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CHINESE AND RUSSIAN INFLUENCE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON
THE MIDDLE EAST, NORTH AFRICA, AND
INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM

OF THE

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CHINESE AND RUSSIAN INFLUENCE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Thursday, May 9, 2019

House of Representatives

Subcommittee on the Middle East, North Africa, and International Terrorism

Committee on Foreign Affairs

Washington, DC

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 2:11 p.m., in room 2172 Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Theodore E. Deutch (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Mr. DEUTCH. All right. This hearing will come to order.

Welcome, everyone. The subcommittee is meeting today to hear testimony on Chinese and Russian influence in the Middle East. I thank our witnesses for appearing here today. I will now recognize myself for the purpose of making an opening statement, and then will turn it over to the ranking member to do the same.

Thanks so much to our witnesses for testifying today and for helping us examine patterns of Russian and Chinese influence in the Middle East and North Africa. In the fall of 2015, Russia launched a targeted military intervention in Syria to save the regime of Bashar al-Assad and ensure access to military bases on the Mediterranean Sea.

Moscow has used this foothold to assert its interests throughout the region, to expand its political and military and economic influence, to reclaim its status as a great power, and to offer itself as an authoritarian alternative to the United States.

In recent years, Moscow conducted military exercises with Egypt and sold Cairo more than $2 billion worth of aircraft, cooperated with Saudi Arabia to stabilize global oil prices, expanded ties with Khalifa Haftar in Libya, engaged in discussions to sell the S–400 Missile Defense System to Qatar, and strengthened relations with both Iran and with Israel.

China has also expanded its influence in the Middle East and North Africa in recent years, although in a different way. China's engagement has been primarily economic rather than military or political.

Since 1995, the region has been China's No. 1 source of imported petroleum. China overtook the United States as the largest net importer of crude oil from the Middle East in 2013. By 2018, roughly 44 percent of China's crude oil imports came from nine Middle Eastern countries.

Every major regional actor, including Israel, Saudi Arabia, and Iran, has expressed interest in various projects of China's Belt and Road Initiative. If history teaches us anything, China is likely to

increase its political engagement and expand its military footprint to secure these economic interests.

Indeed, in 2017, Iran and China held a joint naval exercise in the Persian Gulf, and just last month Egypt hosted the Chinese and Russian navies in a training exercise.

China began operating its first overseas military base located in Djibouti in 2017, providing it greater naval access to the Red Sea, Gulf of Aden, and Arabian Sea.

The expanding regional roles of both Russia and China are of particular importance in light of the Trump administration's national security strategy that prioritizes great power competition. Under this paradigm, rivalry with both China and Russia will become the organizing principle of U.S. foreign policy, yet we continue to see unprincipled China policy and deference to Russia.

The administration's announced withdrawal from Syria was a gift to Putin at a time when clear-eyed American leadership is what is clearly needed. The Middle East and North Africa may become an arena of strategic competition to an extent not seen since the early years of the cold war.

I hope our witnesses can draw upon their experience and share their insight to help us understand Moscow and Beijing strategies in the region, where our interests overlap or diverge, and how the United States should approach Russia and China's roles in the Middle East and North Africa.

And with that, I will turn it over to the ranking member, Mr. Wilson, for his opening statement.

Mr. WILSON. Chairman Deutch, thank you for holding this important hearing. China and Russia's increasing presence in the Middle East underscores the necessity of American leadership in the region. Beijing and Moscow are engaged on all levels in the Middle East and North Africa, political, military, economic, and beyond. And they are planning for the long haul, raising serious questions for U.S. interest and policy in the region.

As we delve into this discussion, we must also bear in mind that China and Russia's engagement in the Middle East is not only meant to increase their clout and influence in the region, but to decrease America's influence. Indeed, China and Russia are eager to take advantage of fissures between the U.S. and our traditional allies. They seek to portray themselves to our regional allies as viable alternatives to the U.S. while deepening their involvement in the region at our expense.

Under Chinese President Xi's leadership, China has expanded its engagement in the region dramatically. Beijing has dedicated considerable focus on the Middle East as part of the controversial Belt and Road Initiative. China has invested in nearly every country in the region, including in Israeli ports and railways and the expansion of the Suez Canal in Egypt.

Even more concerning are China's technology initiatives in the region. While the United States has voiced concern about Huawei, ZTE, and other technology firms, our friends in the Middle East seem happy to integrate Chinese initiatives in their technology sectors. In 2019 alone, Bahrain, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE have already engaged with China on telecom and 5G infrastructure.

Although China's activity in the region has historically focused on economics, under President Xi, Beijing has also increased its military footprint, as Beijing deepens military ties with traditional U.S. allies in the region, like Saudi Arabia and Egypt, and the United States must make it clear to our partners that collaboration with China comes at a significant real-world consequence.

Late last year, the U.S. Navy announced it would reconsider port calls to Haifa, Israel, once the Shanghai International Port Group, a company in which the Chinese government has a majority stake, takes over the civilian port in 2021. Like China, Russia has been strengthening military and diplomatic ties with our traditional Middle Eastern allies for years now, seeking to submit its role as a regional power broker.

Since Russia's 2015 intervention in the Syrian civil war, and support of the Assad regime, Moscow has also built strong economic ties with Saudi Arabia and Qatar, sold billions of dollars of arms to the UAE, and cultivated close ties to President Sisi of Egypt.

Russia's Middle East strategy has been to cultivate those ties with all actors, both U.S. friends and posts, in service of its ultimate goal of dominating the region and undermining U.S. interest. Moscow has depended on its relationships in recent years with Iran, Hezbollah, Turkey, Israel, as well as the rival Palestinian and Libyan factions.

And as Russia's role in the region continues to grow, actors in the region will feel less inclined to heed to U.S. interest, like respect for rule of law, democratic institutions, and human rights. While Russia and China appear to be real viable alternatives to the U.S., whether it be military, politically, or economically, the region will move toward authoritarianism and away from democracy.

I hope our expert witnesses today can address these crucial issues. How can the United States continue to advocate for our democratic values in the Middle East without pushing our friends and partners into the arms of Russia and China?

There is simply no alternative to U.S. leadership. We must redouble our efforts to deepen ties to the region and caution our allies that full-scale engagement with Russia or China is not in their interest.

The Middle East faces many challenges already, but if we fail to face the increasing Chinese and Russian influence in the region, things will only get worse for the people of the Middle East and for the United States and its interest for freedom and democracy.

I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. DEUTCH. I thank the ranking member. I will now recognize members of the subcommittee who wish to be recognized for a 1-minute opening statement. Mr. Cicilline, you are recognized.

Mr. CICILLINE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for calling this important hearing. And, of course, thank you to our witnesses for being here today.

As it has in so many parts of the world, in the Middle East, the Trump administration has forfeited American leadership in an ongoing series of diplomatic and strategic blunders that have set back our standing in the region, not to mention the world.

The administration pulled out of the Iran deal with no replacement, leaving an emboldened Iran that indicates it will return to

its nuclear program. The administration's Syria policy is virtually non-existent. And Saudi Arabia, the Trump administration has embraced a government that has had a journalist hacked to deal.

And Yemen, the United States is supporting a conflict that has led to unspeakable human suffering and inflamed tensions in the region. The list of failures goes on and on.

The lack of a clear U.S. strategy and diplomatic engagement in the region has created a vacuum—a vacuum China and Russia are already exploiting. This is making the region less stable. It is emboldening human rights offenders who take the administration's ambivalence toward human rights as a green light to crack down on civil society, further discriminate against women and LGBTQ individuals, and silence free speech.

Today, I hope we can discuss the risk the American security, as well as the risk to human rights, posed by a rising Russia and China in the Middle East.

I look forward to examining what Congress can do to support human rights activists in the region and to ensure the administration promotes American interests as well as our values. In the absence of a strategic vision by the administration, Congress must step up on behalf of the American people and set forth a path in the Middle East.

And thank you, Mr. Chairman, again for calling this very important hearing, and I yield back.

Mr. DEUTCH. Thank you, Mr. Cicilline. Seeing no other requests for opening statements, we will move on. Without objection, all members may have 5 days to submit statements, questions, and extraneous materials for the record subject to the length limitations in the rules.

It is now my pleasure to introduce our witnesses. Dr. Jon Alterman is senior vice president, Zbigniew Brzezinski Chair in Global Security and Geostrategy, and is director of the Middle East Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

He previously served in multiple roles at the United States Department of State, as an expert advisor to the Iraq Study Group, and before entering government, he was a scholar at the U.S. Institute of Peace and the Washington institute for Near East Policy. In addition to his policy work, he teaches Middle Eastern studies at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies and the George Washington University.

Next, I will turn to my colleague from Texas, Mr. Allred, to introduce his constituent.

Mr. ALLRED. Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am excited to introduce Dr. Andrew Exum, a constituent of mine from Dallas. Dr. Exum is an executive at Hakluyt & Company, a global management consultancy. Before that, he served as Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Middle East Policy, from 2015 until 2017.

And previously, he served active duty in Afghanistan and Iraq where he led a light infantry and ranger platoons, and later served as a civilian in the Department of Defense on a fellowship from the Council on Foreign Relations.

Dr. Exum, thank you so much for coming, sir. We have some friends in common who have spoken highly of you. I am sure every-

thing they said is not true, but we are happy to have you here. And thank you for sharing your expertise with us.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. DEUTCH. Thank you, Mr. Allred. It is worth pointing out, as the member representing South Florida, that many, many of the witnesses who appear before our committee 1 day will ultimately reside in my district as well.

Next, I would—it is my honor to introduce Under Secretary Christine Wormuth. Ms. Wormuth is the director of the RAND International Security and Defense Policy Center and is a frequent writer and speaker on foreign policy and national security and homeland security issues.

Prior to joining RAND, she served as Under Secretary of Defense for Policy at the United States Department of Defense from 2014 to 2016. She previously served in multiple roles at the Pentagon, including Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Strategy, Plans, and Forces, and senior director for defense at the National Security Council. And she was a senior fellow at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

Welcome, Ms. Wormuth.

Finally, Ms. Anna Borshchevskaya is a senior fellow at the Washington Institute focusing on Russia's policy toward the Middle East, a Ph.D. candidate at the George Mason University, and a fellow at the European Foundation for Democracy.

She was previously with the Atlantic Council and the Peterson Institute for International Economics, a former analyst for a U.S. military contractor in Afghanistan. She has also served as communications director at the American Islamic Congress. Welcome, Ms. Borshchevskaya.

Also, Dr. Exum, I would also extend my welcome to you as well.

Thanks to all of you for being here today. Let me remind our witnesses to limit your testimony to 5 minutes. Without objection, your prepared written statements will be made part of the hearing record.

Again, we thank you so much for being here today. And, Dr. Alterman, you are recognized.

STATEMENT OF JON B. ALTERMAN, PH.D., SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT, ZBIGNIEW BRZEZINSKI CHAIR IN GLOBAL SECURITY AND GEOSTRATEGY, DIRECTOR OF THE MIDDLE EAST PROGRAM, CENTER FOR STRATEGIC AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

Dr. ALTERMAN. Mr. Chairman, Mr. Ranking Member, it is an honor for me to appear once again before this subcommittee. It is important to grasp that China's approach to the Middle East is both deliberate and limited. My understanding of Chinese foreign policy is that alongside the overarching desire to restore China to its rightful primacy among world powers is the profound sense of China's vulnerability and insecurity. China has no missionary zeal to persuade the world of the virtues of Chinese civilization.

The Chinese government's goal is to secure itself, best done in a world driven by the bilateral relations of States. China, a country with no allies, is much stronger in a bilateral world. The United

States, a country with dozens of allies, is much weaker in a bilateral world.

China feels especially vulnerable in the Middle East. It is reliant on the Middle East for oil, dependent on its sea lanes, and unable to change the fact that the United States is the preponderant foreign power in the region.

In my judgment, China has no intention of displacing the United States from the Middle East, confronting the United States in the region, or engaging in a rivalry with the United States there, and it sees no reason to do so. It feels that stabilizing the region is beyond its reach, and doing so would likely do more to antagonize potential partners than advance stability. Instead, China is happy to have the United States incur costs in the region while China derives benefits.

In the Middle East, China benefits from high hopes and low expectations. China is a newcomer to the scene with relatively little history but a domestic economic track record that is enviable by almost any measure. In some ways, China is in the place that the United States was after the first World War, a dimly understood global power holding out the promise of a better future untainted by an imperialist history.

China also promises not to disrupt social values in societies undergoing profound change. That is, China promises access to the Chinese economic miracle while expressing none of the Western concerns about fostering systems that produce resilient societies. The China model has become even more attractive to Middle Eastern governments after the Arab uprisings of 2011, which reminded governments of the perils of more open political space.

Further, concern that growing U.S. energy self-sufficiency will draw the United States away from the Middle East calls for these countries to put in place a hedge.

You could argue that China is devising a new mode of imperialism whereby Imperialism 1.0 was imperialism, or European-style Imperialism; Imperialism 2.0 was the U.S.-led rules-based international order; and Imperialism 3.0, or you might call it Mercantilism 2.0, is a set of wholly interest-based government-to-government ties that allow the rapid exploitation of economic opportunities on what is, at least initially, a consensual basis.

China represents a challenge for Western governments that seek to push governments to fight corruption, pursue technical excellence, and encourage environmental stewardship. China advertises that it provides a quick shortcut to resources.

Of course, China is not relying on economics alone to advance its interests. China also deploys traditional State craft to advance its interests and confound its adversaries. As I described in my written testimony, U.S. policy toward Iran is a many splendored gift for China.

China is also pursuing close ties with four other Middle Eastern countries—Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Egypt, and Israel. Each offers something different. And despite differences among all of them, China maintains close ties with all of them.

China's regional strategy is elegant in its simplicity, and it seeks engagement based almost entirely on economic cooperation. The United States, by contrast, is engaged broadly and deeply around

the world, seeking to foster the sort of long-term changes that help generate economic growth and political liberalization in South Korea, Japan, Taiwan, Germany, and elsewhere.

The sting in the U.S. model is it has not led to similar development everywhere. The Middle East, Latin America, and Africa are full of examples where U.S. development efforts failed to meet their goals. China is promising a different approach and a different set of results.

