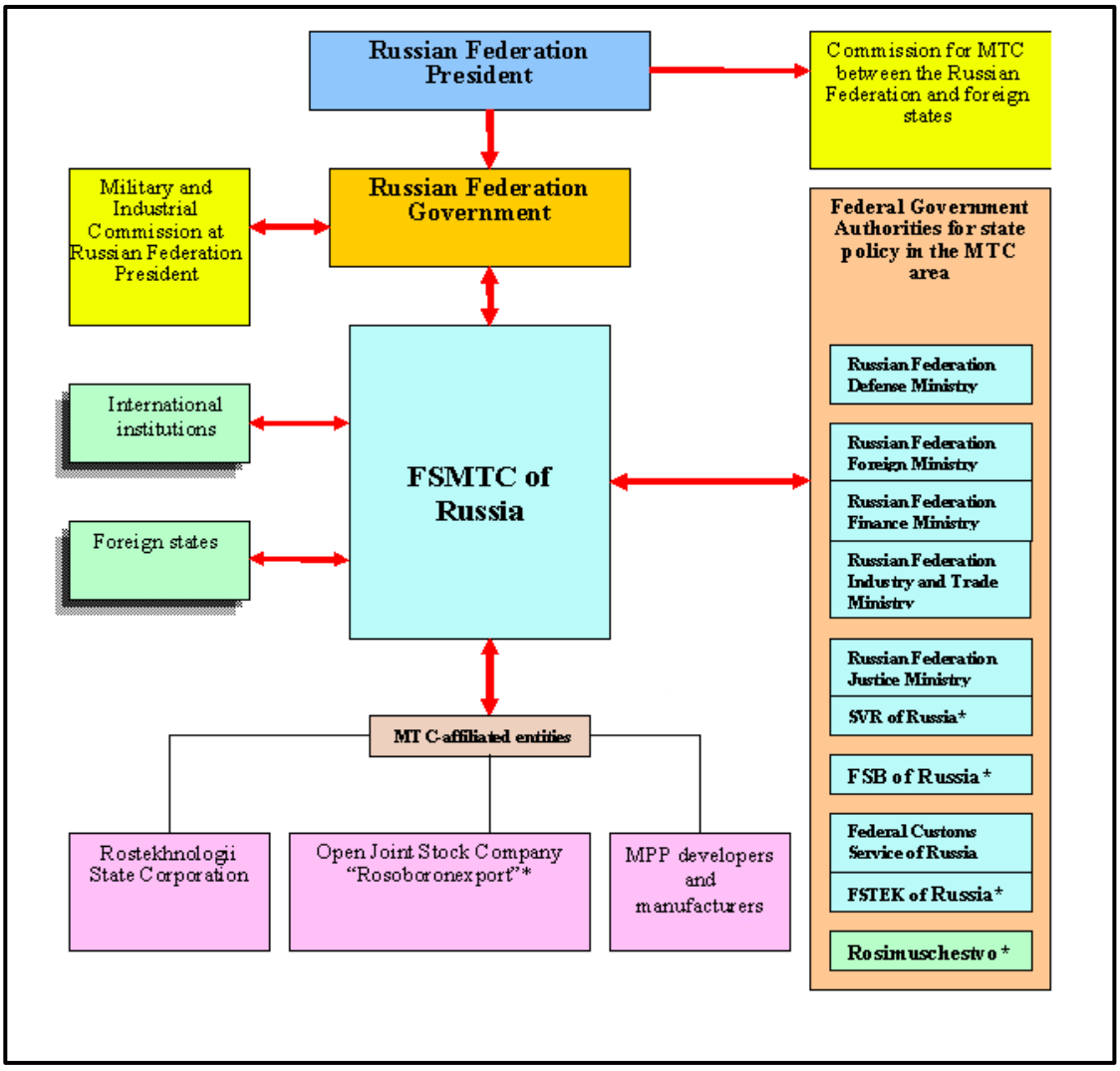

Figure 2. Structure of Russia's MTC System.79

Under Putin, the ideological aims of Soviet-era MTC have given way to a more rational and pragmatic approach to Moscow's use of this tool. Today, with full control of

79 Source: "Federal Service for Military-Technical Cooperation," Official Site, accessed April 18, 2020, http://www.fsvts.gov.ru/materialsf/1C815146FD9FD6DDC325789E0036249F.html.

the MTC process consolidated under the power of the presidency and Russia's advantageous position as a leader in the global arms industry, Vladimir Putin is able to maximize his country's MTC capabilities, leveraging all available tools with his clients, including arms sales, building of facilities, establishing maintenance agreements with regional life cycle logistics support plans, and the deployment of military advisers, technical trainers, and other human intelligence assets. As demonstrated in the following case studies, he is finding success in this effort, using MTC as a preferred method to strategically advance Moscow's geopolitical position in many regions across the globe.

B. CASE STUDIES

1. Venezuela

Between 2005 and 2013, Russia and Venezuela shared a brief but intense period of cooperation in which Venezuela became Moscow's closest ideological ally in South America. Today, the geopolitical and economic turmoil in Venezuela, stemming from the contested legitimacy of the Maduro regime, has made Russia's future as patron and geopolitical ally of Venezuela uncertain. However, Moscow continues to leverage its previously established MTC relationship with Caracas to maintain a small but consequential foothold in Venezuela, using MTC to influence Venezuela's domestic political outcomes in an attempt to ensure that a Moscow-friendly regime remains in power. These efforts move Moscow closer to establishing itself as a powerful actor in South America, a consequential role in the new multipolar world.[80]

a. Background of Russia-Venezuela Military-Technical Cooperation

Prior to the presidency of Hugo Chavez (1999–2013), Venezuela was politically and economically aligned with the West. Venezuela's native defense industry was small and lacked the capability and capacity to equip the country's military, so it relied on

[80] Vladimir Rouvinski, "Russian-Venezuelan Relations at a Crossroads" (Washington, DC: Wilson Center Latin American Program, n.d.), 3, https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/russia-venezuela_report_rouvinski_final.pdf.

Western Europe and the United States to help meet its defense needs.[81] However, upon the election of Hugo Chavez as president of Venezuela, a confluence of domestic and international factors set the conditions for Russia's rise as Venezuela's largest arms supplier, propelling Russian–Venezuelan relations into a new era of bilateral cooperation. These factors included a failed attempt in 2002 to overthrow Chavez by political opposition leaders supported by several high-ranking generals, the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq and overthrow of the Hussein regime in 2003, and growing anti-Chavez rhetoric by the United States.[82] Chavez sought to modernize his military to win favor with his military leaders as well as to protect his regime from external threats.[83] His growing mistrust of U.S. intentions, resulting from his suspicions of American involvement in the failed military coup, pushed him squarely into Russia's corner. Putin, meanwhile, looked to expand his influence in South America and sought to diversify his arms export portfolio.[84] What followed was a period of warm relations between Caracas and Moscow; nevertheless, it took several more years before significant MTC agreement came to fruition.

At the height of this relationship, from 2005 to 2013, Venezuela became the largest purchaser of Russian arms in South America, with an estimated $11 billion in signed arms contracts.[85] Many complex systems were purchased by Caracas during this period of MTC, necessitating long-term agreements with Moscow. These included advanced air defense systems such as the Antey-2500 and Buk-M2E, Igla man-portable air-defense systems, multi-role attack-fighter aircraft like the Sukhoi Su-30MK2, multi-role helicopters such as the Mi-35M and Mi-17, T-72 tanks, BMP-3 infantry combat vehicles, and BTR-80 armored

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[81] Sergey Denisentsev, "Russian-Venezuelan Defense Cooperation" (Arlington, VA: CNA, June 2019), 2, https://www.cna.org/research/IOP-2019-U-020309-Final.

[82] Denisentsev 16–17, 33.

[83] Denisentsev, 16–17, 33.

[84] Denisentsev, 6.

[85] Interfax News Agency, "Russia to Seek Fulfillment of Arms Deals with Venezuela in Any Event - Borisov," *Russia & CIS Military Information Weekly*, February 15, 2019, http://search.proquest.com/docview/2201735716/citation/E82B2C85EF25402APQ/2.

personnel carriers.[86] Under Chavez, Russian arms deals allowed Venezuela to modernize its air force with fourth-generation aircraft and helicopters, equip its ground forces with modern weaponry, and enhance its sovereignty by creating a national air defense system that could protect Venezuela from foreign interference. The large purchase of Russian arms and equipment gave Moscow a public relations boost as Chavez began appearing on television brandishing Russian-made AK-103s.[87]

Properly training and equipping Venezuelan forces on these advanced systems required Moscow's sustained political-military engagement with Caracas. To that end, Moscow agreed to help Venezuela build helicopter-pilot training facilities; to provide military advisers for maintenance, repair, and overhaul (MRO) facilities; and to transfer small arms technology so Caracas could develop a native armaments industry. For example, in 2006, Moscow agreed to transfer the technology to manufacture Kalashnikov rifles and small arms ammunition to Caracas. As part of the $474 million-dollar deal, Moscow agreed to build the manufacturing facilities that would be able produce 25,000 rifles and 50 million rounds of ammunition per year and employ up to 1,500 people.[88]

The death of Hugo Chavez in 2013 left a power vacuum in Venezuela. With several political factions vying for power, the peaceful transition to a successor was uncertain. Nevertheless, speaking one day after the passing of Chavez and during this period of heightened uncertainty, Russian State Duma Defense Committee Deputy Chairman Franz Klintsevich stated, "[m]ost of the Russian-Venezuelan contracts will be implemented even if the opposition takes office."[89] That same day, a Latin American specialist from the Russian Academy of Sciences assessed that MTC would continue regardless of the outcome of the presidential election in Venezuela. He cited Russia's helicopter

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[86] Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, "Transfer of Major Weapons from Russian Federation to Venezuela from 1991–2018," SIPRI Trade Register: Russia to Venezuela 2000–2018, September 13, 2019, http://armstrade.sipri.org/armstrade/page/trade_register.php.

[87] Denisentsev, "Russian-Venezuelan Defense Cooperation," 12–13.

[88] Denisentsev, 25–26.

[89] Interfax News Agency, "Venezuela to Carry on Military Cooperation with Moscow Even If Opposition Takes Office - Experts," *Russia & CIS Military Newswire*, March 6, 2013, https://search.proquest.com/docview/1314913418/abstract/14DE8372811A4662PQ/5.

maintenance and training base and its continued logistical support to Venezuelan aircraft as reasons MTC would continue.[90] Likewise, on February 14, 2019, Russia's Deputy Prime Minister Yury Borisov declared on Russian television in regards to the disputed results of the Maduro presidential election that Russia will "fulfill arms contracts with Venezuela irrespective of the turn of events."[91] Moscow would use these pre-existing MTC agreements as justification for maintaining its involvement in the country's affairs in this time of domestic crisis.

b. Current State of Russia-Venezuela Military-Technical Cooperation

Nicolas Maduro's rise to power in 2013 marked the rapid decline of the Venezuelan economy; as a result, Caracas has not had the means to sign a single MTC contract with Moscow.[92] Nevertheless, existing MTC contracts gave Russia the means to justify its military support Maduro, helping to prop up a beleaguered ally in the face of fierce international opposition. In January 2019, Venezuela's opposition leader, Juan Guiado, declared himself the constitutional leader and interim president after a contested presidential election; Putin demonstrated his support for Maduro by dispatching a team of military advisers and technical experts to Caracas.[93] Most notably, the senior officer on the trip was Colonel General Vasily Tonkoshkurov, Deputy Chief of the Russian General Staff.[94] Reportedly accompanying the personnel were 35 tons of military equipment to repair Venezuela's S-300 air defense systems.[95]

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[90] Interfax News Agency, "Venezuelan Opposition Has Chance to Win If Elections Not Held Soon - Russian Analyst," *Russia & CIS General Newswire*, March 6, 2013, https://advance.lexis.com.

[91] Interfax News Agency, "Russia to Seek Fulfillment of Arms Deals with Venezuela in Any Event - Borisov."

[92] Denisentsev, "Russian-Venezuelan Defense Cooperation," 29.

[93] "Behind the Scenes of Russia's Military Detachment to Venezuela," Jamestown, accessed May 3, 2019, https://jamestown.org/program/behind-the-scenes-of-russias-military-detachment-to-venezuela/.

[94] Interfax News Agency, "Russia Helps Venezuela Restore Combat Capacity of Military Hardware - Russian Deputy DM," *Russia & CIS General Newswire*, April 22, 2019, https://advance.lexis.com/document/.

[95] Alec Luhn and Harriet Alexander, "Russia Opens Military Helicopter Training Centre in Venezuela," *Telegraph*, April 2, 2019, https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2019/04/02/russia-opens-military-helicopter-training-centre-venezuela/.

This overt support to the Maduro regime received significant backlash from the international community. To counter the backlash, the Kremlin justified the deployment by claiming the troops went to Venezuela under the auspices of longstanding MTC agreements.[96] Since this highly publicized show of support for the Maduro regime, Rosoboronexport has announced the opening of another helicopter training facility and a training facility for the Sukhoi Mk2 flight simulator. Additionally, after 13 years of delays, the FSMTC announced that it would help Venezuela complete the corruption-plagued Kalashnikov rifle and ammunition factory,[97] giving the Venezuelan military a much-needed native armaments manufacturing capability and the Maduro regime an equally important domestic public relations victory.

To complete these projects and maintain its catalog of arms and advanced combat systems, Venezuela must rely heavily on a cadre of Russian military advisers and technical specialists. In September 2019, Reuters reported that Moscow conducted several deployments of military advisers to Venezuela in an attempt to help the Venezuelan military increase its combat readiness.[98] Though exact numbers of personnel are hard to ascertain, a source told Meduza, an independent Russian news outlet, that the estimated "number of Russian specialists in the country at two or three thousand, and 'that's including everyone who's there through official military cooperation, all the political advisers and even the Foreign Affairs folks.'"[99]

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[96] Japan Times, "Russian Arms Export Company Opens Helicopter Training Center in Venezuela," *Japan Times Online*, March 30, 2019, https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2019/03/30/world/russian-arms-export-company-opens-helicopter-training-center-venezuela/.

[97] Luhn and Alexander, "Russia Opens Military Helicopter Training Centre in Venezuela"; Mariana Zuñiga, Anthony Faiola, and Anton Troianovski, "As Maduro Confronts a Crisis, Russia's Footprint in Venezuela Grows," *Washington Post*, accessed December 2, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/the_americas/as-maduro-confronts-a-crisis-russias-footprint-in-venezuela-grows/2019/03/29/fcf93cec-50b3-11e9-bdb7-44f948cc0605_story.html; Interfax News Agency, "Kalashnikov Rifle Plant to Commence Operation in Venezuela in 2020–2021 - FSMTC Head," *Interfax : Russia & CIS Business & Investment Weekly; Moscow*, August 28, 2019, https://search.proquest.com/docview/2285265488/citation/456A1503D03F4966PQ/1.

[98] "Russian Military Specialists Arrive in Venezuela to Service Equipment: Interfax," Reuters, September 25, 2019, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-venezuela-specialists-idUSKBN1WA2FJ.

[99] Lilya Yapparova, "Geopolitical Debts: Why Russia Is Really Sending Military Advisers and Other Specialists to Venezuela," trans. Hilah Kohen and Kevin Rothrock, Meduza, July 28, 2019, https://meduza.io/en/feature/2019/07/29/geopolitical-debts.

c. Analysis

Even though Venezuela's domestic political situation remains uncertain, Moscow's continued overt support has no doubt been a critical factor in preserving the Maduro regime's tenuous grip on power, and by equipping the Maduro regime, Moscow has imposed greater cost on opposition groups who might seek to remove him from power. In this regard, Moscow has played a weak hand well by using previous MTC contracts signed with Caracas as a vehicle to bolster the Maduro regime. In addition to completing its pre-existing MTC agreements, Russian MRO facilities have allowed Moscow to maintain a presence in the country while refuting criticism from the West that it has been expanding its military presence. Moscow's MTC relationship has strengthened the Maduro regime's position while deftly managing the potential for escalation by justifying its legal presence based on its previous MTC agreements with Venezuela. The ongoing presence of military personnel, equipment maintainers, and trainers in Venezuela offers the Kremlin necessary human intelligence capabilities in a volatile region. It also allows Moscow to retain close contacts with powerful military officials within Venezuela. This presence gives Moscow influence with a powerful institution that will likely play a significant role in subsequent transitions of power within Venezuela, potentially mitigating Moscow's risk of losing more of its economic investments. This enduring presence in Venezuela has advanced Moscow's goal of legitimizing itself as a power broker and establishing itself as a regional political and military influencer.

Though it is too early to determine the complete impact of Russian MTC with the Maduro regime, it is reasonable to conclude that Moscow's overt show of support for Maduro changed the calculus of the opposition groups and their international supporters in their effort to oust Maduro. In this scenario, MTC proved to be a useful geopolitical instrument in preserving one of Moscow's partners, even in the face of U.S. opposition to the Maduro regime in Venezuela.

2. Egypt

Russian MTC activities in Egypt further illustrate the efficacy of Moscow's use of this tool to gain influence in another geostrategic region. Egypt, the most populous country

with the largest military in the Arab world,[100] is critical to Moscow's emerging strategy in the Middle East–North Africa (MENA) region—an area where it seeks to undermine U.S. influence and "re-assert Russia's parity with the U.S. globally and regionally."[101] Its desire to be recognized as a great power is a crucial driver in its relations with Egypt, especially since any gains Moscow achieves in Egypt serve to undermine U.S.-Egyptian relations.

Russia views Egypt as a regional power with significant military capabilities, bases, and port facilities, a partnership with which could help it project power across the greater MENA region. To emphasize the growing importance of Egypt and the MENA region in Russia's foreign policy strategy, Vladimir Putin co-chaired the first-ever Russia-Africa Summit and Economic Forum with Egyptian President Abdelfattah al-Sisi in 2019.[102] Cairo also sees an opportunity in stronger bilateral military relations with Moscow. Egypt is fighting an active terrorist insurgency in the Sinai Peninsula, where modern Russian arms and military equipment could be employed to achieve significant effect, and the Libyan civil war on its western border threatens to cause greater instability in the region. MTC support from Moscow enhances Egypt's territorial integrity along its borders and could shape favorable outcomes in the Libyan civil war, and warmer MTC relations with Moscow serve as a counterweight to U.S. influence in Egypt and the greater MENA region.[103] Also, unlike the conditional aid from the United States, which requires Cairo to comply with U.S. human rights and democratization standards, aid from Moscow offers the benefits of military and economic cooperation without such conditions. As such, Russia is increasingly using MTC to foster closer relations with Cairo at the expense of Washington-Cairo relations.

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[100] Central Intelligence Agency, "Egypt," The World Factbook, accessed December 27, 2019, https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/eg.html.

[101] Stephen Blank, "The Foundations of Russian Polic in the Middle East," in *Russia in the Middle East* (Washington, DC: The Jamestown Foundation, 2018), 31.

[102] "The Russia–Africa Summit and Economic Forum," The Russia–Africa Summit and Economic Forum, accessed December 27, 2019, http://summitafrica.rc.rcmedia.ru/en/.

[103] Rami Aziz, "Russia's Alarming Attempts to Establish Influence in Egypt," *Fikra Forum* (blog), May 24, 2018, https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/russias-alarming-attempts-to-establish-influence-in-egypt.

a. Background and History of Russia-Egypt Military-Technical Cooperation

During the Cold War, under President Abdel Gamel Nasser, Egypt was one of the Soviet Union's closest allies in the Middle East. To help Egypt defend itself against U.S.-backed Israel, the Soviet Union deployed thousands of advisers and technicians to man, train, and equip the Egyptian military with Soviet hardware.[104] As a result, Egypt had perhaps the largest air-defense network outside of the Soviet bloc.[105] The USSR enjoyed access to two of Egypt's port facilities and five airfields across the country, from which it could project Soviet power to other parts of the MENA region.[106]

After Anwar Sadat succeeded Nasser in 1970, Egypt's leaders began to question the benefits of this relationship with the Soviet Union.[107] By 1972, Moscow had worn out its welcome, and Sadat expelled the Russians—one of the greatest political-military embarrassments for the Soviet Union during the Cold War.[108] After suffering another military defeat by Israel in 1973, Egypt signed the historic Egyptian–Israeli peace treaty in 1979.[109] The United States seized the opportunity to build more significant influence in Egypt and bring it closer to the West by granting it $1.3 billion/year in Foreign Military Financing to purchase U.S. arms and military equipment.[110] For the next three decades, Egypt served as an important U.S. ally in the MENA region, and both countries benefitted from strong bilateral military relations.

