

MANAGING POTENTIAL FLASHPOINTS BETWEEN RUSSIA AND THE WEST IN EURASIA

PAUL STRONSKI | FEBRUARY 2018

As President Donald Trump's administration finished its first year in office, the U.S.-Russia relationship remained mired in distrust, misunderstandings, and bilateral irritants. The prospects for improvement appear dim, while the potential for more tension—for example, over North Korea, Iran, and the Russia investigation in the United States—remains high. Friction over Eurasia, a region where Russia and the West have clashed several times in the past, is also possible. Moscow has long viewed former Soviet Eurasia as its privileged sphere of interest and has resisted Washington's engagement with the region since the early 2000s, when NATO began ramping up coalition efforts in neighboring Afghanistan. Through military action in Georgia and Ukraine, Moscow has clearly demonstrated its opposition to any further integration of Eurasian countries into Western political, economic, or security structures.

While future clashes over Eurasia are possible, they are limited to a small number of issues. This is in part because U.S. engagement with Eurasia has declined since former president George W. Bush was in office. Moving forward, however, potential problems could arise from the political dysfunction in Washington, where the Trump administration has yet to develop clear policies toward Russia or Eurasia. An inward-looking United States that is lukewarm toward its NATO commitments or its partnerships with Georgia, Ukraine, or other Eurasian states could lead to fewer frictions with Russia. However, if the administration reaffirms its ties to the region, as U.S. Vice President Mike Pence's trip to the region suggests it may do, tension with Moscow could rise.¹

On the other end of the spectrum, Russia no longer feels bound by the post-Cold War order, which it believes is against its national interests. Kremlin policymakers—many of whom have backgrounds in the security services and are deeply distrustful of the United States—have shown greater

willingness to go toe-to-toe with the West since 2014.² Eurasia is a relatively easy place for Russia to demonstrate its clout with few costs. Intervening militarily or politically in one of its Eurasian neighbors does not risk the same sort of direct confrontation with the West as an attack on the Baltic states—now NATO members—would. However, such an intervention would still cause tension, risk additional sanctions, and lead to further isolation from the West. It also would reinforce Western views of Russia as a threat to the rules-based international system.

Beyond the politics playing out in both capitals, any surprise events—such as an unintended Russia-NATO military escalation, unpredictable political transitions, tensions between Russia and several of its neighbors, or a populist backlash against a sitting Eurasian state government—could test the U.S.-Russia relationship. In addition, an increase in U.S. military and security cooperation with Central Asia to support a surge of troops in Afghanistan could meet resistance from the

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Kremlin. The Trump administration's recent decision to cease security cooperation with Pakistan increases the chances for greater U.S. outreach to Central Asia on Afghanistan and has the potential to increase tensions.

Given Moscow's growing economic and diplomatic reliance on Beijing, it also is more likely that the Russian media will focus on U.S. military or security activities in Central Asia, as opposed to China's expanding security activities there. The Trump administration's new National Security Strategy makes clear that it anticipates the renewal of geopolitical competition, with both Russia and China as U.S. adversaries, and it even highlights Central Asia as a likely battleground.³ Finally, Ukraine will remain contentious at least through its 2019 presidential and parliamentary elections, while the war in eastern Ukraine will remain a barrier to improved East-West ties for the foreseeable future.

HOW WE GOT HERE

Competition between the United States and Russia in Eurasia dates back to the Soviet era. In 1959, the United States passed the Captive Nations Resolution, which calls on the U.S. president each year to highlight the plight of oppressed nations and ethnic groups around the world. During the Cold War, presidential proclamations generally highlighted Soviet or Soviet-style oppression, initially focusing on parts of the former Soviet Union: Armenia, Azerbaijan, the Baltic republics, Central Asia, Georgia, and Ukraine.⁴ Moscow saw these proclamations as both anti-Soviet and signs of Washington's desire to stoke discontent deep in the heart of the USSR. This historical background is key to understanding Russia's anxiety about Western intervention in its immediate neighborhood today and helps bolster Russian narratives that Washington has long intended to undermine Moscow's role in Eurasia.