We do not know yet how well this all will work. China has a light military footprint around the world, and its expeditionary capacity is limited. That means China may have difficulty securing its interests—and protecting its large overseas population, which numbers as many as 600,000 in the Middle East alone.

China may find that being a global power with global interest carries high global costs as well. In addition, a more checkered track record may take the bloom off the image of Chinese investment, and governments and populations may come to feel coerced into accepting economic agreements that favored Chinese interests over host country interests.

What neighbors interpret as Chinese aggression tends to draw neighbors closer to each other and seek closer relations with the United States. In addition, the whole Chinese economic model may collapse under its own weight. But from a U.S. perspective, we need to be mindful that the Chinese model may pose a formidable challenge. As I see it, China sees us pursuing an expensive and obsolete model of global influence. They do not want to defeat us. They want to marginalize us.

To me, the biggest danger we face in the Middle East is assuming our adversaries will confront us in the ways we are most prepared to be challenged. Facing insecurity, we double down on troops on materiel. Confronted with hostility, we respond with force. For decades, our strategy has been hegemony, which is becoming increasingly expensive to sustain. We do not really have an economic strategy. China seems to harbor no hegemonic ambitions in the Middle East and finds the doors thrown open to its influence.

It seems to me that we have to rethink our approach to the region, not do as we have done for 50 years. We have to—try to lead the world to a better future rather than reinforce the status quo. And, sir, I suggest that we need to continue to make the world a better place now.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Dr. Alterman follows:]

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Statement before the

House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on the Middle East, North Africa, and International Terrorism

"Chinese and Russian Influence in the Middle East"

A Testimony by:

Jon B. Alterman

Senior Vice President, Zbigniew Brzezinski Chair in Global Security and Geostrategy, and Director, Middle East Program
Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS)

May 9, 2019

2172 Rayburn House Office Building

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Ranking Member, it is an honor for me to appear once again before this subcommittee, this time to discuss China's engagement in the Middle East and its implications for U.S. interests.

It's important to remember that, 20 years ago, every government in the Middle East was either friendly to the United States government or seeking to become more so. While the United States was not exactly triumphant, it was unquestionably dominant. A great deal has happened in the last twenty years, and the United States is now struggling to determine what its position in the region should be, while Russia and China carefully advance their interests.

As we consider conditions now, we should recall that, 20 years ago, China was completely peripheral to the region. It had shallow diplomatic relations and only a few national interests. Decades as the fading sponsor of revolutionary movements, and as the supplier of low-cost, low-quality weapons, marginalized China from the broader trends of economic reform and peacebuilding that were salient at the time. China's status as a growing importer of Middle Eastern oil mattered in the 1990s, but China was starting from a low base. China only became a net oil importer in 1993, and while about half of its imported oil came from the Middle East in 1999, the United States imported eleven times the amount of crude oil China did. Even Canada imported more oil, and its population was only 2.5 percent that of China.

China's economy was growing swiftly, though, and the United States was distracted. While the United States reeled after the 9/11 attacks, prosecuted wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and undertook ambitious efforts to promote moderation and reform in the Middle East, China got down to business. It expanded its economic ties throughout the region, and deepened its diplomatic ties, too. By 2010, China was not merely the world's fastest growing major economy (in 2000, China's GDP in current dollars was $1.2 trillion, and by 2010 it had quintupled to $6.1 trillion). As it grew, China also became the principal driver of oil demand growth around the world. In 2000 China imported $13.7 billion worth of crude oil; by 2010 that number had risen to $127 billion.

Not surprisingly, China's Middle East ties have grown alongside growth in its overall economy and its oil demand. In 2000, Chinese-Saudi bilateral trade totaled $3 billion, dominated by crude oil. By 2010 it was $41.6 billion. While the pace of trade growth has slowed, it continues to grow by double digits in most years, and China has advanced plans with several regional states to double trade within a decade. While the plans sound ambitious, they have precedent. China established the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum in 2004, and thirteen years later China-Arab trade had quadrupled.

What is important to grasp about China's approach to the Middle East is how deliberate it is, and how limited it is. My understanding of Chinese foreign policy is that alongside the overarching desire to restore China to its rightful primacy of place among world powers is a profound sense of China's vulnerability and insecurity. In the words of Sulmaan Khan, who recently completed a book on China's grand strategy, China's modern leaders have all seen China "as a brittle entity,

in a world that was fundamentally dangerous. Their main task was to protect it." China has no missionary zeal to persuade the world of the virtues of Chinese civilization, nor any desire to operate in a world of like-minded states. The Chinese government's goal is to foster a world driven by the bilateral relations of states. Such a world creates tremendous advantages for China, in part because it is the larger economy and more populous power in any relationship except one with the United States. The Chinese government has no formal allies, while alliances have been a foundation of U.S security policy for three-quarters of a century.

China's presence in the Middle East seems reluctant. For a quarter century, Chinese leaders have been looking to reduce the Middle East fraction of its oil imports, but the Middle East is where the oil is, and China has few options. The country still buys almost half its imported crude oil from the region, despite a recent spike in Russian imports that have displaced Saudi Arabia as China's leading supplier. China's zeal to embrace electric vehicles is in part a response to oil dependence, as is China's embrace of renewables. It is hard for the math to add up, though. China's appetite for oil is large, its oil deposits are limited, and it lacks the geology for a fracking revolution. China will need oil for decades to come, and much of that oil will need to come from the Middle East.

Much of China's global trade transits the Middle East as well. An estimated 60 percent of China's European and African trade passes through the UAE, for example, and much of China's European and Mediterranean trade sails through the Suez Canal, creating a potential chokepoint for Chinese goods. The region's chokepoints—the Strait of Hormuz, the Bab al-Mandeb, and the Suez Canal—are China's chokepoints.

China has benefitted tremendously from articulating a "Belt and Road Initiative" (BRI) that is sufficiently concrete as to persuade Middle Easterners that it will be transformative, but (like all skillful acts of politics and marketing) sufficiently vague for a diverse array of them to imagine playing a key role in its execution. Rich and poor states alike are judging that China's future in the region is both large and bright, and China will bring prosperity after a 75-year *pax americana* has brought conflict. Much less remarked on is that China has actually engaged in relatively few BRI-related projects in the Middle East, and that China is coming under increasing scrutiny for embracing ill-considered development projects abroad that do more for China than the host governments.

In the Middle East, as in much of the world, China is trying to use economics as its calling card. China has militarized the South China Sea, opened its first overseas military base in Djibouti in 2017, and continues to pour resources into the development of Gwadar Port in Pakistan in a way that puzzles businesspeople who see little economic justification for it. Despite this, I see China as being very reluctant to use the military tools that Great Powers have deployed for centuries. In the Middle East, China's goal is to embed itself more deeply in the economics of the region without provoking a response from the United States or its allies. China's attraction to regional governments is offering a more "a la carte" kind of engagement, devoid of the notions of

Western states that economic growth must necessarily be accompanied by a set of changed social and political norms.

For all of China's growing interest in the Middle East, the country continues to see the region as a place where the United States has the preponderance of power. The U.S. Fifth Fleet dominates the Persian Gulf, and the Sixth Fleet watches over the Mediterranean. The United States has more than 20,000 troops in the region, with bases in every GCC country except Saudi Arabia, as well as in Iraq, Jordan, and Syria. Not only does it have a NATO ally in Turkey, but it has declared seven Middle Eastern states "major non-NATO allies," tying them closer to the United States.

In my judgment, China has no intention of displacing the United States from the Middle East, confronting the United States in the region, or engaging in a rivalry with the United States there. In part, China feels ill-prepared to engage in a conflict with the United States in a region far from China. But equally importantly, China sees no need to. It feels that stabilizing the region is beyond its reach and doing so would likely do more to antagonize potential partners than advance stability. Such tasks are better left to the United States.

Instead, China is happy to have the United States incur costs in the region while China derives benefits. China's narrower security interest is ensuring that instability in the Middle East does not blow back on China. For Middle Eastern countries, China benefits from high hopes and low expectations. China is a newcomer to the scene, with relatively little history in the region but a domestic economic track record that is enviable by almost any measure. In some ways, China is in the place that the United States was after the First World War, a dimly understood global power holding out the promise of a better future untainted by an imperialist history.

China also promises not to disrupt social values in societies undergoing profound change. That is, China promises access to the Chinese economic miracle while expressing none of the Western concerns about fostering systems that produce resilient societies. The China model—robust economic growth under an authoritarian political framework—has become even more attractive to Middle Eastern governments after the Arab uprisings of 2011, which reminded governments of the perils that more open political space can pose to governments lacking the support of their populations. While regional governments often seem to seek U.S. hegemony as protection against external foes, a growing focus on the threat of internal disorder, and a strong conviction that U.S. recipes for openness threaten chaos, makes alternatives to the U.S. more attractive. Further, concern that growing U.S. energy self-sufficiency will draw the United States away from the Middle East calls for a hedge.

Embedded in the Chinese strategy to promote economic ties is an effort to embed Chinese technology in infrastructure. Modern computing relies on complex code being layered over complex code, rendering large blocks of code a sort of black hole whose contents are not understood, even by programmers themselves. This is especially true in the field of artificial intelligence, a premise of which is that it is the computer that directs an activity rather than a

programmer. Immense arrays of code, whether applied to 5G technology, self-driving cars, computer chips, or any of a wide range of technologies open the door both to surveillance and to the installation of "kill switches" that can cripple devices at will. Since the Chinese government and Chinese industry are, by law, intertwined, the spread of Chinese technology also spreads Chinese security capacity into the heart of potential adversaries without a single soldier being deployed or a shot being fired.

One might argue that China is devising a new mode of imperialism, whereby Imperialism 1.0 was European imperialism, and Imperialism 2.0 was the U.S.-led rules-based international order. Imperialism 3.0 (or perhaps, Mercantilism 2.0), is a set of wholly interest-based, government-to-government ties that allow the rapid exploitation of economic opportunities on what is, at least initially, a consensual basis. Chinese state-owned enterprises, Chinese construction firms, and Chinese technology flow in, creating an engagement that may turn into dependency. China certainly represents a challenge for Western governments that seek to use "whole of government" solutions to fight corruption, pursue technical excellence, and encourage environmental stewardship. China advertises that it provides a shortcut to resources.

Of course, China is not relying on economics alone to advance its interests. China also deploys traditional statecraft to advance its interests and confound its adversaries. It is useful, in that regard, to consider China's approach to Iran. For Chinese strategists, not only is Iran's current international position acceptable, but the current U.S. strategy toward Iran is a gift. China (along with Russia) was willing to go along with Obama-era sanctions on Iran and agree to the JCPOA, but the Trump administration's strategy much more closely serves Chinese interests. From a Chinese perspective, maintaining ties with Iran is a vital strategic imperative, for the following reasons:

1) Iran is a hedge against a cutoff in oil sales because its hostility to the United States makes it unlikely to join a U.S.-led effort to embargo China in the case of heightened tension. All of the other Middle Eastern producers have close U.S. ties.
2) Tensions with Iran help ensure that the United States cannot fully focus its military attention on the western Pacific. If the United States puts two carrier strike groups off the coast of Iran, and it can only have three on station at any given time, that means that the United States only has one it can dedicate to China.
3) Tensions over Iran's activities disrupt U.S. ties with its allies, diminishing U.S. global leadership and creating the more bilaterally-driven world that China seeks. A fractured Western alliance is much less threatening to China than a united one.
4) Close ties to Iran drive Saudi Arabia to seek even closer ties to China. That leads the Kingdom to offer China high volumes of discounted oil, drives bilateral investment, and creates opportunities for Chinese construction firms in the Kingdom.
5) Iran represents an investment opportunity for China. As a distressed asset, China sees tremendous opportunities in Iran, with prime geographic location, its educated and relatively large population, and relatively diversified economy. China faces little competition investing in Iran.

6) Iran is by far the weaker party in this bilateral relationship. China represents more than 30 percent of Iran's import and export markets, but Iran represents less than 1 percent of China's. Iran clearly needs China, but China has alternatives to Iran.

What is especially notable is how effective China has been in developing its ties with Iran without disrupting its other ties to Chinese partners in the Middle East. China seems to have mastered the art of deriving benefits from its relations with Iran without paying heavy costs.

As I see it, China has four principal regional partners besides Iran. Importantly, President Xi has visited three of them in the last five years, signaling the importance that China attaches to each relationship.

The first is Saudi Arabia, which is China's largest trading partner in West Asia and the wealthiest country in the region. China, in turn, is Saudi Arabia's largest trading partner and largest oil customer. Chinese construction firms have been playing a growing role developing Saudi infrastructure; meanwhile, Saudi Arabia has been especially eager to build refineries and petrochemical production facilities in China that are specially tailored to use Saudi grades of crude oil.

President Xi visited Saudi Arabia in January 2016, and King Salman made a rare trip to China in March 2017. His son, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, traveled to Beijing in February 2019, when he was still persona non grata in much of the world after the October 2018 murder of Jamal Khashoggi in Istanbul. The Crown Prince reportedly signed economic agreements totaling $28 billion and broadcast that Saudi-Chinese trade had shot up 32 percent in the last year alone.

Saudi Arabia seems to be developing China as a hedge against a decline in Western oil consumption, as a well as a hedge against Western discomfort with authoritarianism within Saudi Arabia. In addition, wooing the Saudis allows China to play Saudi Arabia and Iran off against one another.

China's Arabian Peninsula ties extend beyond Saudi Arabia. China is also the United Arab Emirates' largest trading partner, and Dubai Port is a vital global shipping and logistics hub for Chinese goods. More than 200,000 Chinese nationals live in the UAE, which is emerging as a sort of entrepot for Chinese traders who want to be closer to overseas markets.

While the UAE has been aligning more closely with the United States for decades, the leadership clearly sees such an orientation as being wholly compatible with closer ties to China as well. The UAE sees a leading role for itself as a consequence of the Belt and Road Initiative, building out on what is already a robust trading relationship.

In July 2018, China and the UAE used the occasion of President Xi's visit to the UAE to announce that they had upgraded their 2012 "strategic partnership" to a "comprehensive strategic partnership," outlining cooperation in nine fields including politics, trade and economics,

technology, energy, renewable energy, and security. The two countries set a goal of doubling bilateral trade by 2022, and the UAE recently allowed Chinese visitors visa-free entry.