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104 Edward R. F. Sheehan, "Why Sadat Packed Off the Russians," *New York Times*, August 6, 1972, sec. Archives, https://www.nytimes.com/1972/08/06/archives/why-sadat-packed-off-the-russians-egypt.html.

105 Sheehan.

106 Sheehan.

107 Sheehan.

108 Sheehan.

109 Jeremy M Sharp, "Egypt: Background and U.S. Relations" (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, November 21, 2019), 13, https://fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL33003.pdf.

110 Sharp, 13.

b. Current State of Russia-Egypt Military-Technical Cooperation

The relationship between Cairo and Washington began to show signs of strain in 2013, when Cairo began another turn towards autocratic rule. Moscow used MTC to rapidly seize the opportunity created by that strain. The U.S. Congress began to notice the close security relationship between Cairo and Moscow: In an April 2019 letter to Secretary of State Mike Pompeo**,** a bipartisan group of seventeen U.S. senators expressed their growing concern over Egypt's human rights abuses, its movement away from democratic norms, and its plan to purchase approximately 20 Sukhoi-35 fourth-generation multi-role fighter aircraft from Russia.[111] Regarding the S-35 purchase, the senators called for Secretary Pompeo to "ask President Sisi to reevaluate these decisions, which risk making his country a Russian dependency once again."[112] In November 2019, Egypt finalized the S-35 purchase,[113] putting it at risk of being sanctioned by the United States under the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA) and potentially further alienating Cairo from Washington, D.C.[114] In December 2019, U.S. Secretary of Defense Mark Esper testified before Congress that Russia's growing influence in Egypt concerned him.[115]

Russia's return to Egypt should come as no surprise, as it was the United States that provided Moscow with the window of opportunity to gain the political-military foothold it enjoys today in Egypt. After a July 2013 military coup that ousted democratically elected president Mohammed Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood, the Obama administration's

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111 Sharp, 22; United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, "Leading Senators Call on Sec. Pompeo to Raise Key Concerns During Bilateral Meeting with Egyptian President Sisi," Chairman's Press, April 8, 2019, https://www.foreign.senate.gov/press/chair/release/leading-senators-call-on-sec-pompeo-to-raise-key-concerns-during-bilateral-meeting-with-egyptian-president-sisi.

112 United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, "Leading Senators Call on Sec. Pompeo to Raise Key Concerns During Bilateral Meeting with Egyptian President Sisi."

113 Khalid Hassan, "Will Egypt Heed Us Threat of Sanctions for Russian Jet Deal?," Al-Monitor, December 5, 2019, https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2019/11/washington-warns-egypt-against-acquisition-russian-su-35.html.

114C Sharp, "Egypt: Background and U.S. Relations," 22–23.

115 Katie Bo Williams, "Esper 'Concerned' About Russian Influence in Egypt, Saudi Arabia," Defense One, December 11, 2019, https://www.defenseone.com/threats/2019/12/russias-growing-influence-egypt-saudi-arabia-concerning-esper-says/161822/.

relations with the new Sisi government cooled.[116] The country's security forces began a brutal crackdown on the opposition in an attempt to consolidate its power and secure victory in the coup quickly. With increasingly frequent reports of human rights violations by the Sisi government, the Obama administration withheld hundreds of millions of dollars in aid and loan guarantees. It suspended the transfer of major weapons systems like M1A1 Abrams upgrade kits, F-16s, Apache attack helicopters, and anti-ship missiles, sending a strong signal that Washington was unhappy with the turn of events in Egypt.[117] Believing Washington was disengaging, Egypt looked to a historic partnership that could meet its security needs without preconditions.[118] By February 2014, President Sisi initiated a new phase in Moscow-Cairo strategic relations when he made Moscow the destination of his first official visit to a non-Arab country, where he signed approximately $2 billion worth of arms deals.[119]

Since that meeting between Sisi and Putin, Cairo has increasingly looked to Moscow to meet its security needs. In March 2015, both countries established the Joint Russian-Egyptian Committee on Military-Technical Cooperation in Moscow, now in its sixth iteration, to regularly meet, review, and assess ways to enhance their MTC relationship.[120] Also, in 2015, Moscow announced its intent to establish a regional helicopter MRO facility outside of Cairo to refit and refurbish existing Russian-made helicopters and equipment.[121] In March 2017, Russian special forces reportedly deployed

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[116] Anna Borshchevskaya, What Would Happen If Russia Flipped Egypt?, interview by Madeleine Kearns, June 26, 2018, https://www.nationalreview.com/2018/06/russia-egypt-relationship-foreign-policy/.

[117] "U.S. Suspending Millions In Military Aid To Egypt," NPR.org, accessed December 27, 2019, https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2013/10/09/230676846/u-s-to-slash-military-aid-to-egypt.

[118] Borshchevskaya, What Would Happen If Russia Flipped Egypt?

[119] David Schenker and Eric Trager, "Egypt's Arms Deal with Russia: Potential Strategic Costs," Policywatch 2218, March 4, 2014, https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/egypts-arms-deal-with-russia-potential-strategic-costs.

[120] Federal Service for Military-Technical Cooperation, "The Director of the Federal Service for Military-Technical Cooperation (FSMTC of Russia) A.V.Fomin Participated in the First Meeting of the Joint Russian-Egyptian Commission on Military-Technical Cooperation," FSMTC of Russia, September 23, 2015, http://www.fsvts.gov.ru/materialsf/5E2295E39EA05A1543257EC9003186F7.html.

[121] Oscar Nkala, "Russian Helicopters To Overhaul Egyptian Air Force Mi-8T, Mi-17 Fleet," Defense News, August 8, 2017, https://www.defensenews.com/pentagon/2015/12/17/russian-helicopters-to-overhaul-egyptian-air-force-mi-8t-mi-17-fleet/.

to a base in Egypt's western desert approximately 60 miles from the Libyan border to provide military support to the Libyan opposition leader, General Khalifa Haftar of the Libyan National Army (LNA), who is supported by Egypt and the United Arab Emirates.[122] Later in the year, Egypt and Russia signed an agreement that allowed Russian military jets to use Egyptian airspace and bases.[123] In November 2019, to demonstrate their resolve in further expanding their MTC relationship, Russian and Egyptian air defense units conducted a bilateral exercise named "Arrow of Friendship" to further air defense integration and interoperability between the two nations.[124] Integrated Egyptian-Russian units conducted training solely with Russian-made equipment for the duration of the exercise, which culminated in an air defense drill that simulated intercepting and downing an enemy unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV).[125] Notably, a Moroccan news source observing the exercise reported that the "enemy" UAVs were British- and American-made drones.[126]

Since its reemergence as a significant arms supplier to Egypt in 2014, Russia has thus far sold a Project 12421 (NATO designation Tarantul) guided-missile corvette ship, Egypt-Sat reconnaissance satellite, one Buk-M2, and three S-300 surface-to-air missile systems, fifty MiG-29 fighter aircraft, air search radars, fourteen transport and forty-six Ka-52 "Alligator" attack helicopters, and thousands of various missiles.[127] To further cement its military influence in Egypt, Moscow has inked deals to modernize previously

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[122] Phil Stewart, Idrees Ali, and Lin Noueihed, "Exclusive: Russia Appears to Deploy Forces in Egypt, Eyes on Libya Role," *Reuters*, March 14, 2017, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-russia-libya-exclusive-idUSKBN16K2RY.

[123] David D. Kirkpatrick, "In Snub to U.S., Russia and Egypt Move Toward Deal on Air Bases," *The New York Times*, November 30, 2017, sec. World, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/30/world/middleeast/russia-egypt-air-bases.html.

[124] Al-Youm Al-Masry, "Video: Egyptian-Russian Joint Exercise 'Arrow of Friendship – 1' Concludes," trans. Al-Youm Al-Masry, *Egypt Independent*, November 10, 2019, https://egyptindependent.com/video-egyptian-russian-joint-exercise-arrow-of-friendship-1-concludes/.

[125] "Russia, Egypt Conduct Joint Air Defense Exercise Near Cairo," TASS Russian News Agency, November 6, 2019, https://tass.com/defense/1087337.

[126] Hamza Guessous, "Morocco Sends Military Delegation to Observe Russia-Egypt 'Arrow of Friendship' Exercise," Morocco World News, November 12, 2019, https://www.moroccoworldnews.com/2019/11/286686/morocco-military-egypt-russia-exercise/.

[127] "Transfer of Major Weapons from the Russian Federation to Venezuela from 1991–2018."

purchased aging weapons.[128] Furthermore, Russian defense technology conglomerate Rostec has an office in Egypt to implement the political-military objectives of the Kremlin.[129] Emphasizing the growing MTC relationship between Moscow and Cairo, Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu stated, "Allow me to reaffirm that Russia deems higher defense capacities of Egypt to be a priority of bilateral military and military-technical cooperation."[130] Today, Russian-Egyptian MTC appears to have significant momentum at the expense of U.S. influence in Egypt.

c. Analysis

Russian MTC comes with fewer constraints than U.S. military and economic aid. Thus, Moscow is increasingly seen by Cairo as a more viable partner and a country whose power and influence is on the rise in the MENA region. When the U.S. suspended military aid to the Sisi regime, it gave it the necessary impetus to reduce its dependence on U.S. arms and allowed Moscow—by using MTC as an instrument of influence—to rapidly exploit an opening in Cairo-Washington relations. Since that time, Moscow and Cairo have been busy accelerating their MTC relationship.

Considering the wide-reaching impacts of this strategic partnership on the MENA region and beyond, analysis of the Moscow-Cairo MTC relationship must be comprehensive. In a geostrategic context, MTC has enabled Moscow to increase its military presence in Egypt through the presence of its advisers, access to bases and airspace, interoperability exercises, and repair and training facilities, which enables Moscow to project power across the MENA. The Mediterranean region has been a coveted prize for Moscow for centuries, and securing a strategic partnership—and potential basing agreements—with Egypt has provided Moscow the necessary access to expand the network

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[128] Nkala, "Russian Helicopters To Overhaul Egyptian Air Force Mi-8T, Mi-17 Fleet"; Interfax News Agency, "Egypt to Get Arms Worth $3.5 Bln from Russia Under Initialed Deals," *Russia & CIS General Newswire*, September 17, 2014, https://advance-lexis-com.libproxy.nps.edu/document/.

[129] Rosoboronexport, "Cooperation with Egypt," Partner Countries, accessed January 10, 2020, http://roe.ru/eng/export/egipet/.

[130] Interfax News Agency, "Moscow, Cairo Prioritize Higher Defense Capacity of Egypt in Their Military-Technical Cooperation - Shoigu," *Russia & CIS General Newswire*, November 12, 2019, https://advance-lexis-com.libproxy.nps.edu/document.

of Mediterranean facilities it now has in Syria. MTC has also enabled Cairo-Moscow cooperation in the Libyan civil war, with both parties aligned in their support for the Libyan opposition General Khalifa Haftar. Lastly, assessing Russian access and influence in Egypt should not be isolated to the MENA region alone. Moscow's presence in Egypt provides it another place to gain maritime access to the Red Sea and other strategic regions. Unrestricted air and maritime access through Egypt and the Suez Canal would be an essential requirement to connect Russia's planned logistics bases in the Red Sea countries of Sudan and Eritrea.[131]

3. Vietnam

In 2012, the Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev upgraded Vietnam-Russia relations to a "comprehensive strategic partnership," making Vietnam Russia's closest ally and MTC partner in Southeast Asia.[132] Highlighting the importance of this MTC relationship today, General Valery Gerasimov, Chief of Russian General Staff stated, "Our military and military-technical cooperation remain important elements of our comprehensive strategic partnership, which has noticeably intensified as of late."[133] Over the last decade, Moscow's intensification of its MTC relationship with Hanoi indicates the value it sees in maintaining its influence in Vietnam.

a. Background and History of Russia-Vietnam Military-Technical Cooperation

In 1950, the Soviet Union was the first country to recognize the Viet Minh government and remained a close ideological ally and arms benefactor throughout the Cold

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131 Paul Stronski, "Late to the Party: Russia's Return to Africa" (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, October 16, 2019), https://carnegieendowment.org/2019/10/16/late-to-party-russia-s-return-to-africa-pub-80056; Salem Solomon, "Russia-Eritrea Relations Grow with Planned Logistics Center," Voice of America, September 2, 2018, https://www.voanews.com/africa/russia-eritrea-relations-grow-planned-logistics-center.

132 Bennett Murray, "Russia's Awkward Dance with Vietnam" (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Foreign Policy Research Institute, October 2019), 11, https://www.fpri.org/article/2019/10/russias-awkward-dance-with-vietnam/.

133 Interfax News Agency, "Military and Technical Co-Operation; Russia, Vietnam Noticeably Intensify Military-Technical Cooperation as of Late - Russian General Staff Chief," *Russia & CIS Military Information Weekly*, August 16, 2019, http://search.proquest.com/docview/2278071969/citation/81BAAB382D0C4AABPQ/5.

War.[134] During North Vietnam's conflict with France and the United States, the Soviet Union was North Vietnam's most significant contributor of military equipment. From 1965 to 1968, the Soviet Union focused its MTC on fortifying North Vietnamese air defenses by equipping them with surface-to-air missiles, anti-aircraft weapons, radars, and fighter attack aircraft, accounting for approximately eighty percent of the total foreign military equipment provided to North Vietnam.[135] The last vestige of the Soviet-era military-technical relationship with Vietnam ended in 2002, when Russia withdrew its remaining signals-intelligence personnel from Vietnam's Cam Ranh Bay, one of the Soviet Union's most significant overseas naval bases.[136] Since that time, Vietnam has implemented its "three no's defense policy of no alliances, no foreign basing on its territory, and no alignment with a second country against a third."[137] Though Vietnam's three-nos policy prevents Moscow from re-establishing its overseas basing in Vietnam, Russia has still found opportunities to maintain a military presence, thereby actively assisting in Vietnam's efforts to modernize its military and increase its maritime security in the South China Sea.

b. Current State of Russia-Vietnam Military-Technical Cooperation

Russia seeks to maintain a strong MTC relationship with Vietnam as part of a broader strategy of increasing its political, economic, and military influence in Southeast Asia. Moscow also uses its MTC with Vietnam as leverage against rising U.S. influence in Hanoi as Vietnam seeks warmer relations with the United States. Over the last decade, Vietnam has invested heavily in modernizing its navy and air force and has recently added modern Russian tanks to its ground forces. Vietnam has procured four Mi-8MT/Mi-17

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134 Stratfor, "Russia Strengthens Ties With Vietnam," Stratfor, December 12, 2013, https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/russia-strengthens-ties-vietnam.

135 Directorate of Intelligence, "Communist Aid to North Vietnam," Intelligence Memorandum (Washington, DC: Central Intelligence Agency, March 7, 1968), https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/DOC_0000483828.pdf.

136 Phuong Nguyen, "What Should the United States Do about Cam Ranh Bay and Russia's Place in Vietnam?," *CogitASIA CSIS Asia Policy Blog* (blog), March 16, 2015, https://www.cogitasia.com/what-should-the-united-states-do-about-cam-ranh-bay-and-russias-place-in-vietnam/.

137 Derek Grossman and Christopher Sharman, "How to Read Vietnam's Latest Defense White Paper: A Message to Great Powers," War on the Rocks, December 31, 2019, https://warontherocks.com/2019/12/how-to-read-vietnams-latest-defense-white-paper-a-message-to-great-powers/.

transport helicopters, thirty-four Sukhoi Su-30MK2 "Flanker-F" multi-role combat aircraft, sixty-four T-90S and T-90SK main battle tanks, four Gepard-class frigates, eight Tarantul-class corvettes, six Svetlyak-class patrol vessels, and S-300 air and K-3000 Bastion coastal defense systems.[138] In 2009, Vietnam purchased six Russian diesel-electric submarines, and Russia dispatched military and technical specialists to assist Vietnam in establishing its submarine forces through extensive training of Vietnamese submariners, as well as helping to design and build new submarine facilities.[139]

Vietnam also granted Russian naval vessels use of Cam Ranh Bay facilities and use of its air facilities by Russian aerial refueling aircraft as long as Russia provides Hanoi with prior notice.[140] Moscow has transferred significant military technology to Hanoi, giving Vietnamese armed forces a domestic arms-manufacturing capability, further enhancing its military modernization and maritime security.[141] In 2019, Moscow held the first-ever arms show International Defense and Security Expo Vietnam in Hanoi, indicating that Hanoi sees Moscow as a preferred partner in MTC.[142] In April 2019, Rostec announced that it had opened a helicopter MRO facility in the city of Vung Tau, co-located with units of the Vietnam People's Air Force and commercial helicopter companies.[143] In an April 2019 press release announcing the opening of an MRO facility in Vietnam, Rostec articulated its "plan to actively expand the geography of our cooperation and start providing repair and support services of helicopter engines in India, China, Indonesia, Malaysia, Cambodia,

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138 Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, "Transfer of Major Weapons from Russian Federation to Vietnam 2000–2018," Trade Register: Russia to Vietnam 2000–2018, accessed December 4, 2019, http://armstrade.sipri.org/armstrade/page/trade_register.php.

139 Nguyen, "What Should the United States Do about Cam Ranh Bay and Russia's Place in Vietnam?"

140 Zachary Abuza, "Cam Ranh International Port Visits in Strategic Context," Center for International Maritime Security, May 23, 2016, http://cimsec.org/cam-ranh-international-port-visits-strategic-context/25368; Nguyen, "What Should the United States Do about Cam Ranh Bay and Russia's Place in Vietnam?"

141 International Trade Administration, "Vietnam - Defense Sector," Export.gov, July 19, 2018, https://www.export.gov/article?id=Vietnam-Defense-Sector.

142 "Defense and Security Expo Vietnam 2019 Exhibition in Hanoi," Press Service, October 2, 2019, http://roe.ru/eng/press-service/photo/dse-vietnam-2019-exhibition-in-hanoi/.

143 Prashanth Parameswaran, "What's in Russia's New Military Facility in Vietnam?," April 2019, https://thediplomat.com/2019/04/whats-in-russias-new-military-facility-in-vietnam/.

Thailand, Vietnam, Myanmar, Laos, Australia, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka,"[144] illustrating the wide-reaching use of MRO as a vital part of Russia's regional strategy in Asia.

c. Analysis

Russia has played a key role in Vietnam's effort to modernize its military. For Russia and other countries vying for influence in the region, Vietnam sits at a geographic pivot point in Southeast Asia. It lies close to the strategic Straits of Malacca and the South China Sea. it offers easy access to other economic markets in the region, and it is easily accessible by Russia's navy and commercial fleet located in Russia's far east. Moscow has helped Hanoi modernize its military capabilities through a combination of the sale of high-tech advanced maritime and aviation weapons, technology transfer, and MRO support.

In 2020, Vietnam ascends to the chairmanship of the increasingly influential Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). It assumes a two-year term as a member of the United Nations Security Council, giving Moscow an important ally in international organizations allowing it to reap the rewards of years of strong MTC to influence geopolitics in its favor.[145] However, Moscow's position as Hanoi's principal MTC partner is not guaranteed indefinitely. In May 2016, President Obama lifted a Vietnam War-era ban on the sale of lethal weapon sales to Vietnam, opening the door for greater competition with Russia in the Vietnamese arms market.[146] Also, as Vietnam seeks to further its independent foreign policy, it has sought to diversify its military-technical cooperation with other arms-exporting countries like Israel.[147] Regardless, Moscow will continue to maintain its competitive advantage in military-technical cooperation with Vietnam for the

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144 "Rostec Opens Helicopter Engines Repair Center in Vietnam," Press Release, April 22, 2019, https://rostec.ru/en/media/pressrelease/rostec-opens-helicopter-engines-repair-center-in-vietnam/.

145 "Current Members of the United Nations Security Council," United Nations, accessed January 11, 2020, https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/content/current-members.

146 Gardiner Harris, "Vietnam Arms Embargo to Be Fully Lifted, Obama Says in Hanoi," *New York Times*, May 23, 2016, sec. World, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/24/world/asia/vietnam-us-arms-embargo-obama.html.

147 Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, "Transfer of Major Weapons from Russian Federation to Vietnam 2000–2018."

foreseeable future and may reap the rewards of its longstanding MTC relations with Hanoi sooner than later.

