

## **RUSSIA AND THE SECURITY OF EUROPE**

**EUGENE RUMER**

Russia's annexation of Crimea in March 2014 was the latest step in Moscow's long process of rejection of the post-Cold War Euro-Atlantic security order, reflecting a deeply held view that is unlikely to change anytime soon. Western strategy will need to adjust to Russia's conception of its interests and priorities in and around Europe.

### **The Return of Geopolitics**

- Russian elites are guided by a deep-seated sense of vulnerability vis-à-vis the West and fear Western encroachment on the country's security, economic, and geopolitical interests, as well as on their hold on power in Russia.
- The perception of vulnerability vis-à-vis the West includes every aspect of Russia's economy, politics, and defense. It is reinforced by Russian elites' concerns about the internal weakness of the country and its direction. It also serves as a tool for the elites to mobilize the population in the face of external threats. The elites recognize that the country is in a systemic crisis but fear that solutions could prove destabilizing.
- The lack of confidence in their defense capabilities has led Russian military experts to consider strategies for early nuclear escalation as a deterrent and countermeasure to the West's perceived conventional superiority. The West's plans for improving conventional capabilities and missile defenses are eroding Russian military planners' confidence in their nuclear deterrent.
- As seen by Russia's national security establishment and political elites, the security environment along the periphery of Russia is precarious and adds to the internal challenges facing the country. Russian planners are being confronted with a region rife with instability, local conflicts, and foreign powers they view as competing with or openly hostile to Russia in every strategic direction.
- In this environment, Russia is resorting to an array of tools from nuclear saber rattling to intimidation of smaller, weaker neighbors to information warfare, cyberoperations, subversion, bribery, and other political and economic measures as means of hybrid warfare or continuation of politics by all available means.

### **Implications for Western Policy**

- The experiences of Ukraine and Georgia have profound implications for not only those countries but also Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, and Moldova. Lacking the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO's) security guarantee, these six battleground states remain in what Moscow perceives as its sphere of privileged interests. It is prepared to use military force to keep them in it. As the West is not prepared to consign these states to the Russian sphere, they become the arena for East-West competition.

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- Russian actions before, during, and since the aggression against Ukraine suggest that Moscow still takes NATO's Article 5 security guarantee of its members seriously, and that it is not prepared to test that guarantee directly. Russian leaders went to war twice to prevent Georgia and Ukraine from eventually—as they saw it—joining NATO. Rather than challenge NATO directly, Moscow will continue to rely on its wide array of hybrid warfare methods to undermine member states' confidence in the alliance.
- Western policymakers should have no illusions that the buildup of defense and deterrent capabilities in the frontline states will have a stabilizing effect on the standoff between NATO and Russia. NATO's actions in the aftermath of the Ukraine crisis, intended to shore up the frontline states, have triggered disproportionate Russian responses, including deployment of anti-access and area-denial (A2/AD) capabilities to Crimea and Kaliningrad as well as threats to deploy nuclear weapons there.
- Absent major changes in Russia's (or NATO's) outlook, this adversarial relationship will remain a key feature of the Euro-Atlantic security order for the foreseeable future. Eventually, it will take a political, not a military, solution to resolve this standoff.

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