In the last five years, as China has grown increasingly concerned with transit through the Suez Canal, there has been significant growth in Chinese involvement in Egypt. Chinese firms are deeply engaged in constructing Egypt's new administrative capital in the desert outside of Cairo, and they are developing a Red Sea port and industrial zone in Ain Sukhna. During a September 2018 visit to Beijing, President Sisi reportedly signed $18 billion worth of deals with China, covering rail, real estate, refining, and energy projects. In fact, President Sisi has made at least six trips to Beijing since taking office in 2014, compared to just two trips to Washington.

Despite this, trade figures between Egypt and China are dwarfed by China's trade with other major regional partners. In addition, China struggles to find goods to buy from Egypt. Oranges are a key export, and China has been working for a decade to boost Chinese tourism in Egypt as a way to reduce trade imbalances. Chinese companies reportedly cooled on Egyptian investments about a year ago, convinced that the Egyptians were intent on ensuring that profits only accrued to the Egyptian side. Those concerns appear to have been assuaged, and the larger strategic reality – that the Egyptian leadership is clearly courting China (as it is also courting Russia) – has become the dominant theme. This is seemingly as a hedge against Western countries turning their back on the country.

The last key country is Israel. About a decade ago, a delegation from Israel came to Washington and asked experts here how Israel could remain strategically important to China after the United States put a definitive end to cooperation on military technology that had U.S. roots. Israel seems to have solved that equation, developing deep commercial relationships in advanced technology and government-to-government cooperation in the security and counterterrorism fields.

It is remarkable just how quickly these ties have developed. According to Thompson Reuters, Chinese investment in Israel increased tenfold between 2016 and 2017, totaling more than $16 billion. Chinese firms are deeply engaged in building Israeli infrastructure, building tunnels for light rail, expanding port facilities in Ashdod and Haifa and striking agreements to operate the ports for 25 years.

In recent months Israelis have been discussing the implications of greater Chinese involvement in Israel. According to *Foreign Policy*, Israel's National Security Council was expected to release a report to the Israeli government in March 2019 that outlined steps Israel should take to protect its national security as it welcomes international investment. Reportedly, the main target was China. China's footprint in Israel could not only give China insight into matters regarding Israeli security, but could also provide pathways to surveil U.S. naval operations in Haifa Port and provide access to technologies being developed by Israel or that play a role in U.S. defense systems.

China's advantage in all of this is the government seems to know what it is trying to do, and what it is not trying to do. China has a strategy that is elegant in its simplicity, seeking ways to encourage governments open the door wide to Chinese engagement. The United States, by contrast, is engaged broadly and deeply around the world, seeking to foster the sort of long-term changes that helped generate economic growth and political liberalization in South Korea, Japan, Taiwan, Germany, and elsewhere. The sting in the U.S. model is that it has not led to similar development everywhere. The Middle East, Latin America, and Africa are full of examples where U.S. development efforts failed to meet their goals. China is promising a different approach, and a different set of results.

What we don't know yet is how well this will all work. As noted above, China is building military facilities abroad to protect Chinese trade routes, but the country's footprint remains light, and its efforts to build a blue-water Navy are decades from completion. China may not only be unable to secure its trade routes; it may also find itself unable to deter or to coerce states into defending Chinese security interests. The Chinese base in Djibouti is relatively small—perhaps housing 400 personnel—and it may be more effective to keep track of U.S. forces in nearby U.S. Camp Lemonnier and monitoring the passage of ships through the Bab al-Mandeb than in projecting Chinese force in times of peril.

In addition, with millions of Chinese workers overseas—perhaps 600,000 in the Middle East alone—protecting those workers is a growing challenge. China did relatively well evacuating 30,000 workers from a collapsing Libya in 2011, but protecting those workers from every eventuality in a growing array of countries will be an increasing burden.

China may find, as the United States did, that being a global power with global interests carries high global costs, as well. The discipline of non-intervention in other states may be harder to maintain when interests become deeper and broader, and when economic tools prove inadequate to secure those interests. In addition, a more checkered track record may take the bloom off the image of Chinese investment, and governments and populations may come to feel coerced into accepting economic agreements that favor Chinese interests over host country interests. China, after all, is a behemoth in bilateral ties with almost every country in the world. What neighbors interpret as Chinese aggression tends to draw neighbors closer to each other and seek closer relations with the United States.

In addition, the whole Chinese model may collapse under its own weight. As the Belt and Road Initiative has grown in complexity it has encountered complications, and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank remains a relatively small operation after opening with high hopes three years ago. China is increasingly sensitive to charges that it is creating debt traps for its borrowers, despoiling the environment, and contributing to political corruption.

But from a U.S. perspective, we need to be mindful that the Chinese model may pose a formidable challenge. To me, this is all a little bit personal. I grew up in Poughkeepsie, New York, a city that in the 1960's and 1970's was dominated by the world's largest computer

manufacturer at the time, IBM. IBM mostly made mainframes and typewriters, and beginning in 1981, it manufactured its first personal computer. Because of antitrust concerns, IBM contracted out the disk operating system for its new personal computers to a small company called Microsoft, and the chips to a California outfit called Intel. IBM made most of the hardware, which accounted for most of the cost of the new computers.

But IBM had its model wrong. Microsoft spent just a few pennies manufacturing floppy disks with DOS on them—or sometimes just sold a license—and charged many dollars for the right to install it. Microsoft understood that the real money to be made in the computer world was in the world of intellectual property, where investment costs were relatively high but the marginal cost of production approached zero. Microsoft became a software behemoth. IBM got tired of trying to extract profits from expensive manufacturing processes and exited the personal computer business less than 15 years later.

IBM popularized personal computers, but its business model of manufacturing costly office machines was rendered obsolete. Cheap manufacturers like Gateway and Dell undercut them on price. Google and Facebook created free services that booked billions in annual profits from selling information about the users. Amazon created a retail business model whereby merchandising takes a back seat to logistics. IBM dramatically reduced its footprint in Poughkeepsie, and the company has largely walked away from manufacturing computers altogether, instead positioning itself as a solution provider to large organizations.

We can all think of organizations that are like IBM in 1985, completely dominant in their field but facing systemic challenges because that dominance is of diminishing value. In the 1980s, Sears dominated the catalog business, Kodak dominated film, and Xerox dominated photocopying. Sometimes dominance becomes too expensive to maintain, but more often it seems that paradigms shift to make the entire enterprise less valuable.

China is, to my mind, seeking to exploit an emerging paradigm shift. It does not hope to be the Commodore or Kaypro or Compaq computer, taking on a deep-pocketed behemoth with what it hopes is a better idea for a personal computer. Instead, China is seeking opportunities to create new a new model whereby it does not confront its adversaries head-on nor do expensive things that serve other nation's interests. Instead, China is focused exploiting opportunities that others ignore, carving out profitable activities where others see obstacles, and building on a base that others have created and sustained.

To me, the biggest danger we face in the Middle East is assuming that our adversaries will confront us in the ways we are most prepared to be challenged. Facing insecurity, we double down on troops and materiel. Confronted with hostility, we respond with force. For decades, our strategy has been hegemony, which is becoming increasingly expensive to sustain. China seems to harbor no hegemonic ambitions in the Middle East and finds the doors thrown open to its influence. The United States is blamed for what goes wrong while getting little credit for what

goes right. China seems to be seeking ways to compete without becoming a rival, and its early results seem positive.

China's challenge is not that of a peer that is seeking to displace us in the Middle East. Instead, it is of an upstart that is seeking to render our entire model obsolete. China's challenge needs to be taken as a reminder we must be more deliberate about what we need to do in the Middle East. It is a reminder that we need to explore new models of relations, rather than merely doubling down on what we have done for last 50 years. And it is a reminder that our goal must be not merely to reinforce the status quo, but to lead the world to a better future. It is what we have sought to do for much of our history. We must continue to do so, and we must continue to find success.

Mr. DEUTCH. Thank you, Dr. Alterman.

Dr. Exum, you are recognized.

STATEMENT OF ANDREW EXUM, PH.D., EXECUTIVE, HAKLUYT & COMPANY, FORMER DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR MIDDLE EAST POLICY

Dr. EXUM. Mr. Chairman and Mr. Ranking Member, thank you so much just for giving me the opportunity to come here to speak to you today. It is a privilege to represent the great State of Texas and the 32d congressional District, which is ably represented by Colin Allred. Thank you so much for that warm introduction.

If it is OK with you, I am just going to summarize my prepared remarks before the committee.

As some of you know, from 2015 to 2017, I was the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Middle East Policy. I do not have any type of background in Russia. I do not speak Russian. I have never even been to Russia. But in the summer of 2015, we assessed, as a department and as a government, that the Assad regime in Syria was nearly something close to collapse.

And thanks to the benign guidance of Christine Wormuth, we assembled a kind of tiger team within our office to go over scenarios that we called catastrophic success. In other words, what would it look like if the Assad regime collapsed, you know, overnight or collapsed very rapidly in a way that would in some ways be welcome but in other ways would seriously endanger U.S. interests?

Now, that is what we saw from a five-sided concrete box in Northern Virginia. I imagine that the Russians and the Iranians saw something that was much more real and much more imminent from their perspective, and that is what I believe led the Russians to double down in Syria in the fall of 2015 and to surge a lot of troops there.

Their stated motivations for going into Syria did not line up, unsurprisingly, with their revealed motivations. stated, they said it was all about counter terrorism. We assessed that their revealed motivations for going into Syria at the time ranged from, yes, counter terrorism was part of the reason why they were there, but mainly they were there to prop up their allies.

Tactically, they are dependent on the warm water ports in Tartus and their presence. That allows them to project power into the eastern Mediterranean.

We also assessed that kind of strategically this was about the Russians saying enough, especially after U.N. Security Council Resolution 1973 and the way that was used to overthrow the regime in Libya.

Russia, which has always feared and has greatly resented the color revolutions and the Arab revolutions, the Arab Spring, which they saw the United States and its Western partners as being behind, this was a way for them to draw a line in the sand and say that is not going to happen anymore.

They also used it as an opportunity to build their own coalitions. Part of this was to say, yes, America, you have, you know, a 48-nation coalition, but we, Russia, we also have a military coalition, and you need to look at us as a peer, as somebody that is worthy of being taken seriously.

And then, second, and perhaps most importantly, this was in some ways Russia's entre back into the international community after the isolation which accompanied the invasion of Crimea.

The decision about whether to talk to the Russians about Syria was a controversial one within the administration. I, and many members of the Department of Defense, were not in favor of this. From my perspective, I viewed Russia as arguably being the least important member of their coalition—that coalition which included Hezbollah, Iran, the Assad regime.

And even if we were able to reach some sort of accommodation with the Russians, I did not think they would be able to deliver on it. By contrast, we could deliver our coalition.

Second, we believed that they would use these negotiations as a way to buy time and space for them to pursue their true military objectives. Again, they said this was about counter terrorism. But in point of fact, we all knew where the terrorists were. The Jabhat al-Nusra was in the northwest of Syria. We had the Islamic State in the east. Russia concentrated its military power in recapturing those key urban areas, such as Aleppo and Damascus, that the regime valued. They were 100 percent aligned with the regime's overall goals.

However, in the negotiations, I will confess that we found the Russians to be relatively scrupulous. It is a quirk of Russian bureaucracy that they will actually lie to one another. So you could be talking to a Russian general or intelligence officer or diplomat who will be presenting in good faith what they believe to be the case when you know it is not the case.

And this leads to the second point, which is I also think they use these negotiations, and we were very conscious of those at the time, to not only find out what we knew about Syria but find out how we knew what we knew about Syria, because they were very interested in the sources and methods that we have been able to develop, quite frankly, over the cold war.

In the end, I have to say that, you know, although we in 2016 somewhat chuckled when we saw the Kuznetsov, Russia's only aircraft carrier, belching across the Mediterranean en route to Syria. The Russians were successful in Syria, and the way they have used that success and the success of their coalition has essentially been to tell our traditional partners in the region the United States is a fair weather ally; we are with you fair or foul weather. We are an all-weather ally, and Syria is the proof.

And, you know, I remember when I left the Army and went to graduate school and was studying the Middle East, when we talked about the Russian presence in the Middle East, we talked about it as a historical artifact. That is no longer the case today.

It was not the case when I returned in 2015, but Russia is here to stay. And for many of our traditional partners—the Israelis, the Saudis, the Egyptians—dealing with Russia as a member and as a presence in the region is, quite simply, not optional.

I am happy to take your questions on more about the negotiations or about how we view the Russians, but I will do so during Q&A. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Dr. Exum follows:]

ANDREW EXUM

EXECUTIVE, HAKLUYT & COMPANY

HOUSE COMMITTEE OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

"CHINESE AND RUSSIAN INFLUENCE IN THE MIDDLE EAST"

9 MAY 2019

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Wilson, I bring you greetings from the great state of Texas, and specifically from the 32nd congressional district, which is ably represented by Colin Allred. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before your committee today. My name is Andrew Exum, and from May of 2015 until January of 2017, I served as the deputy assistant secretary of defense for Middle East Policy. I had previously served in the Pentagon's Middle East policy shop from 2012 until 2013, and I began my career as an Army officer, leading both light infantry and special operations units deployed to the Middle East.

For over half a century, U.S. interests in the Middle East have remained remarkably consistent, no matter who has happened to be living in the White House at any given time. The security of the state of Israel and preserving market access to the hydrocarbon resources in and around the Arabian Peninsula have been our top two stated priorities in the period following the world wars. Since the September 11th attacks in 2001, meanwhile, we have also placed a priority on counterproliferation and countering terrorism. That's what animates us today, and that is why we continue to spend so much time and resources – roughly 59,000 troops, by the time I left the Pentagon – in the region.

The subject of my remarks meanwhile, is what animates Russia in the region. I am not, I must admit up front, a specialist on Russia. I do not speak Russian, and I have never even been to Russia. I have spent most of my professional life fighting in, working on, or otherwise studying the Middle East, and all of my own graduate study pertains to the politics, languages, and history of the region. But for much of 2016, the U.S. government engaged in a lengthy series of negotiations with the Russian military and intelligence services over the fate of Syria, and for

better or for worse, and excepting for a period of time in which I had other priorities (namely the birth of my second son), I was the Pentagon's primary representative at these talks. So my view on Russia in the Middle East is informed by those interactions with my Russian counterparts, and that perhaps gives me a unique but by no means sufficient perspective on Russia's designs in the region.