C. CONCLUSION

Moscow's military-technical cooperation with Venezuela, Egypt, and Vietnam has increased the combat capability and readiness of these states to respond to internal and external threats more effectively and will go far in serving Moscow's broader regional interests. In all three cases, Moscow has stated that it plans to develop a regional system of life-cycle logistics support for its systems. This emphasis on logistics is an apparent attempt to correct the Soviet legacy of poor maintenance practices, which was a source of complaint and frustration by Soviet client states. By offering a high-caliber product with rapid and high-quality service without conditions, Moscow gains greater access and influence in the host country. Most importantly, Moscow is establishing MRO facilities to service Russian-made helicopters, which are favored among many nations globally. MRO facilities enable Moscow's presence and access to key leaders in the client's country without having large military bases that draw negative attention. Also, Russian trainers, technicians, and advisers who staff these MRO facilities are human intelligence assets that can provide Moscow with timely information on the use and employment of Russian equipment. These broader geostrategic implications emphasize the need for further analysis of MTC and its significance to regional security.

III. PUTIN'S PROXIES: PRIVATE MILITARY AND SECURITY COMPANIES IN THE AGE OF PUTIN

Since 2013, Russian Private Military and Security Companies (PMSC) have become an expeditionary capability that create an asymmetric advantage for Moscow in the great power competition for global influence.[148] PMCSs are a rapidly deployable force that quickly move to hot spots around the globe to influence the local situation and shape outcomes favorable to Moscow. PMSCs can provide legitimate services in compliance with international standards and at the same time cross the threshold of legality by serving as a hostile force on behalf of Moscow in an internal dispute. This duality of Russian PMSCs allows Moscow to tailor the PMSC force to its needs while enabling the PMSC to maximize profits through its deals with the host nation government or local warlords. As a result, PMSCs have become Moscow's proxy force of choice, and as Thomas D. Arnold states, "PMSCs will become an increasingly integral component of the Kremlin's foreign policy."

However, while it is clear that PMSCs are being deployed with increasing frequency, what Russian PMSCs are doing on the ground and how effective they have been at achieving Moscow's objectives remains ambiguous. Understanding these activities is important because proxy forces add a level of complexity on the battlefield by obfuscating the nature of Moscow's involvement in the affairs of other states, which makes attribution of its actions difficult in the international court of opinion. This complexity is of particular significance for the U.S. military, as it will likely have to share battlespace with these armed groups, which may increase the risk of confrontation. The ambiguity of PMSCs' tactical activity and their relationship with the Russian state, combined with the frequency with which they are employed, increases the probability that the United States could be unintentionally drawn into armed conflict with Russia—especially when PMSCs are acting on behalf of the Kremlin's interests and when the stakes are high enough to necessitate

[148] Sergey Sukhankin, "The 'Hybrid' Role of Russian Mercenaries, PMCs and Irregulars in Moscow's Scramble for Africa," War By Other Means: Russia's Use of Private Military Contractors at Home and Abroad, January 10, 2020, https://jamestown.org/program/the-hybrid-role-of-russian-mercenaries-pmcs-and-irregulars-in-moscows-scramble-for-africa/.

action by the United States. Understanding Russian PMSCs' activities and capabilities is essential for policymakers and military strategists to craft strategies that account for PMSC activity and prevent unnecessary escalation.

Thus, the objective of this chapter is to describe how Moscow is employing PMSCs and to analyze how they help achieve its objectives. It begins with a definition of PMSCs and proxy warfare and briefly lays the historical context of the Soviet Union's use of proxy forces during the Cold War, then examines three countries where Moscow has employed or is employing PMSCs to achieve its objectives: Syria, Libya, and the Central African Republic (CAR). Syria serves as a particularly instructive case study, as it is where Russian PMSCs were first reported to have been employed and whose purpose is frequently regarded as securing energy infrastructure. Libya's geostrategic location on the Mediterranean Sea and significant energy resources make it important for Southern European energy security and safety. Moscow is employing PMSCs in Libya to provide support to Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar, leader of Libya National Army (LNA),[149] which may offer Russia access to additional bases, economic opportunities via energy concessions, and geopolitical clout in the MENA region. The CAR lies in the geographic center of the African continent, giving Moscow access to the wider region. It is wealthy in natural resources and rare metals, which gives Moscow an economic incentive to hold influence there. In addition, a United Nations Security Council authorization to supply arms and military instructors to the Central African Armed Force (FACA) gives Moscow the geopolitical legitimacy to maintain a PMSC presence.

Examination of these cases reveals that Russian PMSCs are ultimately limited in their effectiveness. In Syria and Libya, using PMSCs to support offensive operations has not had the decisive effects that were intended. In both cases, when facing an opponent backed by capable militaries, Russian PMSCs were unable to achieve their tactical objectives and tended to suffer higher casualties than normal military forces. In Libya, this may have precipitated a change in Moscow's proxy strategy from using trained Russian-speaking fighters to training locals from Syria and importing them to fight in Libya. As

[149] Tarek Megerisi, "Libya's Global Civil War," Policy Brief (European Council on Foreign Relation, n.d.), https://www.ecfr.eu/page/-/libyas_global_civil_war1.pdf.

Moscow seeks to minimize Russian casualties, using foreign fighters under the command and control of Russian PMSCs has the dual benefit of saving face and maintaining domestic approval while maintaining plausible deniability with the international community.

That said, though there are limits to PMSCs' effectiveness, the opacity of PMSC activities and the signal sent by their presence creates fear and mistrust in both internal and external actors in a conflict. In Libya, statements by Turkey's president Reccip Tayyip Erdoğan indicate that the presence of Russian PMSCs was a driver behind his decision to intervene on behalf of the Government of National Accord (GNA). In the CAR, the training and equipping of the CAR's security services by PMSCs have driven some of the opposition groups to forsake political reconciliation and continue to arm themselves. These cases suggest that PMSCs create a security dilemma for Moscow, which, if not carefully managed, could drag it into armed conflict with regional powers or further destabilize the country it is intending to influence, which may work against Moscow's long-term goals.

A. BACKGROUND

1. Soviet Proxy War: Cuba as the Conduit for Soviet Objectives

Russia's use of PMSCs has historical antecedents in the Cold War, when proxy warfare became a defining attribute of the great power competition between the United States and the Soviet Union. As Andrew Mumford states, "It was during this period that proxy wars became a frequently used vehicle by strong states for achieving strategic goals within, and beyond, their self-styled 'spheres of influence.'"[150] The use of proxy forces between the United States and the Soviet Union became a global struggle, spanning continents and lasting decades. For example, the Cuba-Soviet relationship formed one of Moscow's most significant patron-client relationships. As one of Moscow's most important allies, Cuba offered many useful advantages to Moscow's global communist ambitions by spreading the communist ideology and its revolutionary call to arms. Also, Cuban proxy forces served as a ready testbed for new Soviet equipment, weaponry, and tactics, techniques and procedures. Many Cold War observers labelled Cuba a proxy for

[150] Andrew Mumford, *Proxy Warfare* (Cambridge, UK : Polity Press, 2013), 46.

the Soviets, some even going so far as to call the Cubans "Moscow's Gurkhas," a reference to the Nepalese mercenaries often used as proxy forces by the British Army.[151]

The frequency and scale to which Cuba was employed made it a critical tool of Soviet power projection. The Department of Defense's 1983 report *Soviet Military Power* claimed that "The Cubans, although they perform many advisory functions, are most important because they provide the manpower for military operations."[152] A capable proxy of the Soviet Union, Cuba provided Moscow with a rapidly deployable intervention force. It is estimated that Cuba was involved in approximately seventeen conflicts in Africa and the Middle East, with some of the most significant contributions of personnel and military aid going to the Angolan and Ethiopian conflicts.[153] Between 1975 and 1991, it is believed that Cuba deployed up to 500,000 personnel to Angola.[154]

Today, Moscow does not have a client state as a proxy force to achieve its objectives. Instead, it uses PMSCs, which are gaining wider support from Moscow as a tool to achieve its objectives. The question to be answered is, how effective have PMSCs' tactical activities been in helping Moscow achieve its objectives and expand its influence?

2. Defining PMSCs

Several scholars have created typologies and analytic frameworks to describe the activities PMSCs perform, the incentives that guide their activity, and the capabilities that translate into the amount of force they might apply.[155] Major Thomas Arnold offers a modification of Peter Singer's widely used typology of Western PMSCs because "it [Singer's typology] does not distinguish between lethal force contracted for defensive or

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151 Edward George, *The Cuban Intervention in Angola, 1965–1991: From Che Guevara to Cuito Cuanavale* (London: Routledge, 2012), 275.

152 Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Soviet Military Power* (Washington, D.C.: Department of Defense, 1983), 92.

153 Porter, *The USSR in Third World Conflicts: Soviet Arms and Diplomacy in Local Wars, 1945–1980*, 55.

154 George, *The Cuban Intervention in Angola, 1965–1991: From Che Guevara to Cuito Cuanavale*, 1.

155 Reference analytic works

offensive purposes."[156] Therefore, in an attempt to distinguish between Western-style and Russian PMSCs, Arnold dissects Singer's military provider categorization by making a distinction between private security companies (PSC), whose primary role is defense and protection, and private military companies (PMC), whose primary role is offensive tasks.[157]

However, as Tor Bukkvoll and Gilje Ostenson argue, "While this distinction [between private security and private military companies] may be analytically useful, many companies will operate on both sides of the divide, which gives the distinction limited practical value."[158] Though typologies organize and provide structure to enable comparative analysis, they create the impression that a label pre-determines a group's activity. Bukvoll and Ostenson therefore "collapse" the term into PMSC to capture the Western (defensive nature) and the Russian (offensive nature) sides of the industry.[159] Recognizing the naturally amorphous nature of Russian PMSCs, which can take on varying forms and functions depending on the conditions of the environment in which they are deployed, this chapter uses the more adaptable term PMSC.

PMSCs have become a mainstay in contemporary conflict, and according to Andrew Mumford, PMSCs will become "proxy war-wagers of the future."[160] His book *Proxy Warfare* defines a proxy war as follows:

> Proxy wars are the indirect engagement in a conflict by third parties wishing to influence its strategic outcome. They are constitutive of a relationship between a benefactor, who is a state or non-state actor external to the dynamic of an existing conflict, and their chosen proxies who are the conduit for weapons, training and funding from the benefactor. Such arm's-

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156 Thomas D. Arnold, "The Geoeconomic Dimensions of Russian Private Military and Security Companies," *Military Review*, no. November-December 2019: 9, accessed November 19, 2019, https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/Military-Review/English-Edition-Archives/November-December-2019/Arnold-Geoeconomic-Dimensions/.

157 Arnold, 8.

158 Tor Bukkvoll and Ase Gilje Ostenson, "Russian Use of Private Military and Security Companies - the Implications for European and Norwegian Security" (Norwegian Defence Research Establishment (FFI), September 11, 2018), 9, https://www.cmi.no/publications/6637-russian-use-of-private-military-and-security.

159 Bukkvoll and Ostenson, 9.

160 Mumford, *Proxy Warfare*, 81.

> length interventions are undertaken ostensibly for reasons of maximizing interests, while at the same time minimizing risk. In short, proxy wars are the logical replacement for states seeking to further their own strategic goals yet at the same time avoid engaging in direct, costly and bloody warfare.[161]

3. Who Employs PMSCs

Though PMSCs and the personnel who work for them (often referred to as mercenaries) are officially outlawed in Russia, most scholars agree that the Kremlin is a benefactor and that PMSCs act as a conduit for achieving its objectives. As such, PMSCs operate in a gray area outside of domestic legal frameworks, interacting with state and non-state actors to achieve Moscow's objectives while seeking to maximize profits as private entities. Recognizing the duality of these emerging instruments of power, Kimberly Marten aptly describes them as "semi-state security forces."[162]

There is ample evidence to indicate that PMSCs have direct links to the Kremlin's power structures. A notorious PMSC, The Wagner Group, also known as Wagner PMC, is a Russian paramilitary organization believed to be financed by Yevgeny Prigozhin, a businessman with close ties to Putin and the Kremlin, and was founded by Retired Lt. Col. Dmitri Utkin, callsign "Wagner," a unit commander for the Slavonic Corps—the first PMSC to believe to have been deployed to Syria.[163] Investigative journalists have tracked the location of a Wagner Group training camp to the village of Molkino, in Russia's Krasnodar region.[164] This base is also located next to a facility operated by the Main Intelligence Directorate of the Russian General Staff. Moreover, Yevgeny Prigozhin was captured on Russian television participating in high-level meetings between Russia's Minister of Defense, Sergey Shoigu, and LNA leader General Khalifa Haftar in November

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161 Mumford, 11.

162 Kimberly Marten, "Russia's Use of Semi-State Security Forces: The Case of the Wagner Group," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 35, no. 3 (May 4, 2019): 1, https://doi.org/10.1080/1060586X.2019.1591142.

163 Sukhankin, "War, Business and Ideology."

164 Tim Lister, Sebastian Shukla, and Clarissa Ward, "Putin's Private Army Is Trying to Increase Russia's Influence in Africa," accessed April 6, 2020, https://www.cnn.com/interactive/2019/08/africa/putins-private-army-car-intl.

2018.[165] And though their activities are technically illegal according to Russian law, PMSC operators have been given combat decorations from the Russian state for their participation in overseas conflicts.[166] Though not direct evidence of state control, rewarding PMSC operators with military decorations is a recognition of their utility, effectiveness, and sacrifice on behalf of the state. During a June 20, 2019 press conference Vladimir Putin essentially confirmed the semi-state function of PMSCs, claiming that they were in Syria to

> deal with issues of an economic nature, related to economic operations: oil production, field development. Of course, we recognize that even in dealing with these national economic problems, like we said before, these people are risking their lives, on the whole, this too is a contribution to the fight against terrorism because they are fighting off deposit fields - from whom? From Islamic State.[167]

Regardless of whether PMSCs are serving as private actors seeking monetary gain or acting on behalf of Moscow's interest, PMSCs have become a common feature in conflicts where Moscow believes it can further its interests. The confluence of conflict and national interest provides ample opportunity for Moscow to employ PMSCs as a way of exploring new ways to achieve its objectives.

B. CASE STUDY: SYRIA

Russian PMSCs have reportedly been very active in securing energy infrastructure in Syria, an area where Moscow has positioned itself to reap significant economic and geostrategic benefits from the oil and natural gas industry. There are multiple parties currently engaged in a competition over Syrian energy infrastructure, including the United

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165 Irek Murtazin, "Something Is Cooking in This Kitchen: Yevgeny Prigozhin Took Part in the Negotiations of the Minister of Defense of Russia with the Libyan Marshal. What Would That Mean?," Новая газета - Novayagazeta.ru, November 9, 2018, https://www.novayagazeta.ru/articles/2018/11/09/78517-na-etoy-kuhne-chto-to-gotovitsya.

166 "Russian Mercenary Leader Attends Kremlin Banquet," *Moscow Times*, December 15, 2016, sec. news, https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2016/12/15/russian-mercenary-leader-attends-kremlin-banquet-a56549.

167 Interfax News Agency, "Private Security Companies' Employees Present in Syria but Not as Combatants - Part 2," *Russia & CIS General Newswire*, June 20, 2019, https://advance-lexis-com.libproxy.nps.edu/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:5WCW-C3P1-DYS4-D3KN-00000-00&context=1516831.

States, which currently protects—on behalf of its Kurdish allies the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)—some of Syria's largest and most productive oil fields. If and when Syria's conflict reaches its conclusion, the revenue from Syria's energy industry will play a critical role in post-conflict reconstruction efforts. The party or parties that control Syria's energy infrastructure will likewise have a significant influence in Syria's future. Until the conflict ends, energy infrastructure continues to be the prize that each group seeks to control, making this case study essential to understand how the tactical actions of PMSCs securing energy infrastructure can have more significant geopolitical and geostrategic effects.

1. Russian PMSC Activities in Syria

The first reported foray by a Russian PMSC in Syria came in 2013, when the St. Petersburg–based news outlet Fontanka uncovered the activities of the Slavonic Corps, a Russian PMSC registered in Hong Kong and found operating in Syria.[168] The investigation revealed that the Slavonic Corps was hired by a Syrian businessman to secure "key regime assets" behind government-controlled areas to free up much-needed regular Syrian Arab Army (SAA) units to liberate other regions.[169] Not long after their arrival, Slavonic Corps' employees realized that the 267 personnel recruited for guarding oil facilities were inadequately trained and equipped for the task of liberating energy infrastructure currently under the control of the Islamic State.[170] En route to its first objective, a group of Slavonic Corps operators, pro-regime militia, and SAA soldiers were ambushed and encircled by an overwhelming enemy force and forced to retreat near the Syrian village of Sukhnah. The group suffered only minor injuries but barely survived the operation.[171] Shortly after, the Slavonic Corps made headlines when two of its members were arrested for mercenary

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[168] The Interpreter, trans., "St. Petersburg Sends Contractors to Syria," The Interpreter, November 15, 2013, http://www.interpretermag.com/st-petersburg-sends-contractors-to-syria/.

[169] Denis Korotkov, "The Last Battle of the 'Slavonic Corps,'" trans. by The Interpreter, The Interpreter, November 16, 2013, http://www.interpretermag.com/the-last-battle-of-the-slavonic-corps/.

[170] Korotkov.

[171] Sergey Sukhankin, "Russian PMCs in the Syrian Civil War: From Slavonic Corps to Wagner Group and Beyond," War By Other Means: Russia's Use of Private Military Contractors at Home and Abroad, December 18, 2019, https://jamestown.org/program/russian-pmcs-in-the-syrian-civil-war-from-slavonic-corps-to-wagner-group-and-beyond/.

activity upon returning to Russia, becoming the first Russian citizens arrested for such overseas activities.[172]

Poorly equipped and ill-prepared, the Slavonic Corps' first and only mission ended in defeat. Sergey Sukhankin of the Jamestown Foundation assessed that three factors likely contributed to the Slavonic Corps' unsuccessful mission: "inadequate equipment and outdated weaponry," "poor coordination with Syrian Armed Forces," and "erroneous goal setting."[173] Dmitri Utkin would take the lessons learned from this experience and apply them to future engagements in Syria.[174]

Out of the ashes of the Slavonic Corps' 2013 debacle, the Wagner Group entered the Syrian conflict under Utkin's leadership.[175] Between 2014 and 2018, the Wagner Group appears to have assumed the role of a principal force in liberating Syrian energy infrastructure and territory from the Assad regime's enemies. As the Russian military took on a more expansive role in the Syrian conflict, other PMSCs likewise expanded their role.[176] Several scholars have noted that as Russia's military involvement increased, the Wagner Group took on a more militarized structure and organization to facilitate closer coordination and cooperation with the Russian military. In February 2016, Syria sent a delegation to Moscow to solicit help from the Russian Minister of Energy and several petroleum industry leaders in restoring Syria's energy infrastructure.[177] This trip may have been the catalyst for a notable energy deal the following year, between Evro Polis— a firm with reported connections to Wagner Group owner Yevgeny Prigozhin—and General Petroleum Corp, Syria's national oil company.[178] The AP claims that the contract

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[172] Korotkov, "The Last Battle of the 'Slavonic Corps.'"

[173] Sukhankin, "Russian PMCs in the Syrian Civil War."

[174] Sukhankin.

[175] Bukkvoll and Ostenson, "Russian Use of Private Military and Security Companies - the Implications for European and Norwegian Security," 25.

[176] Bukkvoll and Ostenson, 25–26; Sukhankin, "Russian PMCs in the Syrian Civil War."

[177] Nikita Sogoloff, "Russia's Energy Goals in Syria," August 30, 2017, https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/russias-energy-goals-in-syria.

[178] Marten, "Russia's Use of Semi-State Security Forces," 194.

stipulated that Evro Polis "would receive 25 percent of the proceeds from oil and gas production at fields its contractors capture and secure from Islamic State militants."[179]

As Moscow's support for the Assad regime ramped up, Wagner emerged as an essential asset for Moscow and the Assad regime alike. Wagner took on riskier missions, typically conducted by regular military forces as a result of better equipment, better training, and higher pay.[180] Missions ranged from offensive operations and combat support to training Syrian militias on the employment of advanced Russian-made weapons.[181] Most notably, the Wagner Group helped the Assad regime recapture the ancient city of Palmyra twice from the Islamic state. In late 2018, Ukrainian open-source intelligence site InformNapalm used photographic evidence and satellite imagery to geolocate a Wagner Group base that was providing local security and protection for a gas processing plant owned by the Hayan Petroleum Company located west of the city of Palmyra.