After the Cold War, Moscow saw the region as one of its last remaining spheres of influence. This desire to retain its hold over Eurasia ran up against the official U.S. policy of supporting the sovereignty, independence, and democratic development of each former Soviet state. Official U.S. policy was to help Eurasian states modernize their economies, connect them to global markets and supply chains, and integrate them into the rules-based international system. Although Washington never explicitly articulated it, U.S. support to the newly

independent states implied an effort to weaken Russia's hold over individual countries. As Russia's democratic transition faltered in the late 1990s, Russian elites grew resentful of Western moves into what they call the "near abroad," a moniker for post-Soviet Eurasia that implies these countries are not fully independent or sovereign. By the end of the 1990s, Western energy companies, supported by Washington and other Western capitals, came to unlock the region's oil and gas potential and to plan multiple pipelines that could break Russia's hold over the region's export infrastructure. NATO's partnership for peace increased military and security contacts between fledgling Eurasian militaries and their Western counterparts.^{5, 6}

After the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, the West's involvement in Eurasia expanded rapidly to support NATO operations in Afghanistan and to prevent radical groups from gaining footholds in the region. Then secretary of defense Donald Rumsfeld proposed "lily pad" military facilities—small U.S. military outposts with limited troops and prepositioned weaponry and supplies to enable more mobile counterterrorism operations.⁷ The United States' first military bases in Central Asia—Karshi-Khanabad in Uzbekistan and Manas in Kyrgyzstan—opened in late 2001. Although Karshi-Khanabad closed in 2005 as U.S.-Uzbek relations deteriorated, these air bases were followed by the establishment of NATO landing and refueling rights at airports across Central Asia and the Caucasus and the creation of the Northern Distribution Network (NDN), a logistical and transportation route financed by the United States to facilitate the shipment of supplies across Eurasia, including Russia, to NATO forces operating in Afghanistan.

Although the NDN and NATO's overall presence in Afghanistan had clear financial and security benefits for Moscow, the Afghan war years saw NATO expand as the alliance transformed itself from a group of democracies countering the USSR to a larger one fighting global extremism. While the alliance at this time still considered post-Soviet Russia as a partner, some new NATO members remained more concerned about potential Russian threats than about global extremism. Russia perceived itself as encircled by the alliance and applied pressure on neighboring states to limit their interactions with Washington and Brussels.⁸ Having seen country after country in Central Europe gain NATO membership, the

Russian leadership viewed the threat of NATO's expansion into Eurasia as real. NATO's 2008 Bucharest Summit Declaration welcoming Georgia and Ukraine on the path to eventual NATO membership further reinforced this perception. To limit NATO's reach into Eurasia, Moscow went to war twice—against Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine in 2014—to make sure that neither country would ever get NATO Article 5 security guarantees.

Russia's wars in Eurasia reinforced stereotypes in the West of Russia as an aggressive power intent on rebuilding its former empire and led to deep declines in the East-West relationship. The wars also reinvigorated Washington's diplomatic, military, and financial support for Tbilisi and Kyiv. Yet Western backing for the region only went so far. For over a decade, disagreements within the alliance have left Georgia and Ukraine in limbo, in which NATO membership for both is off the table for all intents and purposes but the alliance will not formally admit that—an admission that would imply Moscow has a say in NATO decisionmaking.⁹ This limbo status neither alleviates Russian concerns nor reduces Russian security threats to either country. With Russia now deeply involved in the separatist entities of both countries, the likelihood of tensions between Russia and the West remains high.

UNCERTAIN U.S. POLICIES

Beyond its America First slogan, the Trump administration has yet to define its foreign policy approach, with the president and his cabinet sending mixed signals about Washington's commitment to Eurasia. Trump's campaign rhetoric implied a retreat from previous administrations' interventionist policies and a desire to disentangle Washington from alliances and security partnerships in distant parts of the globe. This caused unease not only in NATO capitals but also across Eurasia where governing elites have long seen Washington's presence in the region as key to balancing their security and foreign policies against both Russia and China. Concerns in Washington foreign policy circles over Trump's alleged affinity toward Russia, his dismissal of Russian intervention in the 2016 election, and a perceived de-emphasis of Ukraine by his administration led the U.S. Congress to pass legislation on Russian sanctions. Its passage has muddied the waters in Washington, making it unclear who and what drives U.S. policy toward Russia and Eurasia.¹⁰