You might be questioning the wisdom of talking to Russia about Syria in the first place, and if you are, you would have found good company within certain departments and agencies in the U.S. government during the Obama Administration. Engaging in talks with Russia over Syria was not a universally popular thing to do at the time, was the subject of intense debate among both career professionals and political appointees such as myself, and it's fair to say that my own department was not completely supportive of the talks but – when directed by the president – supported them to our greatest ability. It's probably worth winding the clock back, then, to explain how and why we began talking to the Russians.

It all started in the summer of 2015, when my office – under the direction of my immensely capable Syria director, Dr. Leigh Nolan, and with the support of my boss at the time, Christine Wormuth – began coordinating interagency planning for a scenario in Syria we deemed "catastrophic success." After years in which the Assad Regime had struggled to defeat a persistent insurgency and in which the Islamic State had assumed control of most of eastern Syria and had begun to also threaten Syria's main cities in the West, we worried that the Assad Regime might finally collapse – and do so quickly, in a way that would endanger U.S. interests, to include the security of the state of Israel.

It's fair to conclude that if we, sitting as we were in a five-sided concrete box in Washington, were worrying the Assad Regime might suddenly collapse, the Russians and Iranians – sitting much closer to the situation – were likewise worried. And that fear is what, I believe, led the Russian military to forcefully intervene in Syria in the early fall of 2015. The Russians had long supported the Assad Regime, and it valued the facility at Tartus which provides a warm water

port to Russia's Black Sea Fleet and allows Russia to project military power into the Mediterranean. Russia – along with Hizballah, and Iran – was now surging military resources into Syria in order to beat back rebel advances.

Russia framed its intervention as a counterterrorism operation and invited others to join Russia as it claimed to beat back the forces of Islamist extremism. Russia desperately sought, significantly, to enlist traditional U.S. partners and allies like Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan in its efforts. This, we assessed, was Russia attempting to find its back into the international community following the isolation that accompanied the invasion of Crimea. It was Russia's way of saying to us, "You have your coalition, yes, but we have one as well. We are equal to you and deserve to be treated as a peer."

We also assessed at the time that Russia's intervention in Syria was a response to UN Security Council Resolution 1973 and the way in which the United States and its NATO allies used that resolution in 2011 to bring about regime change in Libya. This was Russia's way of saying "enough." The idea that the international community can band together and replace a regime is an idea that frankly scares Putin's Russia – especially following the Arab Spring and the so-called "color revolutions" in the first decade of this century, which are both viewed in Russia as having been encouraged if not engineered by the West, and specifically by the United States.

Russia's surge in Syria coincided with U.S. and coalition military success against the Islamic State. Over the course of 2015, we had figured out that a combination of coalition air power and motivated proxies on the ground was more than sufficient, when applied from multiple directions at the same time, to roll back the Islamic State's territorial gains. Our own military gains put us in close proximity to the Russian military and its partners, and we quickly determined that we needed to establish channels to prevent any conflicts between our two forces. At the Pentagon, my immediate supervisor at the time, Elissa Slotkin (who is now a member of this House from Michigan), led those efforts along with our uniformed military

counterparts, who included the newly confirmed commander of U.S. Central Command, Frank McKenzie.

A diverse group within the administration, including both diplomats and some uniformed military officers, wanted to go farther, and given the daily horrors we were witnessing in Syria, they asked whether or not we should engage with Russia on ways we might be able to bring the conflict to a close. I did not feel at the time, and I do not feel now, that was a wise course of action: Russia was operating in a coalition with the Assad Regime, Iran, and Hizballah, and among the four of them, Russia was arguably the least influential member of its coalition. I was not sure that Russia, even if it reached an accord with us, could bring along its coalition partners. (This was in contrast to our own position, where we could very much speak for the other nations in our coalition.)

It was also clear that Russia, although it professed to be engaged in a fight against terrorism, was very much concentrating its military efforts on destroying what remained of the secular and moderate Islamist opposition to the Assad Regime. We all knew where the real Islamist extremists were in early 2016: eastern Syria, primarily, and those parts of northwest Syria where the Nusra Front was particularly strong. Russia, by contrast, was focused on winning back those large urban areas like Aleppo and Damascus that were the home to more moderate opposition groups. (This was all the more striking to us since it was understood even at the time that many of those active in both the Nusra Front and the Islamic State were Russian-speakers from either Russia or other states in the former Soviet Union.)

It was a smart strategy, in some ways: If the Assad Regime and its allies could kill off any secular or moderate opposition, the world would be left with a binary choice between the Regime and groups like the Nusra Front and the Islamic State. Russia, to my observation, was fully supportive of this strategy.

Nonetheless, we gamely met with our Russian counterparts for months of negotiations over the course of 2016. My colleagues in the Office of the Secretary and in the Joint Staff attended each round of the negotiations to both advise our colleagues from the rest of the government and to ensure that no step we proposed violated the very prudent restrictions the Congress had put on military coordination with Russia following the invasion of Crimea.

Over the past several years, I had seen Russia play a larger and larger role in the Middle East. As a graduate student studying the region in the first decade of this century, Russia's role in the region was something I read about in history books. By the time I returned to the Pentagon, by contrast, Russia was playing a more aggressive role in the region, courting our traditional allies with promises of unrestricted arms sales – our own arms sales to the region, governed in part by the Naval Vessel Transfer Act of 2008, cannot endanger Israel's qualitative military edge – and fewer moral concerns than we might voice. I was particularly worried about Russia's courtship of the Sisi government in Egypt as well as its relationships with our Gulf partners, with whom we share much intelligence and hardware. (I did not have responsibility for North Africa beyond Egypt, but in Algeria and Libya too, we also saw a more engaged Russia.)

Across the negotiating table, meanwhile, we found the Russians to be professional and relatively scrupulous. (It's a quirk of Russian bureaucracy that parts of it often lie to other parts, so it's quite possible to have a conversation with a Russian who is defending, in good faith, actions taken by a military command without knowing the actual truth about what that military command did or did not do.) At the same time, though, we were very aware that those on the other side of the table were often intelligence officers – members of the GRU, or Main Intelligence Directorate – who were as interested in knowing what we knew, and knowing how we knew what we knew, as they were in negotiating toward a mutually agreeable political end. We thus spent a lot of time being careful about what we said so as to protect sources and methods, and the Russians spent a lot of time pressing us for more information – an effort to no doubt compromise those same sources and methods. At one point, we were even pressed by our leadership to create a means to jointly target suspected terrorist cells with the Russians,

which gave everyone in my own leadership serious heartburn, and for good reason: The idea that certain intelligence might be classified "SECRET // REL RUSSIA" was like something out of a bizarre alternate universe for those of us who, like me, still remember sheltering under our school desks during atomic bomb drills in the 1980s.

We also suspected that the Russians were using the negotiations as a stalling tactic to buy time for its coalition to complete its military operations to re-take Aleppo and other key terrain. We labored, along with our Arab and European partners, to establish temporary ceasefires to allow for the evacuation of non-combatants and the delivery of humanitarian aid to those living under siege. Russia and its partners would agree to those ceasefires when they were militarily convenient, and when they themselves needed time to rest and refit before launching another major assault. The Russians correctly assessed that we and our partners were negotiating in good faith, and they also correctly assessed that we had strong enough relationships with elements of the Syrian opposition that would allow us to bring them along on any agreement. They also correctly assessed that some within the administration, and some of our international partners, so badly wanted to maintain a diplomatic channel that we would likely overlook many violations of ceasefire agreements so long as the Russians continued to return to the negotiating table.

Strategically, I think the Russians were looking for something similar to what they were looking for tactically, which is to say they were looking for access: Access to the region, access to our partners, and access to us. Russia wanted to be taken seriously by us and by our traditional partners, and here again I have to give them some credit: We all laughed when Russia's only aircraft carrier, the Kuznetsov, belched its way across the Mediterranean in late 2016, but overall, one has to conclude that by operating with limited resources but no holds barred, Russia has been successful in Syria. The Assad Regime won the war. Russia may have been captive to the whims of its coalition partners at times, but Russia and its coalition partners also won, so Russia can share in that victory. We cared about our own priorities, and as a consequence, we both helped secure Israel and defeated the Islamic State. Russia, meanwhile,

cared about protecting its tactical interests and then, once those were secured, announcing itself as a new power to be reckoned with in the region writ large.

The United States spent the years between 2003 and 2016 demonstrating our tactical and technological excellence in the region but also demonstrating our strategic inability to secure our interests at a reasonable cost. Russia spent the years between 2015 and 2017 demonstrating its own technological advances to the region but also its ability to secure its interests at a reasonable cost if using the most ruthless of means. It's little wonder, then, why U.S. partners such as Israel, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia now feel the need to also have close ties to Moscow. Russia's message to these traditional U.S. partners is, essentially, "The United States cannot be counted upon to back you in weather both fair and foul. We can, and Syria is the proof."

Today, then, we arguably feel Russia's presence in the region more acutely than we have since the 1970s. Although today's global epicenter of the oil and gas sector is as much five hours west of me in the Permian Basin of Texas and New Mexico as it is in the Persian Gulf, Russia's relationship with OPEC is the most important relationship from the perspective of oil production. Our president complains on Twitter about the price of oil, but to the degree that anyone can actually sets the price, it's Russia and OPEC.

But this might lead us to a final question: How much should we care, really? In part due to the resurgence of our own energy sector, in part due to the astronomical cost of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and in part due to the increasing politicization of our relationships with Saudi Arabia and Israel, more and more Americans – with this president, perhaps, among them – believe we no longer have enduring interests in the Middle East beyond preventing terrorists to strike the homeland.

I myself can make a strong our argument that our traditional interests remain our interests going forward. But I cannot make an argument that we have secured those interests at a cost that I can defend to friends and family back home in Tennessee and Texas.

Russia doesn't have that problem. And that's the source of its own strength in the region going forward.

Mr. DEUTCH. Thank you very much, Dr. Exum.
Ms. Wormuth, you are recognized.

STATEMENT OF CHRISTINE WORMUTH, DIRECTOR, INTERNATIONAL SECURITY AND DEFENSE POLICY CENTER, SENIOR FELLOW, RAND CORPORATION, FORMER UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR POLICY

Ms. WORMUTH. Good afternoon, Chairman Deutch, Ranking Member Wilson, members of the committee. Thank you so much for offering me the opportunity to be a part of this excellent series of hearings. I really commend you for the light that you are shining globally on the role of Russia and China.

China and Russia's increased engagement in the Middle East in recent years underscores that the United States is in a new era of strategic competition, one that is taking place at a time when many Americans are understandably fatigued with the role of the United States as leader and world's policeman.

So I wanted to offer a few thoughts as a bigger frame maybe to talk about what is at stake at this competition and what are the players competing for. For the United States, I think our goal is to ensure our continuing prosperity and security in an increasingly complicated and contested world.

Russia, on the other hand, a country with a very strong military but a deteriorating economic picture, seeks to preserve its status as a great power for as long as it can. China, on the other hand, fueled by its tremendous economic strength, is pursuing a long-term strategy aimed at restoring what it sees as its rightful and traditional historic place as a world power.

To prevail in the competition, Russia is basically trying to disrupt the international order, reestablish what it sees as its rightful sphere of influence, and to weaken the cohesion of our trans-Atlantic relationship with Europe. China sees the United States as trying to contain its rise and wants to both reestablish its primacy in Asia relative to us and also adapt the international order to better accommodate its preferences and objectives.

Looking at Russia and the Middle East specifically, it sees its presence there as a way to highlight its status as a great power at a time when America's influence in the region is seen as waning. Moscow's strategy, as my colleagues have said, rests on maintaining good relationships with all of the countries in the region and really focusing on maximizing its opportunities while minimizing its potential for losses.

Moscow is deeply concerned about the potential for the spread of Islamic extremism to Russia, and in Moscow's view, the Arab Spring, as well as our interventions in the region, have destabilized it significantly. Russia presents itself, in contrast to the United States, as a reliable partner that will not lecture about human rights or societal freedoms but is very interested in trade, investment, and energy with the countries there.

Sustaining its transactional approach to the relationships in the region is getting harder, though, for Russia. While Syria did not turn out to be the quagmire that former President Obama and others predicted, Russia's military involvement there is in its fourth year and there is no diplomatic resolution in sight to the conflict.

While Russia's involvement in Syria could be seen as at least partially successful, it does not appear to have the economic power or the appetite, I would argue, for robust expeditionary military operations that would enable it to pursue a more comprehensive approach to the region.

For China, the Middle East is probably the most important region of the world outside of Asia. China seeks recognition from the countries there of its status as a rising power and sees its relationships as an opportunity to balance U.S. influence.

They appear to be pursuing a strategy grounded in Beijing's policy of non-interference abroad, also, like Russia, emphasizing positive relationships with everyone there while avoiding becoming entangled in the region's many conflicts.

The engine of China's deepening involving in Middle East is its continuous need for energy and its access to economic markets. Countries in the region welcome China's investment, but 5 years into the Belt and Road Initiative, there are some emerging signs of concern, whether it is about debt sustainability or environmental impacts or others.

While China is an economic heavyweight in the Middle East, it is much more a lightweight, frankly, militarily, with really only the small military base in Djibouti that the chairman mentioned.

So before saying a little bit about what this means for U.S. and the Middle East specifically, I would like to emphasize that the United States needs an overarching vision for success in the strategic competition. We need to develop a comprehensive strategy that leverages all of the instruments of our power, whether it is economic, diplomatic, military, or cultural.

Discussions of our competition with Russia and China have really emphasized the military dimension, and that is important. But equally, if not more important, is the economic piece. It is figuring out how are we going to reinvest in our economic health and our educational system, so we can continue to be a world leader in technology and innovation.

Similarly, we need to develop a more comprehensive approach with our allies and partners to just thinking about how we are going to compete with Russia and China, and we need different approaches. Those competitions are not the same.