For a time, Wagner PMSC enjoyed several battlefield successes that elevated its credibility within the Kremlin and showcased its capabilities and demonstrated its potential utility in other conflicts. However, its run of good luck ended on February 7, 2018, when a group of approximately 500 pro-Assad fighters armed with Russian-made tanks, heavy weapons, and artillery attacked an outpost of elite U.S. Delta Force, Army Rangers, and their Kurdish-Arab partner force located near a Conoco natural gas field in the energy-rich Eastern Syrian area of Deir ez-Zor.[182] The ensuing four-hour battle left an estimated 200–300 of these pro-Assad fighters dead from American airpower.[183] The aftermath of the

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179 Nataliya Vasilyeva, "Thousands of Russian Private Contractors Fighting in Syria," AP NEWS, December 12, 2017, https://apnews.com/7f9e63cb14a54dfa9148b6430d89e873.

180 Sergey Sukhankin, "'Continuing War by Other Means': The Case of Wagner, Russia's Premier Private Military Company in the Middle East," in *Russian in the Middle East* (Washington, D.C.: The Jamestown Foundation, 2018), 300–308, jamestown.org.

181 Candace Rondeaux, "Decoding the Wagner Group: Analyzing the Role of Private Military Security Contractors in Russian Proxy Warfare" (Arizona State Center on the Future of War, November 5, 2019), 49–51, https://www.newamerica.org/international-security/reports/decoding-wagner-group-analyzing-role-private-military-security-contractors-russian-proxy-warfare/.

182 Thomas Gibbons-Neff, "How a 4-Hour Battle Between Russian Mercenaries and U.S. Commandos Unfolded in Syria," *New York Times*, May 24, 2018, sec. World, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/24/world/middleeast/american-commandos-russian-mercenaries-syria.html.

183 Kimberly Marten, "The Puzzle of Russian Behavior in Deir Al-Zour," War on the Rocks, July 5, 2018, https://warontherocks.com/2018/07/the-puzzle-of-russian-behavior-in-deir-al-zour/.

battle revealed that a large portion of the deceased fighters were members of the Wagner Group.[184] As reported by the *New York Times*, the group's motive was to recapture and secure the Conoco natural gas field and its infrastructure for the Assad regime.[185] This failure marked the end of Wagner Group's successes and thrust them into the spotlight of international scrutiny.[186]

The Slavonic Corps and the Wagner Group's activities can be characterized mostly as offensive tasks that diverged from the defend, protect, and supply tasks of Western PMSCs.[187] During this period other companies also emerged to protect Syria's energy infrastructure. Using researchers inside Syria, New America's Candace Rondeaux confirmed that two new Russian PMSCs—Patriot and Vega Strategic Services Ltd.—had entered the Syrian market to

> provide infrastructure protection and oversight of at least six major projects backed by Russian and Syrian members of the joint business council, including pipeline and infrastructure construction projects managed by HESCO Co. for STG [Stroytransgaz] in Deir ez-Zor, Homs and Tartus, and power generation projects managed by Technopromexport. Security details for all the projects are additionally manned by local pro-Assad militias trained almost exclusively by Russian PMSCs.[188]

Vega is one of the first PMSCs to emerge in Syria reflecting the traditional roles of Western PMSCs in performing training services.[189] In March 2019, the open-source intelligence organization Conflict Intelligence Team (CIT) reported that this group had been actively training local pro-Assad Palestinian militia Liwa al-Quds to conduct

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184 Marten.

185 Gibbons-Neff, "How a 4-Hour Battle Between Russian Mercenaries and U.S. Commandos Unfolded in Syria."

186 Sukhankin, "'Continuing War by Other Means': The Case of Wagner, Russia's Premier Private Military Company in the Middle East," 307.

187 Rondeaux, "Decoding the Wagner Group," 49.

188 Rondeaux, 49. Note: "HESCO Co is a Syrian engineering firm that has partnered closely with STG on projects in Syria (page 46)." STG "public joint-stock company founded in 1990, originally as a subsidiary of Gazprom. Involved in the construction of hydrocarbon industry infrastructure in Russia, post-Soviet countries and the Middle East (page 66)." "Technopromexport is engineering firm partially owned by Russia's top arms purveyor, Rostec (page 42)."

189 Ruslan Leviev, "Vega: A New PMC in Syria with Ties to Russia and Ukraine," Conflict Intelligence Team, March 28, 2019, https://citeam.org/russian-ukrainian-pmc-vega-in-syria/?lang=en.

offensive operations while refraining from direct participation in offensive operations themselves.[190] In July 2019, Russian-language news outlet *Novaya Gazeta* reported that three Russians from the Russian PMSC Shchit (Shield) were killed in Syria protecting energy infrastructure on behalf of the Russian joint stock company STG. At the time of the article, *Novaya Gazeta* sources reported that STG was employing PMSC Shield to protect about five of its projects—which may have included two processing plants and a 139 km–long gas pipeline—with 25–30 people protecting each site.[191] All of these activities in Syria are strongly linked to Moscow, yet they operate in the shadows, granting Russia plausible deniability.

2. Analysis

Securing Syrian energy infrastructure would give Moscow significant influence over a major source of revenue and put itself in a powerful position regarding the domestic affairs in post-conflict Syria. As noted by Middle East scholar Nikita Sogoloff, Russia likely wants to secure Syrian energy infrastructure because "By controlling significant portions of Syrian energy infrastructure…Russia can not only rationalize its military presence as a defense of its economic interests, but also exert greater influence over the Syrian government, securing the regime's support for any favorable policies."[192] This has the potential to reap significant rewards for Moscow, as Syria's energy infrastructure could link the region's oil and natural gas producers to the European market.

Given all the efforts by Russian PMSCs to secure the Syrian energy infrastructure, one can reasonably expect that their involvement would have a positive effect on oil production. Despite these efforts, however, Russian PMSCs have not had a discernible positive effect on Syria's oil production. According to British Petroleum's 2019 *Statistical*

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[190] Leviev. Note: The CIT report has largely been corroborated by the Atlantic Council's Digital Forensic Research Lab. For more info on DFRL's reporting on PMC Vega's activity in Syria visit, https://medium.com/dfrlab/putinatwar-more-mercenaries-menace-mesopotamia-6b97877e7927 or https://medium.com/dfrlab/a-deeper-look-into-vegacy-strategic-services-ltd-8985ba3eac52

[191] Denis Korotkov, "Without the 'Shield,'" trans. Google Translate, Novayagazeta.ru, July 28, 2019, https://www.novayagazeta.ru/articles/2019/07/28/81406-bez-schita.

[192] Sogoloff, "Russia's Energy Goals in Syria."

Review of World Energy, Syria's oil production has in fact declined from 59,000 bpd to 24,000 bpd since Russian PMSCs reportedly began operating in Syria with the stated goal of protecting energy infrastructure in 2013.[193] If Russian PMSCs were effectively protecting Syrian energy infrastructure, one would likely see at least moderate increases in production. Also, Russian PMSCs have failed to prevent attacks on some of Syria's most important oil and gas facilities. On June 22, 2019, unknown saboteurs blew up the underwater oil and natural gas pipeline at the Baniyas oil terminal just north of the Russian naval base at Tartous.[194] The Baniyas pipeline is one of the few links the Syrian energy industry has for oil imports and exports. More recently, in February 2020, opposition groups conducted a sophisticated drone attack that simultaneously targeted critical energy facilities at Al-Rayyan, South Central Region gas factory, Ebla gas factory, and the Homs refinery.[195] The ability of opposition groups to plan, coordinate, and execute sophisticated attacks against targets under the regime's control demonstrates the limited effectiveness of using Russian PMSCs to secure these key pieces of infrastructure. This ineffectiveness reduces Syria's ability to generate much-needed revenue and reduces Moscow's ability to use the protection of energy infrastructure as a means to influence the Assad regime and to justify its overt military presence in Syria.

Based on the available evidence, it is possible to draw some general conclusions about Russian PMSC activity in Syria. Most reports associate their activity with protecting and liberating Syria's energy infrastructure, which, like other military activities in conflict zones, necessitates adaptability on the part of PMSCs. In Syria, PMSCs' activities can be broadly divided into three types of activities: local security and protection, offensive combat, and training partner forces to conduct the first two activities. In the execution of offensive operations, Russian PMSCs have had little success in liberating Syria's most

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[193] Bob Dudley and Spencer Dale, "BP Statistical Review of World Energy 2019" (London, United Kingdon: British Petroleum, 2019), https://www.bp.com/en/global/corporate/energy-economics/statistical-review-of-world-energy.html.

[194] Tom O'Connor, "Attacks Hit Syrian Oil and Gas Under Government Control as U.S. Military Maintains Hold on Oil Fields in East," *Newsweek*, February 6, 2020, https://www.newsweek.com/us-hold-east-oil-syria-attacks-government-1485958.

[195] O'Connor.

productive oil fields and infrastructure. With the United States guarding some of these oil fields, it is unlikely that Russian PMSCs will risk another attack against energy infrastructure that is being guarded by professional military forces. Seeking control over Syria's energy infrastructure might be driving Moscow's use of PMSCs; however, there is insufficient evidence to conclude that PMSCs are even providing a modicum of security, much less effectively protecting Syria's critical energy infrastructure. Nevertheless, the Syrian civil war did afford the Russian PMSC industry ample opportunity to learn, adapt, and expand its operations, and, as the next case study reveals, Russian PMSCs are innovating to avoid the mistakes made in Syria.

C. CASE STUDY: LIBYA

The 2011 NATO-backed operation that overthrew Muammar Qaddafi—Libya's long-time authoritarian ruler—created a security vacuum that was subsequently filled by numerous ethnic factions, warlords, terrorist groups, and Western powers. Libya has become an arena for great power competition, where the geostrategic, geopolitical, and geoeconomic interests of regional powers have collided in a proxy war for who can have the most influence on the outcome of the turmoil. As Tarek Megerisi from the European Council on Foreign Relations warns, Libya "could become a far-reaching proxy conflict on Europe's southern border."[196]

Moscow seeks to influence the Libyan outcome in order to position itself as regional leader in the MENA. It also has economic interests, since Libya has the largest proven oil reserves in Africa, making it a significant player in the global energy market. However, its oil production has been significantly hampered since the onset of hostilities.[197] In the 2000s, Russian energy companies had made significant investments in Libyan oil and natural gas exploration and infrastructure, reportedly to gain greater

196 Megerisi, "Libya's Global Civil War."

197 United States Energy Information Administration, "2015 Libya Enegy Data, Statistics, and Analysis" (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Energy Information Administration, November 19, 2015), www.eia.doe.gov.

access and influence in the Southern European energy market.[198] Unlike in Venezuela, where Moscow maintained its influence as long-established MTC agreements were honored during the time of political turmoil, in Libya, Moscow lost billions in investments, arms deals, and infrastructure projects when Qaddafi was overthrown by North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) forces operating under a UN mandate.[199] Thus, Moscow's economic interests in Libya may significantly reinforce its perception that it needs a military presence in Libya to protect future investments. Adding Libya to its list of partners that it can expand basing agreements with would bolster its growing presence in the Mediterranean region. Geopolitically, Moscow could use its regional partnerships with Egypt and the United Arab Emirates—which also support the LNA— to influence political outcomes in Libya, further solidifying Moscow's desired image as a great power.

1. Russian PMSC Activities in Libya

Initial reports of Russian PMSCs in Libya emerged in 2017, when a little-known security company, the RSB-Group (Russian Security Systems), was reportedly conducting de-mining operations in and around oil and natural gas facilities captured by the LNA and conducting security operations to protect ships and oil tankers in and around Benghazi.[200] The RSB-Group's leader, Oleg Krinitsyn, claimed in a Reuters interview that the company had pulled out of the country in February 2017, after successfully completing its mission.[201] Krinitsyn stated that some of his employees were veterans of PMSC work in Syria but pointed out that they had fulfilled non-combat roles. When asked if his work was authorized by Moscow, Krinitsyn claimed the group was there for private commercial

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198 Mark N. Katz, "The Russian-Libyan Rapprochement: What Has Moscow Gained?," *Middle East Policy* 15, no. 3 (200809): 122–28, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-4967.2008.00363.x.

199 Tom Balmforth, "For Russia, Qaddafi's Downfall Is No Cause For Celebration," RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty, October 25, 2011, https://www.rferl.org/a/moscow_not_celebrating_qaddafi_downfall/24370945.html.

200 Grzegorz Kuczyński, "Civil War in Libya: Russian Goals and Policy," Special Report (Warsaw, Poland: Warsaw Institute, April 30, 2019), 25, https://warsawinstitute.org/civil-war-libya-russian-goals-policy/.

201 Maria Tsvetkova, "Exclusive: Russian Private Security Firm Says It Had Armed Men in East Libya," Reuters, March 10, 2017, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-libya-contractors-idUSKBN16H2DM.

purposes and was only "consulting with the Russian Foreign Ministry."[202] Whether the RSB-Group's activities were purely private or not, Sergey Sukhankin claims that "[RSB-Group's] mission should be viewed as a combination of economic interests and, arguably, intelligence gathering/surveillance, which could have been used for preparing the ground for more 'serious' players."[203] Around the time RSB-Group was concluding its mission, Reuters reported the presence of Russian Spetsnaz and drones at an airbase in Western Egypt about 60 miles from the Libya-Egypt border, potentially close enough to be able to operate in Libya from Egypt.[204] If Sukhankin's suspicions about RSB-Group's real purpose are correct, it is reasonable to assume that the base in western Egypt was for conducting intelligence collection and target development inside of Libya. The close timing of the RSB-Group and Spetsnaz deployments may indicate a coherent planning effort from within the Kremlin and cooperation between the LNA, Russian military, and Egyptian military.

As the RSB-Group's mission was coming to an end, the prospect of a "serious" player was about to emerge. In February 2017, the Wagner Group was making headlines in Syria for its assistance in training, equipping, and advising the SAA, which enabled it to seize roughly 3,000 square km in approximately 48 hours.[205] Using PMSCs to quickly seize territory was a model that likely caught the interest of General Haftar, the commander of the LNA. In a March 3, 2019 news report, the British newspaper *The Telegraph* reported that British intelligence sources had assessed that the Wagner Group was providing support to Haftar's offensive operations. The article's sources claimed that the Wagner Group "has been supporting Khalifa Haftar with 300 personnel in Benghazi and has supplied his

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202 Tsvetkova.

203 Sergey Sukhankin, "Continuation of Policy by Other Means: Russian Private Military Contractors in the Libyan Civil War," Jamestown, February 7, 2020, https://jamestown.org/program/continuation-of-policy-by-other-means-russian-private-military-contractors-in-the-libyan-civil-war/.

204 Phil Stewart, Idrees Ali, and Lin Noueihed, "Exclusive: Russia Appears to Deploy Forces in Egypt, Eyes on Libya Role," Reuters, March 14, 2017, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-russia-libya-exclusive-idUSKBN16K2RY.

205 Chris Tomson, "Syrian Army Annihilates ISIS in Homs, Reopens All Roads between Palmyra and Damascus," *AMN - Al-Masdar News* (blog), May 25, 2017, https://www.almasdarnews.com/article/syrian-army-annihilates-isis-homs-reopens-roads-palmyra-damascus/.

Libyan National Army with artillery, tanks, drones and ammunition."[206] Leaked internal communications from within Prigozhin's business network confirm these reports. The correspondence of Valery Chekalov, a businessman and director of a Prigozhin subsidiary company called Neva, dated March 12, 2019, reveals precisely the level of logistics and sustainment support provided by PMSC Wagner Group to the LNA: the documents reveal that a team of 23 specialists conducted inspections and repairs of hundreds of LNA tanks, armored vehicles, trucks, and self-propelled artillery pieces.[207] Table 1 details the quantity and quality of the equipment that was inspected and repaired by Russian PMSCs prior to Haftar's Western offensive to capture Tripoli.[208] The proximity of the repairs to Haftar's offensive, combined with the systematic and detailed nature of the repairs, suggests at least a minimum level of coordination between Moscow, the PMSC, and the LNA.

Table 1. From the Internal Communications of Valery Chekalov, an Associate of Yevgeny Prigozhin.[209]

	Hardware name	Inspected	Damage detected	Minor repairs made	Restored
1	T-55 Tank	100	67	16	31
2	T-62 Tank	35	31	4	9
3	T-72 Tank	10	7		1
4	BMP-1	77	57	14	4
5	BTR-60	210	126	32	
6	ARV	21	9	3	
7	BRDM-2	41	30	3	1
8	2S1	20	11	1	6
9	BM-21	6	3		
10	Military Trucks	5			
11	MTLB	10	4		
12	2S3	1			
	Total	**536**	**345**	**73**	**52**

206 Alec Luhn and Dominic Nicholls, "Russian Mercenaries Back Libyan Rebel Leader as Moscow Seeks Influence in Africa," *Telegraph*, March 3, 2019, https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2019/03/03/russian-mercenaries-back-libyan-rebel-leader-moscow-seeks-influence/.

207 Pierre Vaux, "Briefing on the Work of the Repair Brigade from the Russian Federation in Libya," The Interpreter, September 12, 2019, http://www.interpretermag.com/briefing-on-the-work-of-the-repair-brigade-from-the-russian-federation-in-libya/.

208 Vaux.

209 Source: Vaux.

As Moscow's efforts to provide support for Haftar ramped up, the Wagner Group established two military bases in the eastern coastal cities of Benghazi and Tobruk.[210] On April 4, 2019, with support from Moscow, the LNA began major operations to capture the city of Tripoli, the nation's capital, where a third of the total population lives—the last remaining Government of National Accord (GNA) stronghold.[211] In an attempt to make a swift and aggressive thrust against the GNA forces and capture Tripoli, Wagner operators deployed to the front lines in direct support of offensive operations.[212] However, the LNA was unable to capitalize on early successes in its western offensive, and the battle for Tripoli stalled into a stalemate.

In November 2019, Western media began reporting about the impacts that professional Wagner operators were having on the course of the battle. Citing local sources, the *Washington Post*'s Suarsan Raghavan reported that Wagner deployed snipers and artillery specialists to the frontlines to wreak havoc on the opposing forces.[213] Wagner's training of LNA militias had a noticeable impact on battlefield tactics, techniques, and procedures, shifting them from daytime battles at longer distances to nighttime battles and at closer distance. One doctor treating GNA casualties lamented the Russians' impact on the battlefield, observing that "the timing of battles, the types of injuries, the way people are dying, it's all changed now."[214] Wagner's presence was again felt when, in November 2019, it was reported that Wagner operators or LNA air defense units operating Russian

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[210] Kuczyński, "Civil War in Libya: Russian Goals and Policy," 26.

[211] Kuczyński, 5.

[212] Sudarsan Raghavan, "Arrival of Russian Mercenaries Adds Deadlier Firepower, Modern Tactics to Libya's Civil War," *Washington Post*, November 5, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/arrival-of-russian-mercenaries-adds-deadlier-firepower-modern-tactics-to-libyas-civil-war/2019/11/05/f330820c-fa03-11e9-9534-e0dbcc9f5683_story.html.

[213] Raghavan.

[214] Raghavan.

systems shot down a U.S. drone conducting surveillance over Tripoli, drawing a strong rebuke and demands of its return from U.S. AFRICOM.[215]

Wagner's presence clearly had a psychological effect on the GNA and its backers. As the Wagner Group became increasingly involved in the Libyan conflict, Turkey entered the conflict on behalf of the GNA, providing the GNA with much-needed military support.[216] Almost immediately, Turkey brought in airpower to wrest momentum away from the LNA. In September 2019, Turkish airpower struck a command post located in a building near the LNA frontlines and killed an estimated 10–35 Wagner operators.[217] During this time, both Turkey and Russia had been using diplomatic measures to end the stalemate between the GNA and LNA over Tripoli and prevent escalation between Moscow and Ankara. A January 12, 2020, GNA-LNA cease-fire brokered between Ankara and Moscow may have marked a change in Moscow's proxy war strategy from using Russians to do the fighting to importing fighters from conflicts where Russian PMSCs have a presence. The day before the cease-fire was supposed to take effect, Turkish media cited local GNA commanders who claimed that the Wagner Group was withdrawing from the frontlines in Tripoli.[218] However, this withdrawal did not necessarily spell the end of PMSC presence in Libya, because only a couple of weeks later, *The Libya Observer* reported that two new Russian PMSCs—the Moran Group and Shchit (Shield)—had entered the Libyan conflict, bringing with them Syrian contractors who had worked for the

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215 Shawn Snow, "AFRICOM Demands Return of U.S. Drone Shot down by Russian Air Defenses over Libya," Military Times, December 10, 2019, https://www.militarytimes.com/flashpoints/2019/12/10/africom-demands-return-of-us-drone-shot-down-by-russian-air-defenses-over-libya/.