Fearing that the Trump administration has disengaged from the broader region, presidents from Georgia, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine and senior foreign policy officials from virtually every Eurasian country traveled to Washington in 2017 and 2018 to cultivate relationships with the president and gain support for their country within the cabinet and Congress. Engagement by Ukrainian officials, for example, reignited the debate about whether Washington should provide lethal weapons to Ukraine—an issue that former president Barack Obama considered but ultimately shelved.¹¹ After much internal debate, Trump, in late December 2017, authorized the sale of lethal weapons to Ukraine, reversing the Obama era policy. This move clearly has the potential to increase tension between Russia and the United States, although the Russian reaction so far has been muted. Opponents of providing lethal weapons to Ukraine have long argued that these weapons sales will cause Moscow to escalate its support for the separatists in eastern Ukraine. Proponents, however, believe it could force Moscow back to the negotiating table. It is still too soon to determine how this issue will play out in real time, but the decision certainly raises the risk for increased tension between Moscow and Washington.

Furthermore, Ukraine's attempts to escape Russia's sphere and build closer ties with the West remain a major source of friction between Moscow and Washington. Russia's hold over the separatist territories and the undeclared war in eastern Ukraine are a major obstacle to, and distraction from, the reform process in Ukraine. The approaching presidential and parliamentary elections in 2019 in Ukraine will undoubtedly intensify intra-elite competition.¹² Given Russia's practice and proven ability to manipulate elections in other countries, Russian influence operations in Ukraine will likely rise in the run-up to those elections. The West's probable response—accusing Russia of interfering in Ukraine's internal affairs—will just as likely raise friction between it and Russia. These dynamics could lead to more East-West tensions over Ukraine by 2019, if not before.

BLACK SEA SECURITY

The Black Sea is another area of potential friction. With Warsaw Pact countries Bulgaria and Romania on the Black Sea's western coast and the Soviet Union on the northern, eastern, and southeastern coasts, the Soviet Union largely dominated

this body of water during the Cold War—facing only one NATO member, Turkey, on the southwest coast. In fact, dominance over the Black Sea has been a strategic objective for Moscow for centuries, as it has provided Russia with access to warm water ports and the Mediterranean. However, in the post-Soviet era, several Black Sea littoral states either joined NATO (such as Bulgaria and Romania) or declared their intention to do so (such as Georgia and Ukraine), which has pitted Russia against potential adversaries on all sides of the sea.

After Russia annexed Crimea, it began refortifying its naval facilities along the coast.¹³ NATO responded by increasing its activity in the Black Sea region, including basing a multinational force in Romania to reassure allies.¹⁴ Both Russia and NATO also have expanded anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) capabilities in the broader region, which could complicate either side's access to key parts of the greater Black Sea region in a conflict—a particular worry for NATO members on the alliance's eastern flank. The expansion of these capabilities could increase the potential for an unintended escalation in military activities in the region or an accident, especially if one side views a decision to increase combat readiness of these assets as a sign of a potential attack against the other.¹⁵

Maintaining communication channels about the Black Sea is essential to avoid accidents and misunderstandings. All Black Sea littoral states have legitimate interests in promoting tourism, the free movement of trade, the safety of shipping, and the ability to export energy resources to markets in southern Europe. Given growing concerns about extremists moving from Syria into Europe and Eurasia, both Russia and NATO have a stake in patrolling the sea to prevent the smuggling of illicit goods, weapons, and people. The dynamics around the Black Sea will remain tense but can be managed with careful effort by all sides.