The current administration's preference for bilateral approaches fails to take advantage, I would argue, of one of our biggest strengths. I would agree that Russia and China, while they want to demonstrate their status as a great power in the Middle East, they do not want to displace us entirely.

We need to emphasize consistency in our approach, emphasize that we are not leading. We need to pay attention to the BRI projects and address concerns we may have to those projects that may have implications for our presence in the region.

And, finally, I would argue we need to avoid overreach if we are going to compete successfully. Almost 20 years of our military operations, many of them in the Middle East, have led to not only the deaths of thousands of American military personnel, but they have also eroded our standing in the world, and, frankly, created opportunities for Russia and China to make gains at our expense.

So as we think about any future decisions for use of force in the Middle East, I think we need to learn from our experiences in Iraq and Libya and Afghanistan and think had about our vital national interests.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Wormuth follows:]

Russia and China in the Middle East

Implications for the United States in an Era of Strategic Competition

Christine Wormuth

CT-511

Testimony presented before the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Middle East, North Africa and International Terrorism on May 9, 2019.



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Russia and China in the Middle East: Implications for the United States in an Era of Strategic Competition

Testimony of Christine Wormuth[1]
The RAND Corporation[2]

Before the Committee on Foreign Affairs
Subcommittee on the Middle East, North Africa and International Terrorism
United States House of Representatives

May 9, 2019

Chairman Deutch, Ranking Member Wilson, and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to share my observations on Russian and Chinese activity in the Middle East and what it means for the United States and our allies and partners in the region.

A New Era of Strategic Competition

Both China and Russia have significantly increased their engagement in the Middle East in recent years. This involvement spans multiple dimensions, including trade and investment, the energy sector, military cooperation, and diplomatic activity. China's profile in the Middle East has increased substantially in the last ten years, and Russia returned dramatically to the region in 2015, when it deployed military personnel to Syria to prop up the Assad regime. Increased Chinese and Russian engagement in the region underscores that the United States is in a new era of strategic competition. This competition is playing out not just in Europe and Asia, but also in Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East, and it is happening at a time when many Americans are understandably fatigued with the role of the United States as the world's leader and policeman.

What is at stake in this era of strategic competition and what are the players competing for? Put simply, the United States' goal is to ensure our continuing economic prosperity and security

[1] The opinions and conclusions expressed in this testimony are the author's alone and should not be interpreted as representing those of the RAND Corporation or any of the sponsors of its research.

[2] The RAND Corporation is a research organization that develops solutions to public policy challenges to help make communities throughout the world safer and more secure, healthier and more prosperous. RAND is nonprofit, nonpartisan, and committed to the public interest.

in an increasingly complicated and contested world. Russia, a country with a strong military but deteriorating economic prospects, seeks to preserve its status as a great power for as long as it can. China, fueled by its tremendous economic strength, is pursuing a long-term strategy aimed at restoring what it sees as its rightful and traditional historic position as a world power.

To prevail in this competition, Russia seeks to disrupt the international order led by the United States and Western democracies, reestablish what it sees as its rightful sphere of influence in the former countries of the Soviet Union, and weaken the relationship between Europe and the United States. China sees the United States as attempting to contain its rise to power and wants to both reestablish its primacy in Asia relative to the United States and adapt the international order to better accommodate its preferences and goals. To compete successfully, the United States needs to have a vibrant, productive economy, to continue to protect and adapt the international order that has enabled our success as well as that of others, and to operate in coalition with our allies and friends.

This strategic competition is playing out on the world stage, but the Middle East is an important regional theater. It is particularly important for both Russia and China, given its strategic location and vast energy resources. Understanding Russian and Chinese goals in the region and how they are pursuing these goals can help inform how the United States should approach their presence in the Middle East and our own policy choices in the region.

Russia in the Middle East

In 2015, Russia returned to the Middle East with its intervention in the Syrian civil war, deploying military personnel outside what Moscow considers its "near abroad" for the first time since the fall of the Soviet Union. Russia sees engagement with the Middle East as a way to reestablish itself as a great power on the world stage at a time when U.S. influence in the region is seen to be waning. Like Beijing's plans, Moscow's Middle East strategy relies on maintaining good relations with all countries in the region and focuses on maximizing opportunities in the region with a minimum of commitment or potential for losses.[3]

Diplomacy and Economics

Well before deploying military personnel to Syria, Russia was increasing its engagement in the Middle East. In a region where personal relationships matter greatly, President Vladmir Putin invested considerable time visiting countries in the Middle East, including Israel, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Jordan, Qatar, Turkey, and Iran. Russia eases this engagement by emphasizing its belief in state sovereignty, as well as its opposition to external interference and internal popular uprisings. Moscow is also deeply concerned about the potential for the spread of Islamic extremism and terrorism to Russia and its neighboring states. In Moscow's view, the events of the Arab Spring, as well as the U.S. interventions in Iraq and Libya, have destabilized the region significantly.

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[3] James Sladden, Becca Wasser, Ben Connable, and Sarah Grand-Clement, *Russian Strategy in the Middle East*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, PE-236-RC, 2017, p. 10.

Russia presents itself, in contrast to the United States, as a reliable partner for the region that will not lecture about human rights or societal freedoms but will help with trade, investment, and energy diplomacy. Together, Russia and the Middle East have more than 60 percent of the world's proven oil and gas reserves, and they produce 50 percent of the world's oil and almost 40 percent of its natural gas.[4] When Russia and the countries of the Middle East cooperate to pursue common interests, there are significant implications for global oil and gas markets. Russia and Saudi Arabia have been the primary drivers behind the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC)+1 arrangement that has effectively set a floor under oil prices.

Russia is not only a primary exporter of oil and gas, it also exports significant nuclear technology to the Middle East, with deals to build nuclear power plants in Iran, Jordan, and Egypt and discussions underway with Saudi Arabia, which has an ambitious plan to build 16 nuclear reactors by 2032.

Russia's energy diplomacy has enabled it to weather a challenging period in recent years, but the longer-term outlook for Moscow is less certain. Working with OPEC countries to increase oil prices has helped Russia offset economic losses resulting from Western sanctions. It has also generated revenue for Middle Eastern countries; in turn, Middle Eastern countries have used some of this revenue to make major Russian weapons purchases and to invest in Russia through vehicles like the Russian Direct Investment Fund. Going forward, Russia and Middle Eatern countries' heavy dependence on oil and gas revenue will be challenged by a range of shifts in the energy market, including the potential for aggressive climate change policies aimed at phasing out fossil fuel use.

Military Activity and Arms Sales

Arms sales are also a central component of Russia's engagement in the Middle East. Fifty percent of Russian arms sales go to the Middle East, up from 36 percent in 2015.[5] Russia's military involvement in Syria not only has enabled Moscow to field test a wide array of new weapons and delivery systems, but also has served as a highly visible advertisement for Russian equipment. Although U.S. military equipment is seen as the gold standard in the region, countries in the Middle East are often frustrated by the foreign policy conditions attached to U.S. arms sales and the slowness of the U.S. arms sale process, which includes a requirement to protect Israel's qualitative military edge. As a result, Middle Eastern leaders see Russia as a highly viable alternative source of armaments. In 2014, Egypt signed a $3.5 billion deal with Russia, and Iraq became the second largest importer of Russian arms after India. Russia has also signed deals with the UAE, and both Saudi Arabia and Qatar are reportedly in discussion with Moscow to purchase the advanced S-400 anti-aircraft system.[6]

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[4] Nicu Popescu and Stanislav Secrieru, *Russia's Return to the Middle East: Building Sandcastles?* Brussels: European Union Institute for Security Studies, Chaillot Paper No. 146, July 2018, p. 30.

[5] Popescu and Secrieru, 2018, pp. 38–39.

[6] "Russia Is Selling More Weapons to Saudi Arabia and the UAE," *TRT World*, February 22, 2019.

Russia prides itself on being able to talk to and work with every country in the region, but sustaining its transactional approach to relationships in the region is growing more challenging, given the complexity of the landscape.

Russia's diplomatic and military involvement with Iran poses challenges and contradictions, as Israel and most Arab states in the region view Tehran as the region's primary threat. While Syria did not turn out to be the "quagmire" for Russia that former President Barack Obama and others predicted, Russia's military involvement there is in its fourth year, and there is no diplomatic resolution to the conflict in sight. Russia partnered with Iran to prop up Assad, protect its naval and air bases in Latakia and Tartus, and ensure its power projection into the Mediterranean and Middle East, but now Iran is encouraging Assad to resist concessions, a position at odds with Moscow.

In recent years, the Russia-Israel relationship has grown much closer, illustrated by Russia's acceptance of Israeli strikes in Syria against Hezbollah on more than one occasion. At the same time, Russia cooperates with Iran and Hezbollah on the ground, and it provided the advanced S-300 antiaircraft system to both Iran and Syria, both moves that Israel strongly opposed. In the case of Yemen, Russia has sided with the Gulf states against Iran, with Moscow supporting the Gulf Cooperation Council position and calling for a negotiated resolution of the conflict. Russia is also largely aligned with Arab states in the region in its approach to Libya, with Moscow supporting General Khalifa Haftar, a secular militia leader and power broker supported by Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE. While Russia manages to work with most countries in the region, its approach is highly transactional, which may limit the degree of trust that Middle Eastern leaders are willing to invest in these relationships.

At a time when Russia is under considerable pressure in Europe because of its actions in Ukraine, its attacks on individuals outside Russia, and its interference in elections in the United States and Europe, Moscow sees the Middle East as a region where it can demonstrate that it remains a great power. While Russia's involvement in Syria could be seen as partially successful, at least in the near term, it does not appear to have the economic power or appetite for expeditionary military operations that would enable it to pursue a more comprehensive, long-term approach to the region.

China in the Middle East

Outside of the Asia-Pacific, the Middle East is likely the most important region of the world for China.[7] In turn, Middle Eastern countries likely see Beijing as the most important world capital after Washington because of China's considerable economic power. Connecting China through the Suez Canal to the Mediterranean and Europe, the Middle East is a strategic location for China, a critical source of much-needed energy resources, and an area of expanding economic ties. China wants the Middle East to recognize its status as a rising power and sees its growing relationships with countries there as an opportunity to balance U.S. influence.

[7] Andrew Scobell and Alireza Nader, *China in the Middle East: The Wary Dragon*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-1229-A, 2016, p. 73.

Driven by its need for reliable access to the region's energy resources to fuel its growth at home, China appears to be pursuing a strategy in the Middle East that emphasizes maintaining positive relations with all countries in the region and avoiding becoming entangled in the region's various conflicts. However, this may become more difficult as China's economic presence will likely require ever-greater political involvement. Largely comfortable with the authoritarian governance styles of countries in the region, Beijing emphasizes its policy of noninterference in the affairs of other countries and does not put conditions on its development assistance.

Energy and Economic Investment

The engine of China's deepening involvement in the Middle East is its continuous need for energy and access to economic markets around the world. China imports half of its oil from the Middle East and North Africa and is the top oil customer of both Saudi Arabia and Iran. The International Atomic Energy Agency expects China to double its imports from the region by 2035.[8]

China's economic relationship with the Middle East gained a higher profile with the official launch of its Belt and Road Initiative in 2013. At the Third Plenary Session of the 18th Central Committee of Communist Party in China, Beijing designated the Middle East a "neighbor" region, which indicates that the Middle East now falls into China's top priority geostrategic zone.

Most of China's trade and investment in the region involves the Gulf countries, focusing on energy, infrastructure construction, investment in nuclear power, new energy sources, agriculture, and finance. Beijing's relationships with Saudi Arabia and Iran are particularly important, although maintaining productive relations with both of these two countries, who are bitter enemies, will likely become increasingly challenging. Iran is a central node in China's Belt and Road initiative in the Middle East, illustrated by the growing number of Chinese factories, road, rail, and port projects there.

Egypt, Israel, and Jordan are important to the Belt and Road effort. The majority of Chinese goods going to Europe pass through the Suez Canal, and Beijing is actively expanding the cooperative zone around the canal. Jordan joined the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank in 2015, signing deals with China worth $7 billion. Jordan may become a staging point for future Chinese investment in Syria if security improves in the latter country. Finally, Israel is pursuing a high-speed rail project with China that will connect Tel Aviv on the Mediterranean to Eilat on the Red Sea.

Countries in the Middle East welcome China's economic investment, but five years into the Belt and Road Initiative, there are some emerging signs of concern. Echoing concerns heard in Asia, critics are pointing out that the Belt and Road projects often seem to bring greater benefits to China than to host countries. In addition to calling on China to hire local workers instead of Chinese workers, China's partners and outside observers are also raising questions about debt sustainability, environmental impact, corruption and China's overall motives. President Xi

[8] Nicholas Lyall, "Can China Remake its Image in the Middle East?" *The Diplomat*, March 4, 2019.

Jinping's muted tone at the recent Belt and Road Forum in Beijing is an acknowledgement of these concerns and their potential to undermine China's narrative.

Diplomacy and Military Activity

China's diplomatic and military efforts in the Middle East largely serve its economic objectives, although Beijing increasingly welcomes its recognition as a global power and sees its relationships in the region as counters to U.S. influence. China highlights its principle of noninterference in the internal affairs of other countries in its Middle Eastern diplomacy. Wary of becoming involved in the region's many conflicts, China seeks to be a friend to all and an enemy to none, best exemplified by its significant relationships with both Saudi Arabia and Iran. China's ability to remain aloof from the region's conflicts and expand its economic engagement simultaneously is enabled by its freeriding on U.S. efforts to ensure security for the region.

In addition to needing the region's energy resources and welcoming Middle Eastern acknowledgment of China as a rising power, China also wants to ensure its security, both inside China and along its periphery. The Uighurs, a minority Muslim population that resides largely in the western region of Xinjiang, are a particular domestic concern for Beijing. Beijing fears the spread of radical Islamist ideology and looks with concern on reports of Chinese Uighurs joining the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. Chinese diplomats have worked hard to ensure countries in the region avoid criticizing China publicly for its treatment of the Uighur population over the years and its establishment of what are now large-scale internment camps in Xinjiang. China fears that publicity would inflame an already discontented population and perhaps even inspire material support from within the Middle East for the Muslim Uighurs; its efforts to date have been largely successful.