216 David D. Kirkpatrick, "Russian Snipers, Missiles and Warplanes Try to Tilt Libyan War," *New York Times*, November 7, 2019, sec. Middle East, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/05/world/middleeast/russia-libya-mercenaries.html.

217 Liliya Yapparova, "A Small Price to Pay for Tripoli Between 10 and 35 Russian Mercenaries Have Been Killed in the Libyan Civil War. We Identified Several of Them.," *Meduza*, October 2, 2019, https://meduza.io/en/feature/2019/10/02/a-small-price-to-pay-for-tripoli.

218 "Number of Russian Mercenaries Withdraw Following Call for Libya Cease-Fire, Gna Commander Says," Daily Sabah, January 11, 2020, https://www.dailysabah.com/africa/2020/01/11/number-of-russian-mercenaries-withdraw-following-call-for-libya-cease-fire-gna-commander-says.

firms in Syria.[219] A March 20, 2020, *Financial Times* article reported that 300–400 Wagner-backed Syrians are fighting in Libya on behalf of General Haftar "for $1,000 a month to protect facilities or $1500 a month for 'missions,' marking a potential shift in its proxy strategy."[220] As of the time of this writing, the fight between the LNA and GNA for control over Tripoli continues, both sides firmly entrenched with the backing of international powers.

2. Analysis

In Libya, Russian PMSCs were intended to be used decisively to help the LNA quickly seize Tripoli. Given that Haftar's Tripoli offensive stagnated into siege warfare, the effectiveness of PMSCs in supporting offensive operations is dubious. Turkey's overt military support of the GNA likely neutralized any tactical advantage the Russian PMSCs conferred on the LNA. No longer is the LNA, or any Russian PMSC supporting them, facing a patchwork of ill-trained and equipped GNA militias: Turkey has given the GNA technological parity with the Russia-Egypt-UAE-backed LNA, increasing the likelihood that this conflict will continue and raise the costs of Moscow's investment in Haftar and the LNA.

The changing dynamic with the foray of Turkey into the conflict may have given Moscow reason to minimize its risk and to seek diplomatic solutions to prevent escalation with Turkey. This may be a principal reason why Moscow reportedly withdrew its PMSCs from the Tripoli frontlines in January 2020, but it also reveals a possible evolution in Moscow's proxy strategy: As was reported by both Libyan and Western media, Russian PMSCs were importing fighters who had been recruited and trained in Syria by Russian PMSCs, perhaps a sign that Moscow applied its lesson learned from activities in Syria. Since it is getting harder for Moscow to obscure its PMSC activity, the projected loss of

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[219] Abdulkader Assad, "Two Russian Firms Join Wagner Group in Supplying Haftar with Mercenaries," The Libya Observer, January 6, 2020, https://www.libyaobserver.ly/news/two-russian-firms-join-wagner-group-supplying-haftar-mercenaries.

[220] Henry Foy, Heba Saleh, and Chloe Cornish, "Libya Says Foreign Mercenaries Could Bring Coronavirus to Conflict," *Financial Times*, March 20, 2020, https://www.ft.com/content/2949db12-6abc-11ea-800d-da70cff6e4d3.

Russian life required to break the Tripoli stalemate may have been too great for Moscow. If this is true, these foreign fighters give Moscow and Haftar a larger pool of cannon fodder to help break the GNA-LNA Tripoli siege. They also reduce the risk of sacrificing Russian lives and give Moscow an additional layer of plausible deniability, thus freeing up PMSC operators to focus on missions and tasks that align with the normal activities of the international PMSC industry, including logistics, maintenance, repair, protection, and security.

The presence of Russian PMSCs and the fear that the LNA might capture Tripoli may have had the unintended consequence of driving Turkey to commit to back the GNA. Since the Tripoli offensive, Ankara and the GNA have signed a military cooperation agreement, Turkey has shipped arms to the GNA in violation of a UN arms embargo, and Ankara has deployed military advisers to assist the GNA in its fight against the LNA. According to a December 2019 Reuters article, President Erdoğan was forced to act on behalf of the GNA because of the Wagner Group's support to the LNA. In response to questions about Turkey's involvement to counter Russian PMSC activity in the Libyan civil war, Erdoğan stated, "That is the case, and it would not be right for us to remain silent against all of this. We have done our best until now, and will continue to do so."[221] The presence of Russian PMSCs may have created a security-dilemma situation, further complicating the dynamics between Moscow and Ankara and risking escalation beyond a proxy war stalemate into a broader regional conflict.

D. CASE STUDY: CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC (CAR)

Moscow's engagement in the CAR has drawn much attention to the means Moscow is using to accomplish its goals. Here Moscow combines traditional and non-traditional military and diplomatic tools to create geostrategic and economic opportunities for itself. The CAR lies at the geographic center of the continent, and with Moscow's political and military technical cooperation deals with CAR's neighbors—Cameroon, Chad, and Sudan—it serves as a waypoint for Moscow to expand its influence into the heart of Africa.

[221] Maria Kiselyova et al., "Erdogan Says Turkey Won't Be Silent Over Mercenaries in Libya," Reuters, December 20, 2019, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-libya-turkey-russia-idUSKBN1YO1GD.

While Russia is expanding its presence in the former French colony, France has struggled to maintain its historic relationship and influence on the CAR government. A symbol of this shift in power occurred when CAR president, Faustin-Archange Touadéra, named Valery Zakharov, a Russian diplomat, as his national security adviser, a position historically held by the French.

Since 2015, Moscow has dramatically increased its diplomatic and military activity in Africa. By using PMSCs, Moscow can carefully balance the risks of overextending the geographic reach of its military capabilities via PMSCs with reaping the rewards of additional economic opportunities and increased geopolitical influence as it seeks to use "the CAR [as] a prominent testing ground for its broader strategy" in Africa.[222]

A bloody sectarian civil war between Muslim and Christian militias erupted in the CAR in 2013, when the Christian president Francois Bozize was overthrown by a coalition of Muslim rebels called the Seleka.[223] Several years of bloody fighting among 14 armed militias had left thousands dead and millions displaced, creating one of the worst humanitarian crises on the continent. In April 2014, the United Nations deployed United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) to protect the local population and prevent a humanitarian catastrophe.[224] Headquartered in the CAR capital Bangui, the United Nations currently deploys 14,708 personnel to support MINUSCA mission and has an operating budget of almost $1 billion.[225] In 2015, CAR leadership invited the European Union to send a separate training force (European Union Training Mission in Central African Republic, EUTM-RCA) to collaborate with MINUSCA to contribute to reforming the CAR's security apparatus. In

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222 Sergey Sukhankin, "The Kremlin's Game in the CAR: What Does the Façade Conceal?," Eurasia Daily Monitor, January 23, 2019, https://jamestown.org/program/the-kremlins-game-in-the-car-what-does-the-facade-conceal/.

223 France 24, "France Ends Military Mission in Troubled Central African Republic," France 24, October 31, 2016, https://www.france24.com/en/20161031-france-ends-military-mission-troubled-central-african-republic.

224 "United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic," United Nations Peacekeeping, accessed April 1, 2020, https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/mission/minusca.

225 "United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic."

concert with MINUSCA, EUTM-RCA's mandate is to provide strategic advice, operational training, and education to the Central African Armed Forces (FACA).[226] The United Nations also enacted an arms embargo on the CAR in an attempt to prevent further violence that may be caused by foreign powers providing arms and equipment. However, waivers could be granted on supplying arms to the FACA upon pre-approval from the UN Security Council Sanctions Committee.

In 2016, France withdrew its 2,500-person peacekeeping contingent from the CAR, claiming that "the page had been turned" and that France's UN-backed Operation Sangaris had been a success.[227] However, France left up to 350 troops to support MINUSCA's training mission.[228] Given the weakness of the CAR government and its lack of confidence in MINUSCA's ability to stem the violence, the departure of France's strong military presence created fear in the CAR that a security vacuum would entice a power grab by the warring militias.[229] France's withdrawal left the CAR government in the need of a powerful benefactor, opening the door for Moscow to make its entry.

Moscow's opportunity presented itself in 2017, when, after an increase in sectarian violence, the CAR government sought to bolster its security forces by requesting a waiver from the UN to purchase weapons from France. France's initial offer was too expensive for one of the world's poorest countries, so France offered seized weapons from Somalia on consignment.[230] Russia quickly vetoed the request, claiming that it was unlawful to use weapons confiscated while enforcing a UN embargo to supply another country under UN embargo. As reported by Reuters, documents indicate that the UN sanctions committee and diplomats were quick to find a solution and approved a Russian arms assistance package

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226 Common Security and Defence Policy, "European Union Training Mission in Central African Republic (EUTM-RCA) Fact Sheet," September 19, 2019, https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/20190919_mission_factsheet_eutm_rca.pdf.

227 France 24, "France Ends Military Mission in Troubled Central African Republic."

228 "France Ends CAR Military Operation," BBC News, October 31, 2016, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-37823047.

229 BBC News.

230 Aaron Ross, "How Russia Moved into Central Africa," Reuters, October 17, 2018, https://af.reuters.com/article/topNews/idAFKCN1MR0TA-OZATP.

that included "AK47s, sniper rifles, machineguns and grenade launchers."[231] Another UN report, based on firsthand observation from a panel of UN experts, confirmed that from 26 January to 7 February 2018, Moscow delivered nine planeloads of arms in accordance with the UN agreement.[232] It was reported that Russian nationals were there to receive the arms and that under the agreement, these arms would be distributed to newly trained police officers, FACA, and members of the Presidential Guard trained by Russian "instructors."[233] Claiming that its economic and military activities were meant to stabilize the CAR, Moscow signed a military technical cooperation deal with Bangui on August 21, 2018, adding another layer of legitimacy to Moscow's activities.

1. Russian PMSC Activities in the CAR

Moscow's successful geopolitical maneuvering to get Russian arms to CAR security forces marked the beginning of PMSC activity in the CAR. By February 2018, along with the weapons it had promised, Moscow sent an initial cadre of five military and 170 civilian instructors to assist in training government forces.[234] Investigative journalists would later reveal that those civilian trainers were Russian PMSCs, and their role in CAR would quickly expand to include mediating between militia groups, physical protection and local security for mining projects, and embedding advisers and personal security details for the CAR's president, Faustin-Archange Touadéra.[235]

Reporting has indicated that Russian companies involved in the CAR covered both military and non-military tasks. The military tasks were reportedly handled by Wagner and Sewa Security Services, which have been linked to Yevgeny Prigozhin's partners and their

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231 Ross.

232 Romain Esmenjaud et al., "Letter from the Panel of Experts on the Central African Republic Extended Pursuant to Resolution 2399 Addressed to the President of the Security Council" (New York, NY: United Nations Security Council, July 23, 2018), 8, https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_2018_729.pdf.

233 Esmenjaud et al., 8, 33.

234 Aaron Ross, "Russia to Send More Military Trainers, Equipment to Central African Republic," Reuters, October 19, 2018, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-africa-russia-idUSKCN1MT28D; Esmenjaud et al., "Letter from the Panel of Experts on the Central African Republic Extended Pursuant to Resolution 2399 Addressed to the President of the Security Council."

235 Ross, "Russia to Send More Military Trainers, Equipment to Central African Republic."

web of shell companies.[236] Wagner and Sewa Security Services have established footprints at several locations throughout the country, to include a palace of a former head of state and several airfields.[237] They provide security for the CAR president, guard Lobaye Invest's mining interests, and provide basic skills training for FACA soldiers and gendarmes.[238] A 2018 UN report provides the most detailed accounting of the activities of Moscow's "instructors" in the CAR: it highlights that Russian PMSCs have supported the FACA by accompanying them on deployments to conflict areas, providing security for convoys transporting material for the construction of hospitals, physically guarding hospitals donated by Moscow in Bria and Ouadda, and training 160 policemen and 50 gendarmes in Berengo.[239]

The training mission quickly picked up tempo, and according to a panel of UN observers who spoke with Valery Zakharov, the Russian instructors trained approximately 900 FACA and Presidential Guard soldiers between 31 March and 19 June 2018.[240] The UN report also claimed that the Russian instructors were training FACA soldiers at a base in Sudan, a notable location since it is where peace talks between CAR's 14 armed militias happened and also where contingents of Russian PMSCs have been reported.[241] Though the training seems to have had a positive impact on the proficiency of the FACA, the UN noted the dependence of the FACA on the Russian instructors to conduct operations:

> With the support of MINUSCA and sometimes accompanied by Russian instructors, trained FACA personnel have gradually been redeployed in Obo, Paoua, Sibut and Bangassou. While feedback from international partners on the performance of FACA in those locations is quite positive, it must be stressed that FACA currently has insufficient capacity or lacks

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236 Lister, Shukla, and Ward, "Putin's Private Army Is Trying to Increase Russia's Influence in Africa."

237 Mathieu Oliver, "Russia's Murky Business Dealings in the Central African Republic," The Africa Report.com, August 23, 2019, https://www.theafricareport.com/16511/russias-murky-business-dealings-in-the-central-african-republic/.

238 Kimberly Marten, "Into Africa: Prigozhin, Wagner, and the Russian Military," January 4, 2019, http://www.ponarseurasia.org/memo/africa-prigozhin-wagner-and-russian-military.

239 Esmenjaud et al., "Letter from the Panel of Experts on the Central African Republic Extended Pursuant to Resolution 2399 Addressed to the President of the Security Council," 7–8.

240 Esmenjaud et al., 30.

241 Sukhankin, "War, Business and Ideology."

> logistical support for conducting operations without the substantive and constant support of MINUSCA and/or the Russian instructors.[242]

The latest figures from a February 2020 report released by the UN Secretary General, claimed that Russian Federation trainers have trained a total of "3,270 soldiers and 745 internal security forces" on tactical skills.[243]

The military activities of Russian PMSCs appear to be closely aligned with the non-military economic and informational activities of Lobaye Invest, another company that has close ties to Prigozhin. According to a CNN investigation, Lobaye Invest has secured diamond and gold exploration rights in the Yawa and Pama regions of the CAR, with sites reportedly guarded by Russian PMSCs; has established a pro-Moscow radio station; has lined the streets of Bangui with billboards and handbills signaling the benevolence of Moscow's presence; and has even sponsored the Miss Central African Republic beauty contest.[244] Lobaye Invest's presence has reportedly expanded in other cities throughout the country.[245] On the surface, these efforts are primarily aimed at giving Moscow the appearance of a generous benefactor in an effort to legitimize Moscow's diplomatic and military efforts to the CAR's people.

2. Analysis

Moscow's engagement in the CAR is not of an altruistic nature: its true motives are to increase its influence in the region and seek economic gains. The strategic location of the CAR in the center of the continent and its porous borders with other conflict zones gives Moscow open access to the region, affording it an access point from which to expand its influence at little opportunity cost in military manpower. Additionally, the CAR's

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[242] Esmenjaud et al., "Letter from the Panel of Experts on the Central African Republic Extended Pursuant to Resolution 2399 Addressed to the President of the Security Council," 8.

[243] United Nations Security Council, "Report of the Secretary General: Central African Republic" (New York, NY: United Nations Security Council, February 14, 2020), 8, https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/S_2020_124_E.pdf.

[244] Oliver, "Russia's Murky Business Dealings in the Central African Republic"; Lister, Shukla, and Ward, "Putin's Private Army Is Trying to Increase Russia's Influence in Africa."

[245] Oliver, "Russia's Murky Business Dealings in the Central African Republic."

bountiful natural resources give Moscow an economic incentive to use PMSCs to secure concessions for access to gold, diamonds, and rare earth metals. Yet Russian PMSCs' activities have largely occurred under the auspices of a formal request by the internationally recognized government of the CAR and the UN, providing Moscow with a legitimate pretext for its military engagement in CAR. The speed with which Moscow was able to use the UN Security Council to exploit geopolitical opportunities by deploying PMSCs to the CAR demonstrates PMSCs' utility as a foreign policy tool. So far, the train-and-equip mission being led by Russian PMSCs must be credited as a success for Moscow. UN reports suggest a level of professionalism and legitimacy that puts Russian PMSCs on par with the multilateral security sector reform efforts like EUTM-RCA and MINUSCA. In this case, the normative activities of the PMSCs confers legitimacy on Moscow's engagement in the CAR and gives it the right to claim its place as a promoter of regional security and stability.

However, this veneer of legitimacy must be questioned. The close link between PMSC activity and Moscow's economic, intelligence, and influence efforts are cause for suspicion. Moscow's employment of PMSCs to guard resource concessions and train and equip CAR security services may further destabilize the fragile situation in the CAR, as the various armed groups interpret these activities as threats to their security. The 2018 panel of UN experts that travelled to the CAR identified the potential security dilemma created by the training and equipping mission:

> The acquisition of military equipment by national defen [s]e and security forces has led to waves of rearmament by some ex-Séléka factions who believe that the Government is preparing for a war against them … leaders of ex-Séléka factions confided to the panel that, in the absence of a political agreement, they consider ongoing efforts aimed at demobilization, disarmament and reintegration and security sector reform to be a provocation.[246]

This security dilemma presents an opportunity for intervention by the U.S. and its allies, ideally in the form of an information campaign that highlights the surreptitious

[246] Esmenjaud et al., "Letter from the Panel of Experts on the Central African Republic Extended Pursuant to Resolution 2399 Addressed to the President of the Security Council," 11, 19.

nature of Moscow's activities, to undermine the perception that Moscow is a benevolent regional power seeking to enhance the stability and security of the CAR's people.

E. CONCLUSION

Russian PMSCs are a proxy force with historical continuity with the Soviet era, when Moscow was engaged in great power competition with the United States. Today, they are used as a rapidly deployable tool that enables Moscow to exploit geopolitical, geostrategic, and economic opportunities wherever it can expand its influence. What remains to be seen is whether Moscow can secure its long-term interests before the utility of its PMSCs expires. Until Russian PMSCs reach their shelf-life, however, they will remain a fixture in the contemporary operating environment and a force against which the United States must plan effective countermeasures. Diminishing U.S. influence around the globe and the low cost of execution means PMSCs are likely to remain a tool that Moscow keeps at the ready to capitalize on opportunities to peddle its influence.

IV. PUTIN'S PEACEMAKERS

Another tool Moscow is using in conflicts where it seeks to build influence are peacekeepers. International organizations such as the UN consider peacekeeping a necessary tool to bring security and stability to conflict-prone areas throughout the world. Moscow generally views peacekeeping operations through a lens different from the norms of the UN and the international community. Moscow's conception of how to create the conditions for peace has been shaped by the unique geopolitical, geostrategic, and economic conditions that it has faced since the collapse of the Soviet Union. The Russian word for peacekeeping, *mirotvorchestvo,* literally translates to "peacemaking."[247] This is not a subtle difference in translation but a significant distinction in how Moscow views its role in managing conflict and enforcing peace around the world.

As such, Moscow is innovating in its approach to peacekeeping in a way that complicates the dynamics of conflict resolution on the global stage. Moscow's unique conception of peacemaking has influenced the way in which it participates in UN peacekeeping missions, how it cooperates in regional organizations such as the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), and how it mans, trains, and equips its peacemaking forces. Russian peacemaking forces are also finding an increasingly prominent role in Russian foreign policy and military strategy. In his annual address to the Academy of Military Science, General of the Army Valery Gerasimov highlighted the importance of these units in consolidating tactical gains to achieve strategic outcomes:

> Post-conflict management has been developed. In Syria, a new form of employing Armed Forces formations—the humanitarian operation—has been developed and tested. In Aleppo and Eastern Guta, measures for withdrawing the peaceful population from the conflict zone simultaneously with the execution of combat tasks to destroy the terrorists had to be planned and carried out in a very short time. Results that were achieved in Syria made it possible to identify current trends for the study of the issues of

247 Jonson and Archer, *Peacekeeping and the Role of Russia in Eurasia*, 3.

> employing the Armed Forces while executing tasks to defend and advance national interests outside the borders of the national territory.[248]

Though much has been written about Russian peacekeeping activities in the years immediately following the collapse of the Soviet Union, current understanding of how peacekeeping continues to evolve under the Putin regime suffers from two knowledge gaps: too little is known about the activities of the military units and what role they are playing in the strategic calculations of Russia's leaders. This chapter therefore frames Russian peacekeeping in its contemporary, Putin-era foreign policy and military doctrine to understand the utility and importance of peacekeeping for Moscow. It first analyzes the nature and evolution of Russian peacekeeping in the post-Soviet era to understand how this brief but intense period of peacekeeping shaped the nature of Russian peacekeeping today. The chapter then analyzes Russia's perspectives on its participation in UN and regional security organizations, with particular emphasis on its token contributions to UN peacekeeping missions and Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). Next, this chapter analyzes the activities of the 15th Separate Motorized Rifle Brigade (SMRB) and military police (MP) battalions, two Russian military units that have become prominent peacemakers on the battlefield, examining Putin's use of these peacemaking tools in three conflict zones: Georgia, Ukraine, and Syria.