RISKS OF PROTEST AND COLOR REVOLUTIONS

Over the past twenty years, the relationship between Russia and the United States has become strained when large-scale social protests have broken out in the region, leading, in some cases, to color revolutions. Russia's leadership fails to see the power of society in promoting change and remains convinced that outbursts of socioeconomic discontent are orchestrated

by the West. Moscow, for example, views Washington as the agent behind Georgia's 2003 Rose Revolution, Ukraine's 2004–2005 Orange Revolution, Kyrgyzstan's 2005 Tulip Revolution, and the 2014 Ukrainian Maidan, which Russian President Vladimir Putin even labeled a U.S.-sponsored coup.¹⁶ Successive U.S. administrations have failed to alter this Russian worldview, while the actions of some U.S. officials at times have fueled these perceptions.¹⁷

Divergent views over the causes of socioeconomic protests will remain a source of friction in East-West relations. The Trump administration's de-emphasis of values in U.S. foreign policy suggests that it is not interested in democracy promotion or improving governance in distant locales.¹⁸ Yet this de-emphasis of human rights promotion may do little to ease Russian concerns about perceived U.S. plots to promote regime change in Eurasia. This is due to the long-standing conviction of senior Russian leaders that successive U.S. administrations have pursued strategies to instigate political change and overthrow governments, especially those that are friendly to Moscow, for geopolitical gain. There is little Washington can do to change the Kremlin's conviction that the United States actively seeks to overthrow governments through color revolutions, and Washington will likely receive blame for any large-scale protests in the region, even if those public demonstrations take Washington by surprise. This has set Washington and Moscow up again for a clash, particularly as public discontent grows across the region over issues like corruption, high inflation, currency devaluation, pension reform, or election irregularities. Numerous countries—Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russia, and Ukraine—have witnessed sudden outbursts of popular anger over these issues in the past five years.¹⁹

Armenia

The most obvious candidates for more protests are countries where enough civil society space exists to see public pushback against entrenched elites or declining economic opportunity. In Armenia, a country that is highly dependent on Russian economic and security assistance, several protests since 2015 have had strong nationalist and anti-Russian undertones—a worrying turn for Moscow and governing elites in Yerevan.²⁰ With a troubled economy, the country is in the midst of transitioning from a presidential to parliamentary system, and it is

unclear how that transition will play out, particularly if term-limited President Serzh Sargsyan decides to retain power by becoming prime minister—a move that could provoke a public backlash. Armenian presidential elections have frequently led to protests, and the upcoming election in March 2018 will mark the final stage of this structural transition. Growing resentment of Russia in Armenian society likely contributed to the Armenian government’s decision to reengage the European Union to develop a new cooperation agreement—after abandoning the 2014 Association Agreement under pressure from Moscow. Its decision to return to the negotiation table with Brussels and sign the alternate Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement has met quiet resistance from Moscow as well.²¹

Kyrgyzstan

Experiments with democracy have neither made Kyrgyzstan stable nor provided it with much of an opening to the West. Like Armenia, it remains highly dependent on Russia. Its politicians have yet to solve the country’s most pressing issues, including the increasingly polarized north-south and ethnic Kyrgyz-Uzbek divides and long-standing economic problems. The country also lacks the capacity to respond effectively to natural disasters or emerging health threats.²² Given the rise of Kyrgyz ethno-nationalism, political bickering with its stronger neighbor Kazakhstan, and the opening of a criminal case against the losing Kyrgyz presidential candidate in the 2017 election, Kyrgyzstan appears stuck in its perennial cycle of pseudo-democratic dysfunction.²³ Previous instances of ethnic violence, the 2016 bombing of the Chinese embassy in Bishkek, and growing concerns about international terrorist connections to the country raise questions about the country’s stability.²⁴

No external powers—Russia, China, the United States, or any other Western country—intervened in the Kyrgyz Revolution of 2010, when significant clashes between ethnic Kyrgyz and Uzbeks occurred, despite a request by the new Kyrgyz government for assistance from the Russian-dominated Collective Security Treaty Organization. Another domestic crisis in Kyrgyzstan could trigger calls for intervention by outside powers. Who, when, and how one of these countries intervenes could cause friction, particularly if that intervention is seen as harming others’ interests or influence in the region.

Georgia and Moldova

For countries that have recently formalized their ties with Europe through association agreements and trade pacts with the EU, these agreements have yet to jump-start their sluggish economies, create jobs, or improve living standards. While Georgia and Moldova lean to the West, enthusiasm in both countries has dampened as a function of their challenging prospects for closer EU relations, let alone membership.