While China is an economic heavyweight in the Middle East, its military presence in the Middle East is considerably more modest. China established a small military base in Djibouti in 2017, strategically located in the Horn of Africa, an important international shipping lane. China sent three naval vessels to participate in multilateral counterpiracy operations in the Gulf of Aden in 2008, and it remains involved in counterpiracy efforts. Beijing sent 700 peacekeepers to the United Nations operation in Sudan in 2012. However, despite expressing concern about terrorism and emphasizing counterterrorism as an area of potential cooperation with the United States, China resisted calls to join the counter–Islamic State coalition, even through financial support alone.

China is unlikely to substantially increase its military presence in the Middle East in the near term, but its growing economic profile has brought with it growing security responsibilities.[9] More than 550,000 Chinese now live and work in the Middle East.[10] China has evacuated its citizens from countries in the Middle East on multiple occasions in the last several years, although these efforts were organized by China's civilian government ministries. When the security situation in Libya deteriorated in 2011, Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) air and

[9] See discussion in Scobell and Nader, 2016, pp. 18–19.

[10] Niu Xinchun, "China's Interest in and Influence Over the Middle East," trans. Haibing Xing, *Contemporary International Relations*, Vol. 24, No. 1, January/February 2014, p. 41–42.

naval units, which happened to be in the area, played a limited role in evacuating 35,000 Chinese nationals. Notably, the PLA Navy played a central role in removing 600 Chinese nationals and almost 300 foreigners from Yemen in 2015.[11]

Fundamentally, China's strategy in the Middle East is driven by its economic interests. China is growing its commercial engagement with countries in the region but does not appear interested in substantially deepening its diplomatic or security activities there. Like Russia, China will continue to engage with all countries in the region, even as that becomes more challenging because of the complex landscape, but it will likely resist being drawn further into the many political and military conflicts in the region.

Implications for the United States

More important than the U.S. approach to any particular region is the need for the United States to have an overarching vision for how it can prevail in a period of strategic competition. In this new era of competition, the United States needs at least four key assets. First, we need to have a vibrant and productive economy, one in which we are leading in frontier technologies like artificial intelligence, quantum computing, and biotechnology. Second, we need to remain a leader in the international order, so that we have a strong say in its institutions, rules, and norms, while also working to adapt this order to a changing world. Third, the United States needs to invest in its network of allies and partners, working in concert with them to maximize our strength and address common challenges. Fourth, we need to preserve our military strength to underwrite the other dimensions of our power.

The United States needs to develop a comprehensive, coherent strategy to prevail in this competition that leverages all of the elements of national power—economic; diplomatic; military; and cultural, or "soft," power. Discussion of the competition with Russia and China to date has focused strongly on the military dimension . While this is important, it is equally, if not more, important for the United States to chart how we are going to reinvest in our own economy and educational system so that we continue to be a world leader in technology and innovation. Similarly, the United States needs to develop a more comprehensive and structured approach to working together with our allies and partners around the world to compete with Russia and China, whether this involves working together to combat Russian disinformation campaigns and election interference or working with partners to incentivize China to pursue its Belt and Road Initiative responsibly and transparently. The current administration's preference for bilateral approaches fails to take advantage of one of our greatest strengths.

While both Russia and China want to demonstrate their status as great powers in the Middle East, neither Russia or China seems anxious to displace the United States from the region completely. The Middle East is a complicated place, and all three nations will struggle at times to navigate the landscape successfully. The United States should make clear it is not leaving the

[11] Andrew Scobell and Nathan Beauchamp-Mustafaga, "The Flag Lags but Follows: The PLA and China's Great Leap Outward," in Philip C. Saunders, Arthur S. Ding, Andrew Scobell, Andrew N. D. Yang, and Joel Wuthnow, eds., *Chairman Xi Remakes the PLA; Assessing China's Military Reforms*, Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 2019, pp. 189–190.

region and emphasize consistency in its approach, which may encourage leaders in the Middle East to reduce the amount of hedging they pursue with Moscow and Beijing. At a time when the United States should be complementing its defense cooperation with our allies and partners in the region with development assistance to help with much-needed economic development, stabilization, reconstruction and refugee challenges, dramatically reducing the State Department's budget for many Middle Eastern countries seems unwise. In the economic sphere, China's economic attractiveness has a momentum of its own, in the Middle East and beyond. Washington should monitor China's Belt and Road Initiative efforts in the region closely and be alert to infrastructure projects that may have negative security implications for U.S. presence in the region. More broadly, the United States should focus on working with allies and partners to incentivize China to operate within international norms for trade and investment, supporting it when it does and applying joint pressure when it does not. Some of our most important partners in this endeavor are in Europe, as this is the ultimate destination of China's trade routes.[12]

Finally, the United States needs to avoid overreach to be able to compete successfully in the future. Almost 20 years of military operations, many of them in the Middle East, have led to the deaths of thousands of American military personnel but have also drained our economy, undermined our ability to focus on pressing domestic needs, eroded our standing in the world and created opportunities for Russia and China to make gains at our expense. Learning from our experiences in Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya and elsewhere, the United States needs to focus tightly on its vital national interests in the Middle East and weigh any decisions about use of force fully and carefully.

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[12] See James Dobbins, Howard J. Shatz and Ali Wynne, *Russia is a Rogue Not a Peer; China is a Peer, Not a Rogue*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, 2018; and Douglas Lute and Nicholas Burns, *NATO at Seventy: An Alliance in Crisis*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Kennedy School, February 2019.

Mr. DEUTCH. Thank you, Ms. Wormuth.
Ms. Borshchevskaya, you are recognized.

STATEMENT OF ANNA BORSHCHEVSKAYA, SENIOR FELLOW, WASHINGTON INSTITUTE FOR NEAR EAST POLICY

Ms. BORSHCHEVSKAYA. Thank you. Chairman Deutch, Ranking Member Wilson, honorable members, thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

In my written testimony, I have gone into detail about Russian President Vladimir Putin's strategic objectives in the Middle East and North Africa, how those work against our own national security interest, and to that end, I touched very briefly on China.

For the sake of brevity, let me summarize. Vladimir Putin ensured Russia's long-term prominence in the Middle East and North Africa. Washington must now take Moscow into account in the region to a degree it has not had to for years.

The Kremlin is primarily concerned with its own survival, which it views as intrinsically connected to its relationship with the United States, and, more broadly, the West.

In a zero sum search for great power status, for Putin to win, the U.S. has to lose. And Putin needs victories, especially given the trajectory of Russia's domestic politics.

A long-term military presence on the Mediterranean appears to be a critical component of Moscow's goal to deter the West. Thus, in Syria, from the very beginning, Moscow's actions showed it sought to create—to methodically create an anti-access/area denial, so-called A2/AD layout, to deter the West. This position provides Moscow with greater leverage over NATO's southern flank and creates a springboard for further activities.

Moscow benefits from low level conflict in the region and has an interest in perpetuating it. This situation creates—necessitates Moscow's presence, elevates its importance, creates opportunities to sell weapons to all sides, and gain leverage over all players to create dependence on the Kremlin. Thus, Moscow manages conflict but does not bring a genuine resolution.

It is, thus, wishful thinking that Moscow, for example, will restrain Iran in the region. In this context, Moscow's approach to the region is flexible to ensure position of a power broker. The Kremlin courts every major player in the region and increasingly they court Moscow.

American allies from Egypt to Turkey, Israel, the GCC, and Morocco, to one degree or another, have come to see Putin as a necessary reality, a mediator who can talk to all sides, and offer a more reliable partner than the United States.

Key areas of cooperation are political, military, economic, including energy, diplomatic, and soft power-focused. Not only does Turkey continue the discussion about the purchase of the S–400 from Russia, a purchase that appears to reflect reality rather than mere posturing, but Russia is also building Turkey's nuclear power plant while Sputnik plays an important role in Russian information operations in the country.

Moscow has managed to pull Egypt closer into its orbit through arms, nuclear energy, and economic deals. Russia also entered agreements with Morocco that include cooperation on nuclear en-

ergy. Moscow projects power without incurring significant costs as it continues to improve Russia's military capabilities, boost arms sales to the region, and develop economic ties in the energy and other sectors. Meanwhile, Washington's overall commitment to the region remains ambiguous.

To touch very briefly on China, Beijing's involvement in the Middle East thus far has been primarily economic. The Russia-China dynamic is complex, but specifically in the Middle East Beijing has sided with Russia and also seemed happy to have Moscow take the lead in the region.

China's involvement holds major strategic implications for the Middle East, but so far Moscow has not—Beijing has not expressed a desire to be a power broker or a security provider there.

I made a number of policy recommendations in my testimony, which I would like to summarize. First, compete for the region. What happens in the Middle East rarely stays in the Middle East. We increasingly talk of realignment toward great power competition, but in this context the overall retreat from the region that began under the Obama Administration continues.

This situation makes it easier for our adversaries to step in, and, indeed, this is what Putin has done.

Second, we need to craft a clear strategy of dealing with Russia. Sanctions alone are no substitute for policy. And to be sure, they are an important tool and we should keep utilizing it. But as part of a broader strategic vision that involves multiple tools.

To that end, we also have to promote a clear narrative. Moscow has much appeal in the region. Putin's world view that runs counter to democratic value resonates in the Middle East. The U.S. has yet to counter it effectively, especially in the context of our own internal polarization and self-doubt.

Last, we have to remember that there are no quick and easy fixes. But with strategic and moral clarity, the U.S. can reclaim its leadership position and succeed in the unfolding great power competition.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Borshchevskaya follows:]



Moscow in the Middle East and North Africa

Anna Borshchevskaya
Senior Fellow, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy

Testimony submitted to the House Committee on Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on the Middle East, North Africa, and International Terrorism

May 9, 2019

Chairman Deutch, Ranking Member Wilson, Honorable Members, thank you for the opportunity to testify today regarding Russian influence in the Middle East and North Africa. I will address Moscow's overall strategic objectives and regional activities, describe how they hurt U.S. interests by sowing instability, and address what the United States could do to limit the Kremlin's influence. To end, I will touch very briefly on China.

With a combination of aggression and diplomacy, Russian president Vladimir Putin has ensured Russia's long-term prominence in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). Washington must now take Moscow into account in the region to a degree it hasn't had to for years.

Moscow's September 2015 military intervention in Syria was a game changer, but it's important to remember that, prior to the intervention, Putin had worked methodically and consistently for at least fifteen years to return Russia to the Middle East—a region that has historically mattered to Russian rulers. While he had achieved considerable influence by as early as 2010, the Syria intervention officially restored Russia's place as a critical regional player and helped position Putin as a regional powerbroker.

Moscow courts every major player in the region. Access to the Mediterranean gives the Kremlin greater leverage over NATO's southern flank (a long-time Kremlin aspiration), and opportunities to push further into the region and south into Africa. Putin demonstrated a commitment to his partners, all the while expanding ties, formal and informal. In spite of its economic weaknesses, Moscow has staying power in the region. It projects power without incurring significant costs as it continues to improve Russia's military capabilities, boost arms sales to the region, and develop economic ties in energy and other sectors. Meanwhile, Washington's overall commitment to the region remains ambiguous.

MOSCOW'S GOALS AND WHY THEY UNDERMINE U.S. INTERESTS

The Kremlin, driven by anti-Americanism, is primarily concerned with its own survival, which it views as intrinsically connected to its relationship with the United States, and more broadly with the West, in its search for great power status.

Putin has multiple goals in the Middle East, but fundamentally, his Syria intervention was about challenging the U.S.-led global order. Kremlin activities across the region share the same aim: to

undermine the United States and bolster Moscow's position in the region by deterring the West. Indeed, the Kremlin believes it is under attack from the West.[1] The Kremlin sees the hand of the West behind anti-regime protests such as the color revolutions, the Arab Spring, and protests within Russia itself.

Moscow seeks to expand political, economic, and cultural ties in the region as it positions itself as a regional powerbroker and covets a position of its arms supplies of choice.[2] Fundamentally, Moscow's approach is asymmetric. It understands it cannot match the West in resources and knows it doesn't have to. It aims to expend few resources and get high return for low investment, as it often resorts to indirect methods such as electronic warfare and use of private contractors for plausible deniability.

BENEFITS FROM INSTABILITY

For all of the Russian officials' talk about the need for stability in the Middle East, Moscow's efforts at peacemaking are aimed at projecting great power status, but not taking on the responsibility this role entails. Russia has no resources to invest in long-term stabilization, nor does it possess the ability to bring about genuine reconciliation between conflicting parties. But Moscow can live with low-level conflict in the region as it puts Moscow in a position of manager. It necessitates Moscow's presence, elevates its importance, and affords opportunities to gain leverage over all players and foster dependence to the Kremlin—but not to achieve a genuine resolution. This situation echoes frozen conflicts in the post-Soviet space that Moscow created in the first place and has no interest to resolve.

Arms sales have long been a critical component in the Russian foreign policy toolkit. To give some recent examples, at a meeting of the Commission for Military Technology Cooperation with Foreign States in July 2012, Putin said, "We see active military-technical cooperation as an effective instrument for advancing our national interests, both political and economic."[3] In December 2013, Russian deputy prime minister Dmitry Rogozin said more bluntly that the Federal Service for Military-Technical Cooperation, which leads the country's arms sales abroad, is Russia's "second foreign policy agency."[4] Arms sales tie with Moscow's interests in the Middle East and how Russia benefits from instability. Sergei Chemezov, chief of the powerful state-owned industrial holding conglomerate, Rostec (under U.S. sanctions) said in February 2015, "As for the conflict situation in the Middle East, I do not conceal it, and everyone understands this, the more conflicts there are, the more they [clients] buy weapons from us."[5]

Beyond arms sales, Syria is the most visible example of Moscow's overall destabilizing influence. By saving and empowering Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad, the Syrian conflict continued to take innocent lives and sew regional instability through terrorism and refugee flows that affected not only the Middle East and North Africa but also Europe. Iran continued to grow emboldened.