As with PMSCs, recent confrontations in eastern Syria between Russia's MP units and the U.S. military reveal how close these units have come to escalating conflict. Also, as Moscow continues to expand its military presence elsewhere, it is likely that U.S. forces will continue to share battlespace with these units again. The 15th SMRB's participation in the conflict in Georgia and Ukraine and MP battalions who participated in the Syrian conflict have enhanced Moscow's image as a peacemaker in the Middle East and, in the eyes of certain regional allies, conferred legitimacy on Moscow's actions. Such plausible deniability and obfuscation have been a strength for Moscow. Understanding that the presence of Moscow's peacekeeping units indicates Moscow's intentions to shape

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[248] Valery Gerasimov, "The Development of Military Strategy under Contemporary Conditions. Tasks for Military Science," *Military Review*, no. Online Exclusive (November 2019): 7, https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Portals/7/Army-Press-Online-Journal/documents/2019/Orenstein-Thomas.pdf.

outcomes favorable to its interests by controlling events—possibly through the use of force—is important to developing strategies that effectively counter these activities and prevent unnecessary escalation that may ultimately work against U.S. interests.

A. BACKGROUND ON RUSSIAN PEACEMAKING OPERATIONS

The post-Soviet experience shaped Moscow's brand of peacekeeping, making it distinct from internationally accepted norms. In the 1990s, peacekeeping was seen by Russian political scientists and military strategists as an acceptable way for Russia to use its armed forces as a preemptive measure to achieve the Kremlin's political aims: to prevent instability along its borders, to protect the interests of ethnic Russians abroad, and to prevent the rise of political regimes unfriendly to Moscow.[249] Thus, the prevailing characteristics of post-Soviet peacekeeping operations can be summarized as the unilateral, partial, and preemptive use of military force to protect and secure Moscow's vital interests.[250]

Among the rationales Moscow used to justify unilateral peacekeeping intervention was its sense that there was no other country with the political will or ability to prevent instability in the FSU.[251] In a 1993 presentation given at a U.S. Army TRADOC Peacekeeping Conference, Colonel-General Eduard A. Vorob'yev asserted that "Real-world experience confirms that no international organization or group of states will take the place of our [Russia's] peacemaking efforts on the territory of the former Soviet Union."[252] In many cases, Moscow did not feel it needed to wait for UN mandates or even believe that it needed permission to enforce a peace. In the conflicts in the CIS, for example, Russian forces were already in place and needed to use force to prevent a

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[249] Shashenkov, "Russian Peacekeeping in the 'Near Abroad, 50."

[250] Facon, "Integration or Retrenchment? Russian Approaches to Peacekeeping," 32–35; John Mackinlay, ed., "Conclusion: The Paradox of Russian Peacekeeping," in *Regional Peacekeepers: The Paradox of Russian Peacekeeping* (Geneva, Switzerland: United Nations University Press, 2002), 206–9, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ebook-nps/detail.action?docID=253812.

[251] Roy Allison, "The Military Background and Context to Russian Peacekeeping," in *Peacekeeping and the Role of Russia in Eurasia* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996), 35.

[252] Colonel-General Eduard A. Vorob'yev, "On Russia's Conceptual Approach to Peacekeeping" (U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command Peacekeeping Conference, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, December 1993), http://www.bits.de/NRANEU/docs/peacekeeping94.htm.

conflagration and stabilize the situation. Unlike NATO or the UN, Moscow was less constrained by mandate or rules of engagement.[253] In the post-Soviet peacekeeping experience, Moscow grew to prefer its freedom of action over international legitimacy when conducting peacekeeping operations. It would instead work within regional frameworks like the CSTO and CIS—and in some cases independently—so that it had more influence over the conduct and thereby greater control over the outcome of the mission.

Similarly, Moscow has historically used peacekeepers as tools to secure its interests in the FSU, a use that distinguishes its activities from the normative values established by the United Nations regarding the impartiality of the peacekeeping force.[254] Moscow used its peacekeeping forces where it had strong national interests, behavior largely seen by the international community as diminishing the legitimacy of Russia's peacekeeping forces. As Domitilla Sagramoso argues,

> Whereas UN operations were authorized by a Security Council mandate, which provided them with legitimacy, objectives, and rules of engagement, Russian operations took place in a less constrained legal setting. Legitimacy remained dubious, mandates were broadly defined, and rules of engagement were never clearly spelled out. Russian military commanders had room to improvise and this resulted in the infringement of international peacekeeping codes of conduct. Moreover, the dominant role of Russian forces in all CIS military operations often resulted in the restoration of Russia's influence over the regions concerned.[255]

In the FSU, Moscow justified its intervention by claiming it sought to protect minority ethnic-Russian populations, to preserve access to strategic areas and frontier buffers along its borders, and to prevent the countries in Moscow's sphere of influence from moving closer to Western institutions that Russia had little influence over.[256]

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253 Lena Jonson and Clive Archer, eds., "Russia and Peacekeeping in Eurasia," in *Peacekeeping and the Role of Russia in Eurasia* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996), 4.

254 Domitilla Sagramoso, "Russian Peacekeeping Policies," in *Regional Peacekeepers: The Paradox of Russian Peacekeeping* (Geneva, Switzerland: United Nations University Press, 2002), 14, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ebook-nps/detail.action?docID=253812.

255 Sagramoso, 14–15.

256 Mackinlay, "Conclusion: The Paradox of Russian Peacekeeping," 206–8.

Moscow's self-perception as a great power and its need to be perceived as such by other great powers induced its lack of neutrality: Russia linked its ability to bring peace to the conflicts in the FSU to its status in international affairs.[257] Scholar Maxim Shashenkov argues that in order to sustain great power status, Russia "must ensure peace and stability in regions or countries where no other power has the same influence."[258] Jonson and Archer claim that, at worst, Moscow's peacekeeping interventions can be viewed "as an attempt to continue the Soviet Union by other means."[259]

Finally, the preemptive nature of Moscow's peacekeeping operations often required an increased level of force to enforce the peace. Whereas a UN peacekeeping mission operated under an international mandate with strict rules of engagement, Russia used a wider interpretation of the force required to keep and enforce peace. Jonson and Archer suggest that due to its lack of peacekeeping doctrine, Moscow relied on a variety of policy documents and other doctrines to guide its peacekeeping activities. The authors claim that the Russian code of conduct "implies [using] a high level of force…to convince the warring sides to agree to negotiate," which may help explain Russia's departure from international norms.[260] Again Colonel-General Vorob'yev provides insight into the character of Russian peacekeeping: "In certain 'hot spots' Russia has been and remains the only power capable of separating the hostile sides and bringing them to a negotiating table."[261] Russia's perception that it was alone in ensuring its own security and its experience in intra-state conflict within the FSU led it to conclude that it needed to use force quickly to prevent escalation and instability along its borders; therefore, Moscow's interventions in the FSU often occurred before there was a cease-fire and before peace could be negotiated.[262] Moscow also preferred to be the arbiter of the peace, often bringing the warring sides

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257 Shashenkov, 50.

258 Shashenkov.

259 Jonson and Archer, "Russia and Peacekeeping in Eurasia," 25.

260 Jonson and Archer, 8.

261 Colonel-General Eduard A. Vorob'yev, "On Russia's Conceptual Approach to Peacekeeping" (December 1993), http://www.bits.de/NRANEU/docs/peacekeeping94.htm.

262 Jonson and Archer, "Russia and Peacekeeping in Eurasia," 9.

together through the imposition of force. Some scholars have characterized Moscow's distinctive approach to using force to make peace as "muscular peacekeeping."[263]

B. PEACEKEEPING OPERATIONS UNDER PUTIN

Upon his ascension to the presidency of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin began evolving Russia's approach to peacekeeping. Its peacekeeping missions in the FSU transitioned to routine military deployments, becoming what some analysts describe as frozen conflicts, created "when armed hostilities end with ceasefire agreements, but without political settlements addressing the reasons for conflict."[264] Moreover, Putin's foreign policy became more assertive, and Moscow increasingly involved itself in conflicts outside of its traditional spheres of influence in the FSU. Seeing itself as a great power, Moscow's intention to use peacekeeping as a foreign policy tool is expressed in Russian policy documents such as the Russian Federation National Security Strategy, Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation, and Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation. As the 2016 Foreign Policy Concept states,

> Believing international peacekeeping to be an effective tool for settling armed conflicts and facilitating post-crisis nation-building, Russia intends to participate in international peacekeeping efforts under the UN leadership and in cooperation with regional and international organizations, and actively contribute to improving the preventive potential of the UN peacekeeping.[265]

In contrast with this stated commitment, however, Russia is quite selective in its participation in UN peacekeeping missions. Today, Russia only contributes 71 personnel to UN peacekeeping missions, which makes it one of the world's smallest contributors to

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263 Pavel Baev, "The Challenge of 'Small Wars' for the Russian Military," in *Russian Military Reform, 1992–2002*, First (London: Routledge, 2004), chap. 10, https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203011058. For further analysis on "muscular peacekeeping" see Isabell Facon, *Integration or Retrenchment? Russian Approaches to Peacekeeping.*

264 Diana Dascalu, "Frozen Conflicts and Federalization: Russian Policy in Transnistria and Donbass," Journal of International Affairs, May 22, 2019, https://jia.sipa.columbia.edu/online-articles/frozen-conflicts-and-federalization-russian-policy-transnistria-and-donbass.

265 Vladimir Putin, *Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation* (Moscow, Russian Federation, Moscow, 2016), www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/official_documents/-/asset_publisher/CptICkB6BZ29/content/id/2542248.

international peace and stability.[266] Additionally, at an assessed annual contribution rate of 2.405 percent of the total contributions to the UN general budget, Russia contributes the least amount of money to UN peacekeeping among the permanent members of the Security Council.[267] Table 2 displays data on Russian participation in UN peacekeeping operations; highlighted in yellow are UN peacekeeping missions initiated after Putin's election to president, showing that Putin has provided Russian uniformed personnel to five of those eight missions.

Table 2. List of Russian Contributions to Active UN Peacekeeping Missions.[268]

	Start Date	Russian Contribution	Police	Experts	Staff Officer	1 July 2019 - 30 June 2020 Contributions
UNTSO, Middle East	May-48	4	0	4	0	$ -
UNMOGIP, India and Pakistan	Jan-49	0	0	0	0	$ -
UNFICYP, Cyprus	Mar-64	6	6	0	0	$ 352,528.00
UNDOF, Golan	Jun-74	0	0	0	0	$ 1,099,315.00
UNIFIL, Lebanon	Mar-78	0	0	0	0	$ 5,047,578.00
MINURSO, Western Sahara	Apr-91	16	0	16	0	$ 1,173,844.00
UNMIK, Kosovo	Jun-99	2	2	0	0	$ 545,017.00
UNAMID, Darfur	Jul-07	0	0	0	0	$ 2,903,745.00
MONUSCO, D.R. of the Congo	Jul-10	13	5	7	1	$ 17,004,082.00
UNISFA, Abyei	June-11	2	1	0	1	$ 5,236,451.00
UNMISS, South Sudan	Jul-11	24	18	3	3	$ 18,873,073.00
MINUSMA, Mali	Apr-13	0	0	0	0	$ 18,273,836.00
MINUSCA, Central African Republic	Apr-14	2	0	0	2	$ 18,248,020.00
UNVMC, Columbia	Jul-17	2	2	0	0	$ -
MINUJUSTH, Haiti	Oct-17	0	0	0	0	$ 1,502,329.00
Totals		71	34	30	7	$90,259,818.00

In an effort to explain this trend, Isabelle Facon presents a geopolitical justification for Russian participation in UN peacekeeping. In her book chapter entitled "Integration or Retrenchment? Russian Approaches to Peacekeeping," Facon asserts that Russia chooses to participate in international peacekeeping to have a say in the conduct of international security decision-making and thus bolster its prominence as a permanent member of the

266 "Troop and Police Contributors," United Nations Peacekeeping, accessed September 6, 2019, https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/troop-and-police-contributors.

267 UN calculates contribution assessment percentages based on a country's Gross National Product. As such, for 2019 the Permanent Members of the Security Council are currently assessed at United States (22.000), China (12.005), United Kingdom (4.567), France (4.427), and Russia (2.405).

268 Adapted from "Troop and Police Contributors."

UN Security Council (UNSC).[269] Katharina Coleman's research supports this finding, suggesting that even token contributions to UN peacekeeping mission confer international prestige upon the country that makes them.[270] This may explain why the Russian Ministry of Defense's website claims that

> Another important aspect of Russia's participation in international peacekeeping activities is sending military observers to the UN missions. They serve in the Middle East, Western Sahara, Democratic Republic of Congo, Cote d'Ivoire, Liberia and Sudan. It is noteworthy that our country is among ten-top countries in the world with the highest number of military observers at the United Nations.[271]

Though on the surface Moscow's "token" contributions seem insignificant, they actually confer many benefits on Moscow. According to Coleman, as long as a country contributes to a peacekeeping mission, it has "access to operational and political information circulated within the mission and the right to attend UN meetings on the mission."[272] Essentially, regardless of the size of the contribution, a troop-contributing country has a say over what happens within the peacekeeping mission.

Thus, even minimal contributions to UN peacekeeping missions benefit Moscow at the tactical level. Also, Moscow's token contributions of staff officers give it special access to information about the activities of the peacekeeping forces as well as events happening within the country.[273] This information serves as intelligence that can be sent back to the Kremlin. Coleman asserts that contributing staff officers "reflect the fact that some countries' policy is to have maximum influence with minimum engagement, or at least maximum situational awareness with minimum engagement."[274] Influence is another

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269 Isabelle Facon, "Integration or Retrenchment? Russian Approaches to Peacekeeping," in *Major Powers and Peacekeeping: Perspectives, Priorities and the Challenges of Military Intervention*, 1st ed. (London: Routledge, 2006), 37–38.

270 Katharina P. Coleman, "Token Troop Contributions to the United Nations Peacekeeping Operations," in *Providing Peacekeepers: The Politics, Challenges, and Future of United Nations Peacekeeping Contributions*, 1st ed (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 57.

271 Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation, "Peacekeeping Operations."

272 Coleman, "Token Troop Contributions to the United Nations Peacekeeping Operations," 55.

273 Coleman, 59.

274 Coleman, 59.

reason why Moscow supports the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine—a conflict it is a party to. Subsequently, Moscow's military observers have been accused of being spies, with close links to Russian military intelligence.[275] Thus, Moscow's strategy may be seen as an attempt to maximize its influence in international organizations and maintain its image as a great power while expending few resources.[276]

C. RUSSIAN PEACEKEEPING INNOVATIONS

Two military units have become Moscow's principal peacemaking forces and have increasingly found themselves employed in international conflicts. Though relatively young military units, they have risen to prominence for their multi-functional capabilities, which gives Moscow the flexibility to employ them to accomplish a variety of missions.

1. Russia's Peacemaking Force: The 15th SMRB

Russia's post-Soviet experience fighting in intra-state conflict in its near abroad required new concepts and force structures to handle the new missions. During the Yeltsin years, the divisional model shouldered this responsibility using specialized units like Russia's airborne troops (VDV) and the 201st Motorized Rifled Division. The divisional model worked, but due to high personnel turnover and the rotational nature of the units, there was little durable institutional knowledge and few units with experience in peacekeeping missions.[277]

Under Putin, peacekeeping would innovate to meet the needs of Moscow's foreign policy. Learning from the post-Soviet peacekeeping experience, Putin and his military chiefs established a dedicated unit with the singular charter of serving as Russia's peacekeeping force; it would be interoperable with foreign militaries, rapidly deployable, and highly trained in the complex tasks faced on peacekeeping missions. This unit needed

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[275] Paul Niland, "Russia Has No Place in the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine," *Ukraine Alert* (blog), July 23, 2018, https://live-atlanticcouncil-wr.pantheonsite.io/blogs/ukrainealert/russia-has-no-place-in-the-osce-special-monitoring-mission-in-ukraine/.

[276] Coleman, "Token Troop Contributions to the United Nations Peacekeeping Operations," 65.

[277] Kristin Ven Bruusgaard, "Peacekeeping and the Modernized Russian Armed Forces" (Norwegian Defence Research Establishment (FFI), May 11, 2007), 16–17, https://www.ffi.no/en/publications-archive/peacekeeping-and-the-modernized-russian-armed-forces.

a cadre of professional soldiers with diverse skills to handle the complex situations in enforcing peace and had to be postured to mobilize quickly if a conflict erupted. The first such unit dedicated to peacekeeping was the 15th SMRB (unit 90600) of the 2nd Combined Arms Army of the Central Military District, officially established in 2005.[278] According to the Russian Ministry of Defense's website, the 15th SMRB

> is formed in order to prepare the Russian troops to take part in operations to maintain international peace and security. Its troops can be detached to peacekeeping contingents according to the decision of the President of the Russian Federation and in the interests of the Commonwealth of Independent States, UN, OSCE, NATO-Russia Council and, if necessary, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.[279]

Since its inception, the 15the SMRB has been designated as one of Russia's permanent readiness troops. It was intended to be a unit with unique capabilities, prepared to be employed at a moment's notice—designed to be Russia's premiere force for interoperability with foreign militaries abroad and to serve as a model for training and employment for other units in the military.[280] Several features of the unit made it particularly suited to peacekeeping, signaling the importance of peacekeeping to Moscow: The 15th SMRB's home in Roshchnskiy garrison, in the Volzhsky District of the Samara Oblast, chosen by military leaders for its proximity to major railway junctions and to a modern airport, enables the unit to rapidly mobilize for deployment to Russia's borders or overseas.[281] In addition, in a military culture known for austerity, quality of life was important in recruiting the unit's first contract soldiers: it provided its members with a good salary and sought to entice families by building new family barracks and embedded

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[278] Catherine Harris and Frederick W Kagan, "Russia's Military Posture: Ground Forces Order of Battle" (Washington, D.C.: Institute for the Study of War, March 2018), 21, http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/Russian%20Ground%20Forces%20OOB_ISW%20CTP_0.pdf; TASS Russian News Agency, "More Than 1,500 Peacekeepers Take Part in Snap Check in Central Russia - Military & Defense - Tass," TASS Russian News Agency, October 18, 2016, https://tass.com/defense/907055.

[279] Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation, "Peacekeeping Operations."

[280] Ven Bruusgaard, "Peacekeeping and the Modernized Russian Armed Forces," 17.

[281] Mir TV, "Russian TV Reports on Training in Peacekeeper Brigade," *BBC Monitoring Former Soviet Union*, April 2, 2006, http://search.proquest.com/docview/460518075?rfr_id=info%3Axri%2Fsid%3Aprimo.

psychologists at each battalion to help service members cope with the unique stresses of enforcing peace in conflict zones.[282]

The nature of the unit's training was also different: in addition to the standard basic skills training on weapons and combined-arms maneuver, the unit received specialized language and cultural training, engineering skills to establish population-control measures like checkpoints and observation posts, and humanitarian law.[283] Within a year of its establishment, it was fully manned and equipped—unusual for a military that was still struggling to reform, modernize, and professionalize—further demonstrating the importance Moscow placed on the unit's mission.[284] To signify its special designation, the 15th SMRB would have its equipment emblazoned with its new emblem. Figure 3 shows the 15th SMRB's emblem and the special marking "MC," meaning "Mirotvorcheskiye Sily," which translates to "peacemaking forces."