Moldova is one of Europe’s poorest countries. It has seen more than its fair share of political turbulence over the past twenty-five years.²⁵ Endemic corruption by successive governments of various political orientations and poor economic performance have taken their toll on the country, leading to political uncertainty and lack of progress on the reform agenda.²⁶ Igor Dodon, the country’s pro-Russian president elected in 2016, has called on Moldova to walk away from its European Union Association Agreement. Such a move could spark domestic protests and contribute to tensions between Russia and the West.²⁷

While successive governments in Georgia continue to promote a reform agenda and reiterate the importance of Euro-Atlantic integration, there are a number of contentious issues in Georgian politics that could lead to protests and social fissures that Russia could exploit to increase its influence in the country.²⁸ These include the failure of Georgia’s successive governments to address high unemployment levels and other socioeconomic problems. Furthermore, while the majority of the population is supportive of Georgia’s pursuit of integration into Western institutions, the country’s domestic politics remains polarized. This is particularly true when it comes to the legacies of the country’s larger-than-life former president Mikheil Saakashvili and former prime minister Bidzina Ivanishvili.²⁹ Saakashvili’s supporters claim that the current ruling Georgian Dream coalition is trying to establish a monopoly on political power through controversial constitutional amendments—the same charge Georgian Dream supporters leveled against Saakashvili when he was in power.³⁰

Predominantly Orthodox Christians, Georgians remain culturally conservative, particularly when it comes to several issues that are important to Georgia’s European partners, such as gender equality and minority or LGBT rights. EU advocacy of these issues has caused a backlash against Western

cultural norms in the country—a fact that Russia has tried to exploit. For example, the Russian-friendly, populist opposition party Alliance of Patriots won parliamentary seats for the first time in the 2016 election, campaigning on a pledge to uphold Georgian traditional values.³¹ These trends suggest that some constituencies inside Georgia could be vulnerable to anti-Western, pro-Russian influence operations.

MOSCOW'S UNHAPPY ALLIES

Belarus

The Kremlin has been particularly sensitive about Western engagement with Belarus, a country with a large number of Russian speakers, strategic Russian military and security installations, and a shared border with Russia. Belarus's historical role in providing a major invasion route into Russia from the West—most recently in World War II—and present role in serving as the key buffer state between Russia and NATO underscore its importance for Russia.

For over twenty years, Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko has maintained close ties with Russia and derived crucial economic benefits from that relationship. Minsk receives Russian subsidies that have been key to Lukashenko's longevity in office. They enable him to maintain a social contract with society in which the state—the country's key employer—provides its citizens with a basic standard of living in return for limited say in government. In return for these subsidies, Belarus has become one of Russia's closest allies.³² The Russian and Belarusian militaries train together and are largely interoperable.³³

However, despite his country's dependence on Russia, Lukashenko has been anything but a pliant client of Moscow and has managed to maintain a degree of independence. He has resisted Moscow's demands to establish a military base in Belarus.³⁴ He has cultivated his image domestically as a leader who does not bow to Moscow's pressure. More recently, he has also sought to rebuild ties with Europe and the United States, which were badly damaged as a result of sanctions imposed on the country in response to his domestic political crackdowns.

In addition, the benefits of Belarus's uniquely close relationship with Russia have decreased as Moscow's ability to subsidize Belarus has diminished with the Russian economic

slowdown and as Moscow has tried to use economic leverage to pressure Lukashenko to be more accommodating to its wishes. The likelihood of Russia continuing generous subsidies to Belarus without forcing major concessions from Minsk (like a military base) is diminishing. This new reality, combined with Russian aggression in Ukraine, helps explain Minsk's recent efforts to improve ties with Brussels and Washington. It is unclear how far Minsk will go in its recent outreach with the West, but Moscow is certainly watching. With Belarus as a unique ally, Moscow could be tempted to do something to keep Belarus in its orbit, especially if it sees its equities at risk.

Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan occupies a distinctive place among the former Soviet states, having pursued a successful multivector foreign policy carefully balanced between Russia, China, and the West. Like Belarus, it is heavily dependent on Russia in several key areas of economic activity and security. It also has a sizable ethnic Russian minority.³⁵

The annexation of Crimea and Russia's undeclared war in eastern Ukraine, combined with Putin's questioning of the historical legitimacy of the Kazakh nation and state in a 2014 speech, sent a troubling signal to Kazakhstan and contributed to a rise in ethnic Kazakh nationalism.³⁶ The recent decision by the Kazakh government to switch from the Cyrillic to Latin alphabet is indicative of Astana's desire to carve out more independence from Russia. Although government officials claim the goal of the switch is to modernize the Kazakh language, many Kazakhs and Russians see it as an effort to distance the country from its Soviet and Russian imperial pasts.³⁷

In recent years, rapid urbanization has led to the large-scale migration of rural Kazakhs to urban areas and changed the cultural, ethnic, and linguistic environment of Kazakhstan cities.³⁸ These factors have likely helped accelerate the migration of ethnic Russians from Kazakhstan to Russia.

President Nursultan Nazarbayev, seventy-seven years old, has deftly managed the country's complex interethnic relations and its relationship with Russia. Given Kazakhstan's geographic location and its close ties with Russia, Nazarbayev's successor will certainly have to maintain good relations with Moscow and be attentive to its wishes. Yet, while doing that,

the next president will also have to do at least as well as, if not better than, Nazarbayev in managing Kazakh nationalism, keeping the Russian minority happy, addressing socioeconomic problems, and maintaining the multivector foreign policy approach. The country's ethnic makeup and its long undefended border with Russia make it susceptible to the type of Russian interference and pressure used against Ukraine. Should Moscow attempt a Ukraine-style scenario in Kazakhstan, it would lead to a further deterioration of U.S.-Russian relations; essentially, it would reinforce Western perceptions of an aggressive Russia, highlight the West's inability to prevent such actions, and potentially damage U.S. complicated interests in the country.

A WAY FORWARD

U.S.-Russian relations are unlikely to improve anytime soon, yet the two countries need to find ways to avoid further confrontations. The past twenty-five years provide some lessons on what Eurasian states, Russia, and the West can do to better manage the situation.

First, Washington and Brussels should recognize the sovereignty and independent decisionmaking ability of Eurasian states but also be realistic about the importance of Eurasia to Russia. Russia is willing to go to war to deny the West the ability to play a major role in the region. The West, however, is not prepared to face that risk. Two wars—in Georgia and Ukraine—have demonstrated that. In both instances, Russia and the West had unrealistic perceptions of each other and asymmetrical interests in the countries and region. Russia acted on its inflated perceptions of the West's commitment to the region and threat to Russian interests, while the West underestimated Russia's likely response and acted on inflated expectations of progress made by the two countries in their post-Soviet transition.

Russia is unlikely to change its posture vis-à-vis Eurasia in the foreseeable future, while the West is not prepared to surrender it to Russia's sphere of influence. This requires the West to take a deeper, more nuanced, longer-term approach to engagement with Eurasian states.

Second, Eurasian states should recognize Russia's ambitions and the advantages it enjoys due to its geography and economic and

historical ties. They should factor this into their foreign and security policies and recognize that the West is not prepared to challenge Russia on their behalf. They need to devote as much energy and attention to managing their relations with Russia as they have invested in building ties with the West.

Third, Eurasian states should better understand political trends in the West. Trump's 2016 election revealed that a significant portion of the U.S. public approves of his America First approach to foreign policy and desire a retrenchment of U.S. engagement internationally. This retrenchment started with Obama's administration, which was reacting to the Bush administration's activist foreign policy. Trump is accelerating this trend, and Europe is also looking inward. Therefore, Eurasian states can count only on limited attention from Washington and Brussels. In the aftermath of two wars in Georgia and Ukraine, NATO's expansion into Russia's Eurasian backyard is on hold indefinitely, except in the Balkans, as attested by Montenegro's 2017 accession. Eurasian governments can count on some security and moral support from the West, but in the event of a major crisis with Russia, they will be left largely on their own to bolster their security and increase the costs to Russia of any aggression.