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[1] Stephen Blank, *Moscow's Competitive Strategy*, July 2018 https://www.lexingtoninstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/7.25.18-Moscows-Competitive-Strategy.pdf

[2] Indeed, for years, Moscow's arms sales have been second only to the United States, and in recent years, the MENA region has emerged as the second most important for Russian weaponry after Asia Anna Borshchevskaya, "The Tactical Side of Russia's Arms Sales to the Middle East," Jamestown, December 20, 2018 https://jamestown.org/program/tactical-side-russias-arms-sales-middle-east/

[3] President of Russia, "Meeting of the Commission for Military Technology Cooperation with Foreign States," Kremlin.ru, 2 July 2012, http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/15865.

[4] "Рогозин: ФСВТС сегодня является вторым внешнеполитическим ведомством," RIA Novosti, 11 December 2013, https://ria.ru/defense_safety/20131211/983472868.html

[5] "Глава "Ростеха" сообщил о росте продаж: 'Чем больше конфликтов, тем больше у нас покупают вооружения'" Newsru.com, February 23, 2015 http://www.newsru.com/russia/23feb2015/chemezov.html.

Moreover, Syria brought Russia's partnership with Iran to unprecedented heights. Distrust undercuts their relationship, but mutual opposition to the United States in the region and the pursuit of trade keep Iran interested in working with Russia. The fact of the matter is that the latter two countries' governments have not been so close in the last 500 years.[6] It is therefore wishful thinking that Moscow has any ability or desire to restrain Iran in any meaningful way.

Meanwhile, Moscow's efforts in the Astana talks produced no tangible results with regard to achieving peace. Yet these efforts elevated Moscow's image as a powerbroker while marginalizing the Geneva peace talks and the genuine anti-Assad Syrian opposition. Recall that Assad's regime has been responsible for the vast majority of civilian deaths in Syria and encouraged radicalization in the first place.

Another example is Lebanon. Last July, Moscow launched an initiative with Lebanon to repatriate Syrian refugees. The agreement reportedly included facilitating conditions for their return to Syria, and a small token number began to return. However, reports suggest that Syrian authorities have been ignoring Russia's safety guarantees, even killing or detaining many returnees. As I have written with my colleague Hanin Ghaddar, the slow repatriation pace allows Russian officials to consolidate ties with Beirut, gain diplomatic leverage, and keep pressing for further involvement. Most importantly, a genuine resolution to the refugee issue is nowhere in sight.[7]

A possibility of war between Israel and Hezbollah has grown in recent years. Should that happen, Moscow would aim to position itself as the arbiter that prevents each side from doing too much damage to the other and, as Dmitry Adamsky wrote, possibly come out the winner.[8] It is doubtful that Moscow has any interest in such conflict escalation, but this situation shows how Moscow positioned itself to potentially benefit even when conflict can escalate beyond the Kremlin's comfort level.

In Libya, Moscow had always seemed to favor Haftar somewhat, but has built contacts with all major players on the ground.[9] As tensions continue to escalate there, Moscow is well-positioned to play a mediator role, especially when the United States is absent, or appears to side with Russia.[10] The Kremlin has been careful and holds its cards close when it comes to its ultimate intentions in Libya, but Russia's presence in the country is real: it has a number of strategic interests there, such as energy and port access, and its track record is less than encouraging when it comes to genuine stabilization.

A2AD STRATEGY AND WARM WATER PORTS

The weaponry and equipment that Moscow brought into the Syrian theater from the very beginning signaled a clear intent for a long-term presence, while Russian operations suggested a strategy to deter the West and protect Assad and Russian assets, rather than consistently fight

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[6] Michael Rubin, "Iran-Russia Relations," July 1 2016, Operational Environment Watch, http://www.aei.org/publication/iran-russia-relations/

[7] Anna Borshchevskaya and Hanin Ghaddar, "How to Read Lebanon's Acceptance of Russian Military Aid," The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, December 7, 2018 https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/how-to-read-lebanons-acceptance-of-russian-military-aid

[8] Dmitry (Dima) Adamsky, "Russia and the Next Lebanon War," *Foreign Affairs,* https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/israel/2017-10-06/russia-and-next-lebanon-war

[9] Anna Borshchevskaya, "After Syria, Putin's next move could be Libya," The Hill, February 13, 2017 https://thehill.com/blogs/pundits-blog/international/319272-after-syria-libya-could-be-putins-next-move

Anna Borshchevskaya, "Russia's Growing Influence in North Africa," Atlantic Community, February 26, 2019 https://atlantic-community.org/russias-growing-influence-in-north-africa/

[10]Michelle Nichols, "U.S., Russia say cannot support a U.N. call for Libya truce: diplomats," Reuters, April 18, 2019 https://www.reuters.com/article/us-libya-security-un/us-russia-say-cannot-support-a-un-call-for-libya-truce-diplomats-idUSKCN1RU2ML

the Islamic State, as was Putin's proclaimed reason for going into Syria.

Moscow's actions showed it sought to methodically create an antiaccess/area-denial (A2AD) layout. Thus, Moscow deployed advanced weaponry such as the Pantsir short-range air defense system and the Almaz-Antey S-400 high-altitude surface-to-air missile (SAM) system to the Khmeimim airbase and later to the northwestern city of Masyaf, along with the KRET Krasukha-S4 ground-based electronic warfare system. It has also deployed the K-300P Bastion P coastal defense missile and the 9K720 Iskander ballistic missile system. Moscow's control of Syrian airspace complicates the U.S. ability to maneuver and makes Israel's freedom of action dependent on the Kremlin.

Moreover, a January 2017 agreement with Damascus expanded Russian naval facility in Tartus, allowed Russian ships access to Syrian ports and waters for at least the next 49 years, and gave Moscow rights to use the Khmeimim airbase indefinitely.[11] A long-term military presence on the Mediterranean appears to be a critical component of Moscow's goal to deter the West and weaken NATO. Indeed, Crimea increasingly plays an important role in Moscow's plans for Syria, from building connections between their ports, to a wide range of commercial ties, including energy and phosphates.[12]

As Russian military expert Roger McDermott writes, the Krasukha-S4 deployment also mattered with regard to field-testing the system in operational conditions.[13] Indeed, McDermott writes that, since 2009, Moscow has consistently invested in modernizing its electronic warfare capabilities, with the overall aim of asymmetrically challenging NATO on Russia's periphery "and maximiz[ing] its chances of success in any operation against NATO's eastern members." Moscow's most recent and controversial transfer—of the S-300 to the Syrian Arab Army[14]—sent a political message: an assertion of Russia's regional dominance. The S-300 also fits within the overall A2AD strategy and potentially gives Moscow more leverage over the West and its allies.

Russia's maritime and naval doctrines meanwhile set the goal of expanding Russian naval capacities from regional to global blue water.[15] At best, these ideas are years away from becoming a reality but aspirations matter. More to the point, Moscow continues its long-sought port access (rather than investment in building new ports) in the MENA region on the Mediterranean beyond Syria where it now has a long-term presence, along with greater deployment capabilities in the Black Sea and the Caspian.

To date, Moscow has achieved partial success with its overall A2AD layout. The United States and its allies are still able to operate, but Moscow's presence complicates these operations. In addition, Moscow boosted Russia's arms sales by using Syria as a testing and advertising arena

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[11] Reuters, "Russia establishing permanent presence at its Syrian bases: RIA," December 26, 2017 https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-russia-bases/russia-establishing-permanent-presence-at-its-syrian-bases-ria-idUSKBN1EK0HD

[12] Ridvan Bari Urcosta, "Russian Proxy Diplomacy in Syria: Crimea and Sevastopol," Jamestown, April 24, 2019, https://jamestown.org/program/russian-proxy-diplomacy-in-syria-crimea-and-sevastopol/

[13] Roger N. McDermott, *Russia's Electronic Warfare Capabilities to 2025: Challenging NATO in the Electromagnetic Spectrum* (Estonia: International Center for Defense and Security, 2017), https://icds.ee/wp-content/uploads/2018/ICDS_Report_Russias_Electronic_Warfare_to_2025.pdf; Roger McDermott, "Russia's Network-Centric Warfare Capability: Tried and Tested in Syria," *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 15, no. 154 (October 30, 2018), https://jamestown.org/program/russias-network-centric-warfare-capability-tried-and-tested-in-syria/.

[14] Roger McDermott "Moscow's S-300 Double Bluff in Syria," *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 15, no. 142 (October 10, 2018), https://jamestown.org/program/moscows-s-300-double-bluff-in-syria/.

[15] Указ Президента Российской Федерации от 20.07.2017 № 327 "Об утверждении Основ государственной политики Российской Федерации в области военно-морской деятельности на период до 2030 года" http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/View/0001201707200015?index=0&rangeSize=1

for its weaponry, and improved military capabilities by providing live combat training for its military. More to the point, Moscow's activities demonstrate consistent commitment to deter the West and project influence across the Mediterranean. Russia's long-term military presence in Syria puts it in a good position to collect intelligence on the U.S. coalition, Israel, and the rest of the region. Appetite comes with eating, and the Syria intervention created additional opportunities Moscow likely had not planned for from the beginning. Syria and Moscow's overall position created a springboard to project power into the rest of the region.

INROADS BEYOND SYRIA

Putin has developed pragmatic ties with every government and major opposition movement in the region—an approach that has proven more successful than the Soviet Union's ideological blinkering.[16] Moreover, Putin offers a clear narrative that finds much resonance in the region dominated by rulers who tend to eschew democratic values.

The region's leaders feel comfortable dealing with Putin, who appeals to their self-interest. They covet Russian weaponry and hedge their bets in the uncertainty of U.S. policy. Moscow doesn't ask Middle East leaders to improve the human rights situation in their countries. And Middle East officials do not worry about a Russian equivalent of a Foreign Corrupt Practices Act or Leahy vetting on training and military purchases when dealing with Moscow.

American allies in the region, from Egypt, Turkey, Israel, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), and Morocco, to one degree or another, have come to see Putin as a necessary reality and a more reliable partner than the United States—a mediator who can talk to all sides. Many in the region have come to respect Putin, even if some did so begrudgingly. Key areas of cooperation are political, diplomatic, and soft power-focused. Other key areas are military, energy, and economic cooperation.

Not only has the Kremlin courted every major government and opposition movement in the region, but increasingly, they conversely court the Kremlin. Senior regional leaders routinely pay their respects to Putin in Moscow. To give a few examples, Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu has made more trips to Moscow than to Washington during both Obama's and Trump's presidencies. Israel has broadened its outreach to Russia, even as the Jewish state retains the United States as its number one ally. Israel has come to accept Russia on its doorstep as a necessary reality it can do little about. Netanyahu hoped that through engagement with Putin, Russia would ensure Israel's freedom of action, even as Russia held control of Syrian airspace. And indeed, Israel has been able to continue with airstrikes in Syria after Moscow entered the Syrian theater. Iran presents an existential threat to Israel, and many Israelis hope that through developing good relations with Putin, Moscow would curb Iranian ambitions.

Saudi Arabian King Salman made a historic visit to Moscow in October 2017, which demonstrates Moscow's accepted prominence in the region. Riyadh too hopes that through engagement and investments in Russia it can distance Moscow from Iran. Overall, the region perceives Moscow as critical when it comes to a peace settlement in Syria.

Turkey has long since come around to Putin's position on Assad, partly because of Erdogan's anti-Western sentiment but also out of fear of Kurdish nationalism. This latter concern, of course, is ironic given Moscow's long-standing ties to the Kurds that predate the Soviet Union

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[16] Mark Katz, "Moscow and the Middle East: Repeat Performance?" Russia in Global Affairs, October 7, 2012, http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/number/Moscow-and-the-Middle-East-Repeat-Performance-15690
O. Freedman, Robert. (2018). From Khrushchev and Brezhnev to Putin: Has Moscow's Policy in the Middle East Come Full Circle? Contemporary Review of the Middle East. 5. 234779891876219. 10.1177/2347798918762197.

but is illustrative of how many regional states give Russia a free pass on past Russian actions.

In 2016 Morocco's King Mohammed VI came to Moscow for the first time since 2002. Rabat's policy may have been motivated by Moroccan frustration perceived sympathy from both the Obama and Trump administrations toward the Polisario Front's position with regard to both the human rights monitoring component of the UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) as well as a lack of enthusiasm for Morocco's position on the Western Sahara. Ultimately, the Polisario Front's role as a Soviet Cold War proxy is an ironic twist but has not been an insurmountable obstacle in Moscow's outreach to Rabat.

Arms and nuclear deals play an important role in Egypt's increasingly closer ties to Russia. Putin has managed to pull Cairo closer to its orbit through arms, nuclear energy, and economic deals. In September 2016, Russian defense minister Sergei Shoigu described Egypt as Russia's most important partner in North Africa.[17]

Moscow is also building Turkey's nuclear power plant. Erdogan's ongoing discussion about the purchase of S-400's from Moscow would have been unthinkable even a decade ago but increasingly appears to reflect reality rather than mere posturing. Should this sale go through, it would have major implications for U.S.-Turkey relations and Turkey's relationship with NATO.

Morocco has grown closer to Russia in terms of Moscow's support for Morocco's nuclear energy.[18] In Iraq, Putin has made relatively few inroads since Nouri al-Maliki's premiership, but has had more success with the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) through Rosneft's Spring 2018 agreement to construct a gas pipeline to Turkey. In general, the perception of Russia as a more reliable ally than the United States permeates the thinking of many in Kurdistan. Moscow has also been solidifying its role in OPEC.

Economic outreach and soft power also play an important element in Moscow's regional activities. Russian tourists make a highly significant contribution to the Egyptian economy and the two countries now have signed an industrial free trade zone. Though its primary purpose is likely political, the economic dimension is worth mentioning. Erdogan also understands Putin's leverage in this regard: Russia can always turn the flow of Russian tourists on and off, which would be critical to Turkey's economy. Indeed, Turkey is falling deeper into Putin's sphere of influence, and the ongoing S-400 discussion is only part of the story, albeit an important one. The Gulf is increasing its investments in Russia, and more broadly, the financial aspect is a critical aspect of Moscow's approach to the Gulf.[19]

Moscow's large Sunni majority is also possibly related to Riyadh's outreach to Moscow, whose own Chechen strongman Ramzan Kadyrov has been a useful tool in courting the region and presenting Russia as a country that understands Muslims and Islam better than the United States.[20] His messaging appears to have resonance despite Russia's continued mistreatment of

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[17] "Defense Ministers of Russia and Egypt held the III session of the joint Russian-Egyptian military cooperation commission," September 5, 2016, http://eng.mil.ru/en/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12094751@egNews

[18] "Russia and Morocco sign agreements to inaugurate military and security cooperation," Middle East Monitor, October 12, 2017 https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20171012-russia-and-morocco-sign-agreements-to-inaugurate-military-and-security-cooperation/
"Morocco and Russia to Sign Nuclear Deal," The North Africa Post, October 5, 2018. http://northafricapost.com/25700-morocco-russia-to-sign-nuclear-deal.html

[19] Theodore Karasik, "Russia's Financial Tactics in the Middle East," Jamestown, December 20, 2017. https://jamestown.org/program/russias-financial-tactics-middle-east/

[20] Anna Borshchevskaya, "While Mo Salah Sleeps in Grozny," The Moscow Times, June 12, 2018 https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2018/06/12/while-mo-salah-sleeps-in-grozny-op-ed-a61765

its Muslim minority. Russians sometimes point out that their country's officials, unlike American ones, make the Hajj.