Figure 3. 15th SMRB Markings that Designate Them as Peacekeepers.[285]

a. The 15th SMRB and Russian Peacemakers in Georgia

Almost immediately after the formation of the 15th SMRB in 2005, Moscow had plans to use its professional peacekeeping unit to reinforce its military positions in its frozen conflicts in the Caucasus region. The 15th SMRB deployed one of its motorized rifle battalions to Georgia's break-away region of Abkhazia, where Moscow was authorized to

[282] Mir TV.

[283] Mir TV.

[284] Mir TV.

[285] Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation, "Peacekeeping Operations."

deploy upwards of 3,000 peacekeepers as part of its previously brokered peace agreements from the 1990s.[286] In 2006, as the bellicose rhetoric and political tensions between Moscow and Tblisi intensified, Moscow began preparing to thwart potential Georgian plans to invade Abkhazia or South Ossetia. It began holding large-scale military exercises on the border of Georgia, as well as smaller snap exercises on the border of South Ossetia, where Russian units would simulate reinforcing the peacekeeping forces in the event of a Georgian invasion.[287]

Coincidentally, within days of the conclusion of one of the Russian military's yearly large-scale exercises called "Caucasus 2008," tensions began to escalate between Georgian forces and Russian peacekeeping and South Ossetian forces on August 2, 2008.[288] At the conclusion of the exercise, Moscow pre-positioned two reinforced motorized rifle battalions along its borders to reinforce the peacekeepers in South Ossetia in the event of attack. By August 7, Georgia had begun its offensive against separatist forces, causing Moscow to invade Georgia to repel the attacks against the pro-Moscow enclaves.[289] Moscow quickly reinforced the Abkhazian and South Ossetian forces, and over the next five days, Moscow decisively defeated the Georgian forces.

Reflecting on the battle on its ten-year anniversary, Michael Kofman suggests that Moscow deployed peacekeepers to these regions as a "trip wire force."[290] This assertion suggests that Moscow used the peacekeepers to signal its intent to defend its interests in the breakaway regions while not triggering a chain-reaction of escalation with Georgia. Furthermore, Kofman's interpretation suggests that in the event of escalation Moscow intended to use peacekeepers to slow down Georgian advances until it could mobilize

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[286] Mir TV, "Russian TV Reports on Training in Peacekeeper Brigade," 41; M.S. Barabanov, A.V. Lavrov, and V.A. Tseluiko, *The Tanks of August*, ed. Ruslan Pukhov (Moscow: Centre for Analysis of Strategies and Technologies, 2010).

[287] Barabanov, Lavrov, and Tseluiko, *The Tanks of August*, 41–43.

[288] Barabanov, Lavrov, and Tseluiko, 43.

[289] Barabanov, Lavrov, and Tseluiko, 48.

[290] Michael Kofman, "The August War, Ten Years On: A Retrospective on the Russo-Georgian War," War on the Rocks, August 17, 2018, https://warontherocks.com/2018/08/the-august-war-ten-years-on-a-retrospective-on-the-russo-georgian-war/.

sufficient forces to conduct counteroffensive operations. Whichever scenario is true, Kofman believes that, in retrospect, Georgia's attacks on the peacekeepers in the first few days of August gave Moscow a justification to invade.[291] In a sanguine interpretation of Russia's performance, Anton Lavrov argues that years of interoperability exercises between the peacekeeping forces and Russian military enabled the execution of a well-rehearsed plan with the rapid deployment of Russian forces into combat.[292] After the August 2008 conflict, the 15th SMRB continued to professionalize its forces through participation in large-scale exercises at home, sending delegations to foreign exercises to rehearse joint peacekeeping operations and implementing specialized education and training programs on humanitarian law and languages.[293]

b. 15th SMRB in Ukraine

As geopolitical tensions mounted after the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the separatist conflict in eastern Ukraine heated up, Moscow started posturing its peacekeeping brigade for possible intervention in eastern Ukraine. Out of the playbook of the Georgian invasion, President Putin and Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu ordered the 15th SMRB to participate in a massive snap exercise, during which it conducted a 350 km road march to a live-fire training evolution.[294] In August 2014, with eastern Ukrainian provinces of Luhansk and Donetsk ablaze in conflict and Moscow's separatist proxies looking as though they were about to fold under increasing Ukrainian pressure, Western media began assessing the likelihood of an invasion by Russia. Sergey Shoigu alerted the 15th SMRB about potential mobilization, claiming that "The world has changed, changed radically. As you know from past examples, including for this brigade, the peacekeeping subunits can

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291 Kofman.

292 Barabanov, Lavrov, and Tseluiko, *The Tanks of August*, 44.

293 TASS Russian News Agency, "Russian Peacekeepers to Take Part in Exercises in Germany," TASS Russian News Agency, July 8, 2013, https://tass.com/russia/696698; TASS Russian News Agency, "Foreign Military Attaches to Attend Russian Peacekeepers' Training," TASS Russian News Agency, September 12, 2013, https://tass.com/world/700666; Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation, "Peacekeeping Operations."

294 TASS Russian News Agency, "Peacekeeping Brigade Begins Fire Drills in Southern Ural Region," TASS Russian News Agency, June 23, 2014, https://tass.com/russia/737468.

be required at short notice…peacekeeping forces subunits and brigades must be on constant combat alert."[295]

Open-source news began spotting the 15th SMRB's distinctive blue circle with yellow letters as it began positioning its forces in staging areas along the Ukraine border.[296] Fear that the deployment of the 15th SMRB along the Ukrainian border was a prelude to invasion, NATO spokeswoman Oana Lungescu warned in a widely publicized statement that Russia could use "a humanitarian or peacekeeping mission as a pretext to send troops to East Ukraine."[297] Though Moscow denied the presence of its military forces in the conflict in Ukraine, Ukrainian intelligence[298] and pro-Ukraine open-source intelligence website InformNapalm uncovered evidence that suggested the 15th SMRB was fighting in Eastern Ukraine. The use of social media to geolocate the soldiers along the Ukrainian border prior to Moscow's military invention and within Ukraine shortly after the intervention provided compelling evidence that the unit had been deployed in combat operations in Ukraine.[299] Additionally, the website discovered awards the soldiers

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295 Politkom.ru, "Russian Food Ban Could Herald Military Scenario in Ukraine - Expert - Proquest," Politkom.ru, August 7, 2014, http://search.proquest.com/docview/1551971587?rfr_id=info%3Axri%2Fsid%3Aprimo.

296 Michael Weiss, "We Come in 'Peace,'" *Foreign Policy*, August 8, 2014, https://foreignpolicy.com/2014/08/08/we-come-in-peace/; The Interpreter, "Day 170: Heavy Fighting Overnight on Western Edge of Donetsk," *Ukraine Liveblog* (blog), August 6, 2014, https://www.interpretermag.com/ukraine-liveblog-day-170-heavy-fighting-overnight-on-western-edge-of-donetsk/.

297 Weiss, "We Come in 'Peace.'"

298 Maxim Solopov, "Russian Soldiers in Ukraine: An Investigation," Euromaidan Press, October 3, 2014, http://euromaidanpress.com/2014/10/03/russian-soldiers-in-ukraine-an-investigation/; Dmytro Snegiryov, "Ukrainian Intelligence Does Not Provide Information on Some Russian Military Units That Were Deployed to Ukraine," Uawire, March 16, 2017, https://uawire.org/news/prava-sprava-ukrainian-intelligence-does-not-provide-information-of-some-of-russian-military-units-that-were-deployed-to-ukraine.

299 The Ukrainian open-source intelligence site InfornNapalm has posted several of its investigations into the presence of the 15th SMRB in Ukraine at informnapalm.org.

received in Ukraine and reported the deaths of 15th SMRB soldiers who were reportedly killed fighting alongside separatist fighters in the Donbas and Luhansk.[300]

Finding such information was made more difficult by the fact that, in an attempt to mask their presence in Ukraine, forces from the 15th SMRB that deployed from a forward staging base in the Rostov region along the Ukrainian border would remove any unit identification and license plate information, remove their military uniforms, and change into civilian-looking combat gear before entering Ukraine, where they would embed with the pro-Russian separatist units.[301] In the age of Putin, the 15th SMRB has evolved from a force intended to be a dedicated professional peacekeeping force interoperable with foreign militaries into a tool that Moscow uses to influence events on the ground to shape favorable outcomes in pursuit of its interests.

2. Russia's Military Police (MP) Battalions

The military police are Russia's youngest branch in its armed services.[302] The idea to have dedicated military police units was a response to the tumultuous post-Soviet era, when a lack of good order and discipline bred criminality and rampant hazing within Russia's military ranks.[303] In 2006, Putin began the process of establishing a formal military police service but met resistance within the military on how best to structure the service.[304] After nearly a decade of back-and-forth on how to best organize and implement the new service, Putin signed the Military Police Statute in March 2015. Like the 15th

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300 Anton Pavlushko, "Mourning 'Peacekeepers' of the 15th Brigade," trans. Evgen Podolsky, InformNapalm.org, July 23, 2015, https://informnapalm.org/en/mourning-peacekeepers-of-the-15th-brigade/; Irakli Komaxidze, "15th Motorized Rifle Brigade Deployed to the Ukrainian Border as an Intelligence Unit and 'Peacekeepers' at the Same Time.," InformNapalm.org, September 12, 2014, https://informnapalm.org/en/15th-motorized-rifle-brigade-deployed-ukrainian-border-intelligence-unit-peacekeepers-time/; Komaxidze and Vidal Soroki, "Russia Uses Servicemen of the 15th Motorized Rifle Brigade of Peacekeeping Forces in Donbas," trans. Maksym Sviezhentsev, InformNapalm.org (English), September 10, 2016, https://informnapalm.org/en/uses-15th-motorized-rifle-brigade/.

301 Mikhail Kuznetzsov, "Russian 15th Brigade Mimics 'Donbas Miners,'" trans. Stepan Grishin, InformNapalm.org, December 15, 2015, https://informnapalm.org/en/dec14-mimic-donbas/.

302 Aleksey Ramm, "The Russian Military Police," *Center for Analysis and Strategic Technologies* (blog), accessed April 14, 2020, http://cast.ru/products/articles/the-russian-military-police.html.

303 Mark Galeotti, "Not-So-Soft Power: Russia's Military Police in Syria," War on the Rocks, October 2, 2017, https://warontherocks.com/2017/10/not-so-soft-power-russias-military-police-in-syria/.

304 Ramm, "CAST."

SMRB, the MP units are contract soldiers with very high recruitment standards.[305] To join these units, recruits must have at least two other servicemembers vouch for their potential to serve in the military police.[306]

Under Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu and the Chief of the Military Police Vladimir Ivanovskiy, military police directorates have been established in each military district.[307] The plan was to establish a military police unit ranging from platoon to battalion size at each garrison within the military district.[308] Their primary tasks in peacetime are to patrol the military garrisons and maintain good order and discipline.[309] In wartime, their principal task is the protection and security of military facilities and critical infrastructure.[310] When the unit was first conceived, it was unlikely that anyone within the Kremlin would have thought that these military police units would be thrust into the international spotlight in middle of one of history's worst civil wars, conducting humanitarian operations, patrolling deconfliction zones with foreign militaries, mediating local conflicts, and potentially shifting the balance of power in the contest over Syria's future.

a. Russian MPs in the Syrian Civil War

Russia's intervention in the Syrian civil war has been a testbed for exploring military innovations and where many of its military leaders have gained valuable combat experience. One such innovation is the employment of its MP battalions to perform peacekeeping activities in Syria. Since its introduction into the Syria conflict in 2016, the unit has brought security to areas along the Syria-Israel border, enforced cease-fire

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305 Nikolay Surkov, "Russian Military Police in Syria: Function and Prospects," in *The Emerging Security Dynamics and the Political Settlement in Syria* (Syracuse, Italy: The Geneva Centre for Security Policy and Omran for Strategic Studies, 2018), 4, https://dam.gcsp.ch/files/2y10na4neNsu7CMsBDVA0Yta7YnvXYE6hyYihF3Aqcb1cSPVM0eO.

306 Surkov, 4.

307 Ramm, "CAST."

308 Ramm.

309 Ramm.

310 Ramm.

agreements, conducted joint border patrols with UN peacekeepers and Turkish armed forces, and distributed humanitarian aid to the Syrian people.[311] According to Lieutenant-General Vladimir Ivanovsky, head of the MoD's Main Military Police Department, "The Russian military police in Syria primarily deals with peacekeeping missions…This activity is linked with monitoring the cease-fire, providing for humanitarian actions, accompanying UN convoys and solving other tasks."[312]

The presence of Russia's MP battalions provides Moscow with a military force capable of influencing tactical actions on the battlefield in order to control events on the ground. Notable scholar of the Russian military Mark Galeotti assessed that the military police provide Moscow with a multi-faceted force capable of accomplishing various objectives:

> The military police are first and foremost exactly what they seem, a long-needed response to a need within the Russian armed forces, [but] they also provide another source of "hard soft power." Ostensibly providers of law, order, and security, they are also combat assets, and their presence in harm's way can even — if one is working on a very ruthless calculus — justify the injection of more conventional military force when they come under threat.[313]

Around the time Putin codified the existence of the MPs into law, he announced a plan to withdraw the majority of Russian troops from Syria, claiming Moscow had achieved its objectives there.[314] However, the Assad regime still needed on-the-ground military support to consolidate the gains of its recent tactical victories and free up Syrian forces for continued combat operations. Militarily speaking, deploying the military police provided Moscow with a multifaceted force capable of being Galeotti's "potential

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311 "Russia Says UN Peacekeepers Have Returned To Israeli-Syrian Border," RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty, August 3, 2018, https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-rudskoi-says-un-peacekeepers-return-israeli-syrian-border-golan-heights-after-years/29408135.html.

312 "Russia's Military Police Tasked with Peacekeeping Missions in Syria — Top Brass," TASS Russian News Agency, April 25, 2019, https://tass.com/world/1055666.

313 Galeotti, "Not-So-Soft Power."

314 Patrick Wintour and Shaun Walker, "Vladimir Putin Orders Withdrawal of Russian Troops from Syria," *The Guardian*, March 15, 2016, sec. World news, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/mar/14/vladimir-putin-orders-withdrawal-russian-troops-syria.

instrument of a robust kind of soft power," which would allow Moscow to respond quickly to the changing military circumstances on the ground.[315] Political motivations for deploying the MP battalions under a peacekeeping/humanitarian mandate were to signal to domestic audiences that Putin had transitioned Moscow's campaign from combat operations to a mission focused on stability, reconstruction, and reconciliation in an attempt to limit domestic backlash for deploying combat forces for an extended period of time overseas.[316] Thus, the deployment of the MP battalions can be viewed as both a military and a political move by Moscow, one that would give it influence over events on the ground in Syria while mitigating negative press concerning casualties resulting from its support of the Assad regime with combat forces.[317]

These functions were manifested when, in December 2016, Moscow brokered a cease-fire agreement between the Assad regime and opposition groups in Aleppo, a stronghold of several Turkish-backed opposition groups.[318] As part of the agreement, Moscow deployed its military police units to enforce the cease-fire and guard the movement of civilians and opposition fighters out of the city, allowing Assad's forces to effectively take control of it.[319] Two features made this initial deployment of military police units unique and demonstrated their multifaceted nature. First, the initial deployments were composed of largely Sunni Muslim soldiers from Chechnya, Dagestan, and Ingushetia.[320] Aptly called the "Muslim battalions," they were likely intended to ingratiate themselves with the local population in order to facilitate a peaceful settlement between the Assad regime and the Sunni Muslim population, which largely opposed the presence of Assad's soldiers and Shiite militia groups. Second, these battalions were

315 Galeotti, "Not-So-Soft Power."

316 Surkov, "Russian Military Police in Syria: Function and Prospects," 4.

317 Surkov, 4.

318 Raymond Hinnebusch and Omar Imady, "Syria's Reconciliation Agreements" (St. Andrews, UK: Center for Syrian Studies at the University of St. Andrews, 2017), 8, https://core.ac.uk/reader/161930534.

319 "Ceasefire Agreed in Syrian Conflict," BBC News, December 29, 2016, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-38460127.

320 Neil Hauer, "Putin Has a New Secret Weapon in Syria: Chechens," *Foreign Policy*, May 4, 2017, https://foreignpolicy.com/2017/05/04/putin-has-a-new-secret-weapon-in-syria-chechens/; Surkov, "Russian Military Police in Syria: Function and Prospects," 4; Galeotti, "Not-So-Soft Power."

reportedly composed of soldiers from Spetsnaz units from the North Caucasus region, indicating that these forces had a level of prior training that would made them a credible fighting force at the disposal of Russian military commanders on the ground.[321] Muslim battalions manned checkpoints, distributed humanitarian aid, aided in safe resettlement of internally displaced persons, and conducted joint patrols with regime forces in several deconfliction zones in Northern Syria.[322] They also served as an effective fighting force when pro-regime forces needed additional combat support. When regime forces were threatened in and around Damascus, military police units were believed to have coordinated the successful defense of these neighborhoods.[323] When the military police units came under attack themselves, Moscow was quick to respond with overwhelming fire support.[324]

Having the MP battalions on the ground has thus helped enhance Russia's international prestige. In 2014, UN peacekeepers were forced to abandon their positions on the Syrian side of the Golan Heights when Islamic militants took control of the area.[325] After the Assad regime was able to clear the militant-held areas along the Syria-Israel border, Russia sent in its military police to stabilize the area so the UN could resume its peacekeeping and monitoring operations.[326] On a press tour of the area, Lieutenant General Sergei Kuralenko claimed that "the Russian flag is the guarantor of peace and security on that land."[327] He also reinforced the idea that Russia was a transparent and reliable security partner and that the military police units work in close cooperation with

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321 Galeotti, "Not-So-Soft Power"; Surkov, "Russian Military Police in Syria: Function and Prospects," 4–6; Hauer, "Putin Has a New Secret Weapon in Syria."

322 Hauer, "Putin Has a New Secret Weapon in Syria"; Surkov, "Russian Military Police in Syria: Function and Prospects," 4–5.

323 Hauer, "Putin Has a New Secret Weapon in Syria."

324 Galeotti, "Not-So-Soft Power."

325 Louis Charbonneau, "U.N. Golan Peacekeepers Pull Back from Syrian Positions Amid Clashes," Reuters, September 15, 2014, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-syria-crisis-golan-un-idUSKBN0HA1HW20140915.

326 "Russian Military Says Helping Restore UN Patrols On Syrian-Israeli Border," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, August 15, 2018, https://www.rferl.org/a/russian-military-general-kuralenko-says-helping-restore-un-peacekeeping-patrols-syrian-israeli-border-golan-heights/29434551.html.

327 "Russian Military Says Helping Restore UN Patrols On Syrian-Israeli Border."

UN authorities in coordinating its activities in the region.[328] The Golan Heights area has long been a source of insecurity for the Israelis, and stability on the Syrian side is in Israel's interest. Fearing that Iranian proxies presented a greater threat to Israel's security than Al-Qaeda–linked militants, Moscow brokered an agreement with the Assad regime to keep Iranian proxies 50 miles away from the Israel-Syria border.[329] To assure Israel, Moscow agreed that the military police would establish eight posts along the UN disengagement zone.[330] In the role of guarantor of security along the Syria-Israel-Jordan border, the military police units have played a key role in legitimizing Russia's efforts in Syria and elevating its prestige as a regional leader.

b. Cooperation and Confrontation with Turkey and the United States

In October 2019, the MPs were again thrust into the center of geopolitics when a series of events shifted the balance of power between Russia, Turkey, and the United States. In early October, President Erdoğan announced Operation Peace Spring, an operation to invade northeast Syria and remove Kurdish forces in order to extend the security buffer along Turkey's border with Syria.[331] At the same time, President Trump announced the withdrawal of U.S. forces from northeast Syria, leaving the U.S.-backed Kurdish forces to seek protection elsewhere. Without the United States' protection from Turkey's military incursion into Kurdish-held territory, the Kurdish People's Protection Unit (YPG) asked the Assad regime and Russians to replace the United States as the

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328 "Russian Military Says Helping Restore UN Patrols On Syrian-Israeli Border."

329 Polina Nikolskaya and Dan Williams, "Russia Says Iranian Forces Pulled Back from Golan in Syria; Israel Unsatisfied," Reuters, August 1, 2018, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-golan/russia-says-iranian-forces-pulled-back-from-golan-in-syria-israel-unsatisfied-idUSKBN1KM4GS.