Fourth, Washington and Brussels should approach their engagement with the Eurasian region from a demand-driven perspective, focusing on countries and sectors where there are true constituencies for reform and for better relations with the West. Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine are obvious partners in this approach, but Armenia, Kazakhstan, and, recently, Uzbekistan have shown receptiveness for greater ties with the West and Western assistance in advancing reform, particularly on socioeconomic issues. Azerbaijan sends mixed signals about its desire for a partnership with the West but appears ready to engage on select security issues and to cooperate in areas that might help it diversify its economy—a move that would benefit the Azerbaijani people and is in the West's interests. The West also should recognize that some Eurasian countries—depending on their size, geographic location, and reliance on Russia—are more able and willing than others to engage with the West. Unlike the EU's initial one-size-fits-all approach to the Eastern Partnership countries in 2013, the West should develop tailored strategies to engage with each. The West should recognize the positive effects of China's

growing role in the region, which offers Eurasian states additional economic and geopolitical options. Greater Chinese investment and economic presence in Eurasia would likely increase the political costs to Russia of any potential military action in a neighboring Eurasian country and could act as a moderating influence on it.

Fifth, the last twenty-five years suggest that the multivector foreign policies of Armenia and Kazakhstan have allowed them to balance their close ties with Russia with reliably good ties with the major outside powers—China, Europe, and the United States. This careful, consistent approach has helped both countries maximize their engagement internationally, while avoiding direct Russian military intervention (as seen in Georgia and Ukraine) or diplomatic isolation from the West (as experienced by Belarus and Uzbekistan).

Sixth, the gradual decline of public infrastructure, healthcare systems, and educational institutions in much of Eurasia raises questions about Eurasian state capacity to both prevent and respond to a destabilizing event.³⁹ Given that neither Russia nor the West wants instability in a larger region that is close to Afghanistan, Europe, and the Middle East, this should concern them both. Tailored U.S. economic assistance to help regional states improve socioeconomic conditions and investor climates, as well as advance the health and educational prospects of their citizens, would raise the prospects for long-term stability and promote better governance in the region. A focus on building state capacity, including economic and infrastructure development, and on countering threats, such as terrorism, proliferation, and narco-trafficking, are likely

areas in which the United States can assist or partner with countries in the region. Even small levels of assistance in these noncontroversial, nonvalue-laden areas are likely to open up avenues for U.S. influence, which could be useful in quelling a potential crisis. It also would promote the U.S. image as a reliable partner. Both should be key goals in Western policy toward the region. However, the ability of the United States or Europe to provide assistance during a destabilizing event may hinge on cooperation with Russia; engaging with Russia early and developing channels of communication will be essential to respond in a timely manner.

Seventh, the gradual de-emphasis of the region in U.S. policy over the past decade and the reduction of U.S. presence across Eurasia mandate that China and the EU be brought into efforts to improve state capacity. In fact, both Beijing and Brussels have greater economic stakes in Eurasia than the United States does, which will likely translate into greater capacity to assist over the long term.

Finally, Europe, Russia, and the United States should continue to cooperate in areas that historically have not proven controversial. For example, all sides have worked together effectively in the Minsk Group process, which originally was intended to find a negotiated solution to the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Brokering a final peace deal has long eluded the Minsk Group, but U.S.-French-Russian efforts in this forum have helped manage the conflict and avoid a return to full-blown war. That cooperation should be continued, particularly if tensions rise between Armenia and Azerbaijan once again.

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U.S.-RUSSIA POLICY OPTIONS FOR THE LONG HAUL

With the U.S.-Russian relationship badly frayed, what are the biggest risks for escalation, deterioration, and miscalculation? What, if any, opportunities exist for halting a continued downward slide?

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perspectives beyond the relatively narrow confines of the current discussion in Washington and other capitals. The papers highlight the glaring differences between Russian and Western approaches to and perspectives on transatlantic, European, and Eurasian security.

The search for mutual understanding and dialogue is all the more challenging at a time when many of the long-established communication channels between Moscow and the West have been suspended as a result of what is increasingly described as a new cold war. Many of the perspectives in this collection differ, at times fundamentally, from the consensus view held by Western policymakers and analysts. Nevertheless, it is all the more vital for policymakers, analysts, and opinion-makers in the West to be informed about views held by their Russian counterparts, as these views oftentimes reflect and inform official Russian policy. This project is supported, in part, by the Carnegie Corporation of New York.



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