330 Sarah El Deeb and Maria Danilova, "Russia: UN Peacekeepers Back on Golan Heights-Syria Frontier," Associated Press, August 2, 2018, https://apnews.com/9d40295ea5d74f4682c96b7201c188b9/Russia:-UN-peacekeepers-back-on-Golan-Heights-Syria-frontier.

331 Caleb Mills, "Operation Peace Spring: A Timeline," Backgrounders, October 18, 2019, https://www.geopoliticalmonitor.com/operation-peace-spring-a-timeline/; "Full Text of Turkey, Russia Agreement on Northeast Syria," Syria's War, October 22, 2019, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/10/full-text-turkey-russia-agreement-northeast-syria-191022180033274.html; Tom O'Connor, "Russia Shows Off New Syria Map, Sends Troops to Border After Its Deal with Turkey," *Newsweek*, October 23, 2019, https://www.newsweek.com/russia-syria-map-troops-deal-turkey-1467252.

security guarantor in the area.[332] As soon as the United States began to vacate its bases in Kurdish-held territory, Moscow quickly deployed its MP units to occupy the former U.S. positions and began joint security operations with Turkish forces.[333] To avoid potential conflict with Ankara, Moscow then used the military police to negotiate a joint peace deal and facilitate the withdrawal of U.S.-backed Kurdish forces from the Turkish border and establish a joint deconfliction zone. The prominence of the Russian military police in this process is highlighted in the signed agreement between Putin and Erdoğan:

> Starting 12.00 noon of October 23, 2019, Russian military police and Syrian border guards will enter the Syrian side of the Turkish-Syrian border, outside the area of Operation Peace Spring, to facilitate the removal of YPG elements and their weapons to the depth of 30km (19 miles) from the Turkish-Syrian border, which should be finalized in 150 hours. At that moment, joint Russian-Turkish patrols will start in the west and the east of the area of Operation Peace Spring with a depth of 10km (six miles), except Qamishli city.[334]

Moscow used the MPs to facilitate deconfliction with Turkey along Syria's border, and also to assist the Assad regime in deterring Turkey from making additional territorial gains in Syria. The rapid deployment of the MP battalions brought more territory under the Assad regime's control and extended Moscow's operational reach closer to the Iraq border. The United States only executed a partial withdrawal of its forces and ended up keeping approximately 500 soldiers to guard strategic oil fields still under the control of the U.S.-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF).[335] This partial withdrawal placed U.S. soldiers in frequent contact with the Russian MP units. Fears of a possible escalation between Russia and the United States were elevated after several high-profile, non-violent confrontations between the military police units and U.S. soldiers were captured on video.[336]

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[332] Mills, "Operation Peace Spring."

[333] Eric Schmitt, "Russians Pressure U.S. Forces in Northeast Syria," *New York Times*, February 14, 2020, sec. World, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/14/world/middleeast/russia-northeast-syria.html.

[334] "Full Text of Turkey, Russia Agreement on Northeast Syria."

[335] "Is Trump 'Stealing Oil' from Syria?," Reality Check, November 21, 2019, https://www.bbc.com/news/50464561.

[336] Schmitt, "Russians Pressure U.S. Forces in Northeast Syria."

In another incident, after Turkish-backed Syrian opposition groups suffered several days of losses at the hands of the Assad-regime forces,[337] on March 1, 2020, Turkey announced another intervention into Syria named Operation Spring Shield.[338] In order to secure its foothold in Idlib province, Turkey's military attacked Assad-regime forces and escalated the conflict by shooting down two Syrian Su-24 fighter jets.[339] Turkey signaled its intent to retake the strategically important city of Saraqib, which sits at the junction of major intrastate highways that connect the Assad regime strongholds of Damascus and Latakia to Aleppo,[340] demanding that Damascus withdraw its forces to previously held positions.[341] In response, Moscow rushed the MP units to the area, ensuring that pro-regime forces controlled the vital ground lines of communication, which serves as major arteries for the movement of goods, soldiers, and equipment between Russia's bases along the coast to the interior of the country, and deterring Turkey from intervening to re-take the city.[342]

Since their first deployment to Syria, Russia's MP units have been deployed to all corners of the country and served in a wide variety of roles, from peacekeeping and humanitarian missions to enforcing cease-fire agreements and supporting combat operations. They remain on the front lines of the Syrian conflict, helping Moscow to secure victory for the Assad regime. However, the military police are a small force that is increasingly spread thin across the country.[343] Their lack of depth remains a potential limiting factor in Moscow's ability to shape events on the ground.

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337 "Russian Military Police Deployed to Syria's Saraqib," TASS Russian News Agency, March 2, 2020, https://tass.com/defense/1125825.

338 Joseph Trevithick, "Russians Tag Along With Assad's Forces To Deter Turkish Strikes As Syrian Air War Heats Up," The War Zone, March 2, 2020, https://www.thedrive.com/the-war-zone/32418/russians-tag-along-with-assads-forces-to-deter-turkish-strikes-as-syrian-air-war-heats-up.

339 Trevithick.

340 "Russian Military Police Deployed to Syria's Saraqib."

341 "Russian Military Police Deployed to Syria's Saraqib."

342 Trevithick, "Russians Tag Along With Assad's Forces To Deter Turkish Strikes As Syrian Air War Heats Up"; "Russian Military Police Deployed to Syria's Saraqib."

343 Surkov, "Russian Military Police in Syria: Function and Prospects," 5.

D. CONCLUSION

Since Vladimir Putin has been in power, he has employed peacekeepers in numerous military interventions, including the three examined in this chapter—Georgia, Ukraine, and Syria—to control events on the ground and influence outcomes favorably for Moscow. Moscow's principal peacekeeping units, the 15th SMRB and its MP battalions, provide it with a professional military force that can deploy rapidly without triggering negative domestic and international attention. This utility serves two goals for Moscow. Its peacekeepers' presence serves as a credible deterrent against intervention by Moscow's adversaries, and it simultaneously prevents Moscow from being pulled into a costly confrontation with another power—a situation that Moscow cannot afford, politically or economically. Deploying peacekeepers under humanitarian or peacekeeping mandates gives Moscow's activities the appearance of legitimacy. If its peacekeepers are attacked, Moscow can use that attack as a geopolitical justification to intervene and thereby play the victim. In summary, the peacekeeping forces allow Moscow to maximize its influence—within the means and capabilities of the units—while minimizing geopolitical and domestic costs.

Similarly, Moscow's minimal contributions to UN peacekeeping missions are another example of the Kremlin's effort to maximize its influence in international politics while minimizing costs. Moscow can claim that it is a troop-contributing country while at the same time investing very little, using its slight contributions as a means to obtain valuable intelligence and influence on the ground. The specialized training of the 15th SMRB provides a readymade pool of personnel to support Moscow's efforts to influence the conduct of the peacekeeping mission. As Russia continues its global push for influence, its peacemaking units will continue to be a key foreign policy tool that Moscow can use to control events on the ground and exploit opportunities to expand its influence.

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V. CONCLUSION

This research has analyzed Russia's use of three military tools—military technical cooperation, private military and security companies, and peacekeeping forces—to demonstrate how Moscow is using these capabilities to build influence and achieve its objectives abroad. The aim of this final chapter is to identify trends and drivers behind the use of these tools, both individually and holistically, and provide policy recommendations to limit their effectiveness.

A. FINDINGS AND TRENDS

"You probe with bayonets. If you find mush, you proceed. If you find steel, you withdraw."[344] Attributed to Vladimir Lenin

The evidence suggests Russia is shrewdly using its military tools to gain influence in countries where U.S. influence is declining. These indicators suggest that Russia has become emboldened by recent victories, such as its successful military-diplomatic intervention for the Assad regime in Syria, its annexation of Crimea, its support to separatist movements in Eastern Ukraine, and its successful expansion of military-diplomatic cooperation in regions such as Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East—regions where it seeks to compete with the United States for geopolitical, geostrategic, and economic influence.

This research finds that, on the whole, Moscow is using these three low-cost military tools with the primary tactical goal of projecting power and rapidly exploiting opportunities to influence the outcome of events on the ground in the hopes that Moscow can achieve a strategic success. These three tools are rapidly deployable, help Moscow

[344] David Brandenberger and Catherine A. Fitzpatrick, "Report on Polish War: 20 September 1920," in *The Unknown Lenin: From the Secret Archive*, ed. Richard Pipes (Yale University Press, 1996), 100, https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt5vm3c7.70. Note: Lenin provides context to this famous quote, in "Document 59: Political Report of the Central Committee RKP(b) to the Ninth All-Russian Conference of the Communist Party." Lenin claims that "As far as we were able to probe with a bayonet the readiness of Poland for social revolution, we must say that this readiness was slight. To probe with a bayonet meant gaining direct access to the Polish farm laborers and to the Polish industrial proletariat, to the extent that it remained in Poland."

project power, and allow Russia to gain influence while preventing escalation into open confrontation with the United States or other military powers.

1. Military-Technical Cooperation

MTC serves Moscow's broader geopolitical aims and has significant implications for regional security. MTC is the connective tissue that binds Moscow with its partners and allies. In the case studies of Russian MTC, the provision of weapons, military equipment, and advanced systems was intended to strengthen the self-defense capabilities—with respect to both internal and external threats—of the recipient. As Chapter II revealed, these complex systems are maintenance-intensive, leaving countries dependent on Moscow's military and arms industry. This dependent relationship gives Moscow significant influence with each of its MTC partner nations and aids its narrative that it wishes to protect a country's sovereignty and protect regional stability.[345] Additionally, Russia is pursuing greater maintenance, repair, and overhaul support for major weapons recipients across the globe in an attempt to rectify a major weakness of Soviet-era MTC relations. Russia is able to quickly execute its MTC agreements to exploit an opportunity, subsequently using the penetrative effects of maintenance, repair, and overhaul facilities, advisers, and technicians to consolidate gains and maintain a lasting presence in whichever region it is operating in. Russian MTC agreements come with fewer constraints than those of the United States, and many countries are beginning to see Moscow as a more viable partner than Washington. Though the United States may still have a qualitative edge in weapons technology, many countries are beginning to prefer the speed, affordability, and constraint-free agreements with Moscow over quality. Thus, Russia is able to capitalize on its MTC agreements more rapidly than many of its geopolitical competitors in the West. This affordability, speed, and an ongoing presence give Moscow a competitive advantage over the United States in the near-term.

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[345] Dmitry Gorenburg, "Russian Foreign Policy Narratives," Security Insights, Marshall Center Series (Garmisch, Germany: George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies, November 2019), https://www.marshallcenter.org/mcpublicweb/en/nav-publications-security-insights-en.html.

2. Private Military and Security Companies

PMSCs are a multipurpose tool that Moscow can use to perform a wide range of tasks, which includes training local forces and providing local security and protection of critical infrastructure; combat support (artillery, intelligence, engineering, coordinating fire support); logistics; repair of Russian-made weapons; and assault forces conducting offensive operations. These capabilities enable Moscow to tailor its application of PMSCs based on the situation on the ground. They can move in and out of a given hot-spot or conflict zone with relative ease and with far less visibility than a regular military unit, making their movements significantly harder to detect, which allows Moscow to deny their existence and buys it critical time to influence events on the ground.

Conventional warfare thinking has evolved, and Russia's use of PMSC arguably demonstrates that Moscow is adapting to the times at a rate faster than the United States is prepared to counter. As Sean McFate states in his article "The Return of Mercenaries, Non-State Conflict, and More Predictions for the Future of Warfare," private armies are making a comeback, and Russia is at the forefront of this comeback. Moscow tellingly "cut its military budget by 20 percent in 2017, yet it shows no sign of curbing its global ambitions."[346] However, as the case studies in Chapter III demonstrate, PMSCs are limited in their effectiveness. In Libya and Syria, when used in direct support of combat operations, they did not create decisive results for their partner force. In both conflicts, initial offensive successes were against uncoordinated and poorly equipped enemies. When confronted with a competent military force, like the United States or Turkey, their effectiveness was severely degraded. When Turkey entered the Libyan conflict, the prospect of high losses against a superior opponent may have triggered a shift in Moscow's proxy strategy—from using PMSCs composed of Russians to using Russian PMSCs only to train, recruit, and import fighters from other theaters.

These cases also reveal that Russian PMSCs at times exacerbate fear and suspicion among internal and external actors in a conflict, often resulting in the buildup of military

[346] Sean McFate, "The Return of Mercenaries, Non-State Conflict, and More Predictions for the Future of Warfare," Medium, November 8, 2019, https://gen.medium.com/the-return-of-mercenaries-non-state-conflict-and-more-predictions-for-the-future-of-warfare-7449241a04e5.

capabilities and the intervention of foreign powers to prevent an unequal distribution of power. For example, evidence from Chapter III suggests that in the CAR and Libya, the presence of Russian PMSCs as a third-party actor in the country's internal dispute forced each opposing side to increase its own security. Thus far it appears that the effectiveness of Russian PMSCs has been limited as a result of this security dilemma and provides the United States an opportunity, through an effective information campaign, to exploit mistrust of Russian PMSCS and counter Russia's ability to control the outcome of these conflicts.

3. Peacekeeping

The uniquely Russian approach to peacekeeping, which resulted from its post-Soviet experience in intrastate conflict in the FSU, has led Moscow to forsake impartiality in its peacekeeping operations, often using military force in conflict zones to produce outcomes beneficial to its interests. Russia's principal peacemaking units have become a multifunctional tool used to influence events from the geopolitical to the tactical level and demonstrate a continuity in the evolution of Russian peacekeeping that will likely continue to be a hallmark of Russian foreign policy. Russia's peacemaking units are most useful when employed in situations where Moscow needs to deploy sufficient combat power to effectively enforce peace and deter adversary behavior while maintaining an image of legitimacy and prestige. If and when these units are threatened, Moscow can use that threat as an opportunity to play the victim and thereby escalate its involvement or use peacekeeping operations as leverage to bring about favorable geopolitical conditions. Putin will likely continue to engage in peacekeeping missions, maintaining the appearance of advocating for peace and security while surreptitiously applying this tool in ways that violate norms of impartiality, territorial sovereignty, and use of force—all to the benefit of the Kremlin. Moscow has employed its peacemaking units in three of its military interventions in the Putin era, a fact that has received little attention or scholarly analysis and is a strong indicator of Moscow's intentions to exert maximum influence on the battlefield in order to achieve its objectives.

4. Bringing It All Together

Individually, each of these military tools can be used as a probe for Moscow to find and capitalize on opportunities to achieve its foreign policy objectives. When an opportunity is discovered, it has the capability to rapidly exploit it; if it meets resistance, Moscow can withdraw or deny its intentions. Vladimir Lenin's concept of probing with a bayonet to find and exploit opportunities is an excellent metaphor for Russia's activities: Moscow will probe continuously until it finds an opportunity to exploit, at which time it will act. When analyzed holistically, Moscow's use of these three tools in a coordinated manner to increase influence or bolster its interests abroad displays a trend that suggests a coherent Russian strategy, though not formally stated, both in theory and practice. Therefore, these findings confirm the author's hypothesis: Russia's use of these military-diplomatic tools to probe for opportunities is a strategic, intentional policy decision driven by its desire to project power and its need for great power recognition.

B. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The United States and its partners should seek to expose Russia's military-diplomatic activities and engage with each other on areas of mutual interest to weaken the effects of these tools and to ensure a tactical action is not turned into a strategic success. To date, the United States government has left many aspects of these tools underanalyzed, and most scholarly literature relies extensively on journalistic reporting. In order to expose Moscow's objectives in using these tools and the full extent of their capabilities, the United States Department of Defense (DOD) must leverage its large network of intelligence analysts to provide unclassified reporting on the wider set of tools Moscow is using to project power.

In the last decade of the Cold War, the DOD sought to expose Soviet capabilities and intentions by publishing a yearly report titled "Soviet Military Power." From 1981 to 1991, the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) published annual reports providing a holistic and detailed account of the deployment of Soviet capabilities and activities abroad. The expansive set of tools that Moscow used to project power and build influence were the

source of much study and analysis.[347] In an important first step toward bringing Moscow's recent activities to the forefront of scholarly research and analysis, the DIA published "Russia Military Power" in 2017, stating that the purpose of the report was "to foster a dialogue between U.S. leaders, the national security community, partner nations, and the public about the challenges we face in the 21st century."[348]

Though an important step in exposing the challenge Russia poses for the United States and its allies, there is little in the report that describes the increasingly expansive means Moscow is using to project power and build its influence abroad. Military-technical cooperation is only mentioned once, with the majority of discussion spent on the monetary value of Moscow's arms sales and the weapons systems sold. The aspects of MTC analyzed in this thesis receive scant attention. In the section on arms sales, the report indicates Putin's desire to use MTC as a tool of influence but does little to analyze how or why. It states, "President Putin has expressed Moscow's willingness to improve financing options for contracts, expand offerings for joint production and local assembly of defense equipment in customers' countries, and improve upon post-sale support and equipment servicing."[349] The same holds true for PMSCs and peacekeepers, but these tools are not analyzed in the DIA report.

Detailed and unclassified analysis by the DOD is still needed to expose the breadth of Moscow's military tools of influence and its broader conception of power projection. Also, the United States has been remarkably slow at exposing missteps by Russia. It was not until after the February 2018 battle between the Wagner Group and U.S. special operations forces that Russian PMSCs began to receive significant attention. The DOD must make a determined and proactive effort to expose Moscow's objectives in order to equip policy-makers, diplomats, and military leaders with the information necessary to craft effective plans and strategies that can reduce their effectiveness.

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[347] The collection of "Soviet Military Power" reports can be found at https://edocs.nps.edu/2014/May/SovietMilPower

[348] "Russia Military Power," Military Power (Washington, D.C.: Department of Defense, 2017), IV, https://www.dia.mil/Portals/27/Documents/News/Military%20Power%20Publications/Russia%20Military%20Power%20Report%202017.pdf?ver=2017-06-28-144235-937.

[349] Defense Intelligence Agency, 86.

In addition, all of the military tools Moscow is using have limitations, which present opportunities for the United States and its partners to exploit. The utility of these tools lies in their ability to influence events in order to take advantage of opportunities without creating obstacles for Moscow. They allow Moscow to employ an assertive foreign policy while limiting its exposure to unnecessary risk. Therefore, Moscow must walk a fine line between exploiting opportunities and probing too hard and escalating conflicts. Moscow's desire to limit conflicts with other countries presents opportunities for the United States to raise the cost of employing these tools for Moscow. As this research has revealed, the surreptitious nature of these tools creates security dilemmas for Moscow. A strong information campaign exposing Moscow's surreptitious activity can sow the seeds of fear and mistrust against Moscow and limit the efficacy of its military tools.

Finally, Moscow's utilization of MTC, PMSCs, and peacekeepers as a low-opportunity-cost strategy will likely remain a key part of its foreign policy in the near term. The United States should increase its international engagement with countries that also share the desire to limit Moscow's reach and reduce the effectiveness of these tools. Furthermore, the United States should use regional organizations like the African Union, EU, and ASEAN to expose Moscow's activities and limit its geopolitical influence. Though Russia has a veto power in the UNSC, the United States should still use this forum to raise these issues with the international community. By increasing diplomatic engagement around these issues, the United States can bolster the resolve of many countries who are questioning its global leadership.

As Moscow continues to promote itself as an alternative leader to the U.S.-led world order, the United States must continuously expose Russia's activities and aggressively engage its partners to subdue Russia's ability to project power and undermine peace and stability across the globe. In their article on Russian activities published by the Middle East Institute, Mick Mulroy and Eric Oehlerich argue that "The U.S. needs to be steel" in its response to rising Russian assertive probing in the Middle East.[350] In light of

[350] Mick Mulroy and Eric Oehlerich, "Russia's Middle East: You Probe with Bayonets. If You Find Mush, You Proceed ...," Policy Paper (Washington, D.C.: Middle East Institute, February 27, 2020), 8, https://www.mei.edu/publications/russias-middle-east-you-probe-bayonets-if-you-find-mush-you-proceed.

this thesis' findings, a balanced approach to countering Russian activities is critical. In the United States' effort to counter Russia's influence, it should not overstate Russian capabilities and their effectiveness in order to spur others to action. On the other hand, underestimating Russian capabilities and intentions will run the risk of doing too little to check Russian expansionist tendencies and their negative consequences. A balanced U.S. response using the information and diplomatic instruments of national power will provide the international community with the necessary antidote to Russia's aggressive probing campaign.

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