Lastly, Russian propaganda outlets in Arabic, mainly RT and Sputnik, play an important and often unnoticed role in the region as part of Russia's broader soft power efforts. RT and Sputnik also increasingly partner with local media outlets to enhance their legitimacy. [21] Moscow's efforts mainly target social media and the region's large youth bulge—and these efforts seem to be paying off. A most recent Arab Youth Survey found that 64 percent of young Arabs see Russia as an ally, while only 41 say the same about the U.S. Moreover, the perception of the U.S. as the enemy has nearly doubled since 2016.[22]

Many point to Russia's declining economy. Yet this decline can stumble on for years and will not prevent Russia from pursuing its objectives because the Kremlin is conscious of the dangers of overextending. Moreover, Russian weakness can necessitate Putin to pursue further aggression. The Russian military meanwhile has reformed since 2008; its improvements are real and significant. Nor have sanctions alone compelled Putin to change behavior.

Moscow cannot replace the United States, but it is not seeking that role. It has no resources to that end, nor a desire to take on the responsibility. Russia does not need to replace the United States to do serious damage to U.S. interests; it is often enough to be present when the United States is absent or ambivalent. Putin's plans may not always pan themselves out, but until this situation changes, Moscow will continue to wield influence in the region to the detriment of its peace and stability, which can only undermine U.S. interests.

CHINA

China's involvement in the Middle East has been primarily economic so far, with a military and political component. China imports approximately half of its oil from the region, which is also major destination for Chinese investments. China's demand for the region's energy will only grow. Beijing has established a military base in Djibouti, is participating in Arabian Sea anti-piracy efforts, and by some account is interested in leveraging political and security advantages out of the major infrastructure projects it funds across the region as part of its ambitious Belt and Road Initiative. Indeed, last year, China promised the region $23 billion in a package of loans, aid, and development funding. China funded the Duqm port in Oman and invested in facilities that could provide Beijing with leverage. For instance, the Shanghai International Port Group (SIPG), whose majority stake owner is the Chinese government, is set to construct and manage the civilian port in Haifa, Israel. Other Chinese companies have signed memorandums of understanding with Iran on railway construction and modernization.

Moscow and Beijing are increasingly working together. These authoritarian regimes share a perceived threat to themselves from the U.S.-led global order and, in this context, call for a multipolar world. Putin and Chinese president Xi Jinping have developed a close personal relationship.

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[21] H. Akin Unver, "Russia Has Won the Information War in Turkey," Foreign Policy, April 21, 2019 https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/04/21/russia-has-won-the-information-war-in-turkey-rt-sputnik-putin-erdogan-disinformation/
"Sputnik, UAE Official News Agency Wam Sign a Memorandum of Understanding," Sputnik, March 21, 2019
https://sputniknews.com/agency_news/201903211073424082-sputnik-uae-news-agency-memorandum/
Anna Borshchevskaya and Catherine Cleveland, "Russia's Arabic Propaganda: What It Is, Why It Matters," Policy Note, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, December 2018 https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/russias-arabic-propaganda-what-it-is-why-it-matters

[22] ASDA'A, Arab Youth Survey, *A Call for Reform*, The 11th Annual ASDA'A Yourth Survey 2019, pp. 31 and 33. https://www.arabyouthsurvey.com/pdf/downloadwhitepaper/download-whitepaper.pdf

As early as October 2015, days after Moscow's Syria intervention, Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov said, "Our cooperation and coordination [with China] in the international arena are one of the most important stabilizing factors in the world system. We regularly coordinate our approaches to various conflicts, whether it is in the Middle East, North Africa, or the Korean peninsula."[23] Three years later, Putin described the relationship as a "privileged strategic partnership."[24]

In the Middle East, China has sided with Russia politically on Syria and other issues, and also has appeared comfortable with Moscow taking the overall lead in this region. Beijing's economic sway holds major strategic implications for the Middle East, though China has yet to express a desire to be a powerbroker or a security provider there—aspects that in the Middle East, as Steven Cook observed, matter more than economic strength alone when it comes to great power status.[25]

Beyond the Middle East, the Russia-China dynamic is more complex. Beijing appears less interested in Moscow's outright direct hostility to the United States. Despite the shared disdain for its global primacy, perhaps China benefits more than Russia from this situation. In addition, Moscow often has to adjust to China but not the other way around. And by some accounts, Russia is turning into a raw materials supplier to China and a 'junior partner'[26]—a long-held Russian fear. It is difficult to image Moscow happy in a junior partner role to anyone, yet it is also hard to imagine Putin, who prioritizes anti-Americanism, to move closer to the West to challenge China.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

As Washington increasingly realigns towards great power competition, it should embrace a strategy that includes the following:

- **Compete for the Middle East.** The current and previous U.S. administrations, unlike the Kremlin, have yet to engage in competition in the Middle East and North Africa. However, this region is strategically vital. It straddles Europe, Asia, and Africa. What happens in the Middle East rarely stays in the Middle East. This region will continue to matter due to issues such as refugee flows and terrorism. Some may view engagement as a distraction from the broader great power competition, but allowing Russia to gain a deeper foothold in the Middle East will only hurt U.S. interests in this regard. Moscow's ambition may outweigh its resources, but Western resources diminish in importance when the West has little interest in utilizing them. The United States must demonstrate a credible and consistent commitment to the region, to both our allies and adversaries.
- **Don't substitute sanctions for strategy**. The U.S. National Security Council clearly names Russia (along with China) as top adversaries, but we have yet to craft a comprehensive strategy to counter Russia. Sanctions have caused pain but fundamentally have

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[23] Embassy of the Russian Federation to the Republic of India, "Press release on Sergey Lavrov's press conference following Russia's Presidency of the UN Security Council," October 5, 2015 http://rusembindia.com/home/foreign-policy-news/138-foreign-policy-news/7540-press-release-on-sergey-lavrov-s-press-conference-following-russia-s-presidency-of-the-un-security-council

[24] "Путин: Связи России и Китая развиваются впечатляющими темпами," Regnum, November 15, 2018 https://regnum.ru/news/polit/2519794.html

[25] Steven A. Cook, "The Middle East Doesn't Take China Seriously," Foreign Policy, September 13, 2018 https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/09/13/the-middle-east-doesnt-take-china-seriously/

[26] Georgy Kunadze, "Россия – Китай: горизонты сотрудничества," Echo Moskvy, April 30, 2019. https://echo.msk.ru/blog/kunadze/2417225-echo/?fbclid=IwAR1lkUQE36hRzsBt_FvRD2-P2V4-BWgtFPbPARJm3iN8ZAmCbLhNuCkaxhI

not compelled Putin to change his behavior in a way that is more aligned with U.S. interests. Sanctions are an important tool we should continue utilizing but primarily as part of a broader strategic vision, where sanctions are one of multiple tools. It is ironic that while we often cast Putin as a mere short-term opportunist, we have yet to craft our own strategy to counter his malign activities and are instead only reactive.

- **Craft a clear narrative to counter the Kremlin**. Moscow has much appeal in the region on multiple fronts. One reason for this is because it offers a clear, simple narrative that resonates in the region, and one that runs counter to democratic values. The United States has yet to counter it effectively, especially in the context of our own internal polarization and self-doubt. Indeed, the growing prominence of RT and Sputnik in the region highlights our own broader narrative problem. We should invest greater resources in countering the Kremlin narrative more effectively.
- **Recognize there is no easy fix and settle in for the long haul**. Putin has been committed from the beginning to undermine the United States overall and return Russia to the Middle East. He is playing the long game. He has been in power for nineteen years now and does not have to constrain himself to timelines of democratic leaders. Putin's Achilles heel is exposed when U.S. policymakers reclaim leadership with strategic and moral clarity.

Mr. DEUTCH. Thank you, Ms. Borshchevskaya.

We will now move to member questions under the 5-minute rule. I am actually going to defer until later, and we will start with the ranking member, Mr. Wilson, and then alternate between the parties. Mr. Wilson, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. WILSON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And beginning with Dr. Alterman, has China's treatment of the Uyghur population and stance on Syria negatively impacted public opinion in the Middle Eastern countries? I would like a view from each of you. Dr. Alterman?

Dr. ALTERMAN. Congressman, it is remarkable how little public comment there has been outside of Turkey, which has an ethnic tie to the Uyghur population. I think this is a consequence of the fact that governments in the Arab world generally have very tight control over the press. Governments have decided, for reasons of diplomatic interest and economic interest, they do not want to antagonize the Chinese.

And they have been pointedly silent in many cases about the oppression of the Uyghurs and the collection of perhaps a million Uyghurs into what appear to be concentration camps.

Mr. WILSON. And Dr. Exum?

Dr. EXUM. I have nothing to add to that. I think that is exactly right. I think the most notable thing has been the silence of the large Arab States with respect to the interment of the Uyghur population.

Mr. WILSON. Thank you. And Ms. Wormuth?

Ms. WORMUTH. I would just add, I think I would absolutely agree with Dr. Alterman that because the government has such control, there is not a lot of public discussion of it, but I think to the extent that Arabs, if you will, on the street, Muslims on the street are aware of it, it is probably quite unpopular.

It is also worth noting I think that the Chinese diplomats place a lot of emphasis in their interactions with officials in Middle Eastern countries basically saying do not criticize us publically. That is one of their diplomatic goals, and they have been, sadly, very successful to date.

Mr. WILSON. And Ms. Borshchevskaya?

Ms. BORSHCHEVSKAYA. Yes. I would agree with everything that was said. The silence on this issue in the region has really been quite remarkable, and I agree also that the Chinese diplomats indeed push this—press this issue over and over again.

What is also interesting is it is rare that the Chinese—when in public, Chinese diplomats would talk about their own Muslim minorities as if it does not exist.

Mr. WILSON. And, Ms. Borshchevskaya, you have referenced this about the development of nuclear facilities by Russia. What has been the level of involvement of Russian nuclear energy sector investments? And is there any—what is our ability—and I want each of you to answer this, too—for the United States to compete?

Ms. BORSHCHEVSKAYA. Sure. So with Turkey, as far as I understand, the construction of a nuclear power plant has already started. With Egypt, there was an agreement signed several years ago, and there is plan to begin construction in about 2 years. And Rus-

sia is helping Egypt finance the construction. They are essentially giving them a loan.

With Morocco, the agreement is more tentative. There has simply been an agreement on nuclear cooperation. It is unclear where that is headed. But the fact—but the very fact that it is taking place is significant.

Mr. WILSON. And back again—what can the United States do to compete?

Ms. BORSHCHEVSKAYA. Well, I think, again, it goes back to being—for one—you know, to—Egypt, for example, Egypt used to be our partner on nuclear energy security. That is not the case anymore. I think, again, it goes back to our consistent presence in the region, demonstrating to the region that we are committed, that we are not leaving the Middle East. The major issue is that so many of our allies are hedging bets that they feel we are very much ambivalent in what we want to do.

Mr. WILSON. Thank you. And Ms. Wormuth?

Ms. WORMUTH. I think I would just add, one, the advantages of having U.S. companies provide nuclear cooperation, energy cooperation, for example, is that our technology comes with, you know, a very high level of sort of safety and regulatory standards. So I think that is on the positive side.

I think, you know, the really big competition right now, as I understand it, is around Saudi Arabia's desire to build a number of nuclear power plants. And I think the concern that I would put on the table there is that in signing a 123 Agreement, we really would like the Saudis to basically say, you know, we are interested in doing this, but we are not going to enrich uranium.

And right now, as I understand it, Saudi Arabia has not been willing to include that kind of a provision in a potential 123 Agreement, which is particularly concerning in light of the fact that Mohammed bin Salman has indicated that if Iran gets a nuclear weapon, Saudi Arabia would want to build one as well.

Mr. WILSON. Very insightful. Dr. Exum.

Dr. EXUM. No, that is right. I actually think that U.S. firms are doing a pretty good job in terms of marketing themselves to the Saudis, and I think the administration has helped with that. But I think as the Honorable Ms. Wormuth noted, that there are sticking points that, frankly, the administration should hold firm on.

We also have leverage. The Saudis are wanting to invest in our energy infrastructure going forward. I think that is largely a positive thing. The Saudis also want continued access to advanced weapon system. That is also in large part—that could be a potential chip for negotiations, but I would turn it to Jon for further thoughts.

Dr. ALTERMAN. Congressman, we could drop standards and constraints, but I do not think we should. I think the reality is that then the Saudis or the Egyptians or somebody else may go to a supplier that does not impose those constraints. But I am not sure we should stand in the way of that, because the constraints are important.

Mr. WILSON. Thank you all very much.

Mr. DEUTCH. Thank you, Mr. Wilson.

Mr. Cicilline, you are recognized.

Mr. CICILLINE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Dr. Exum, Brett McGurk, the former U.S. Special Presidential Envoy for the Global Coalition to Counter ISIS, recently wrote, and I quote, "The United States must recognize that Russia is now the main power broker in Syria. Washington has no relations with Damascus or Turan, so we will have to work with Moscow to get anything done. Russia and the United States have some overlapping interest in Syria. Both want the country to retain its territorial integrity, deny safe haven to ISIS and al-Qaeda, and both have close ties with Israel."

Do you agree with that assessment? And, if not, why not? And if you do, kind of what is the best way forward in light of that observation?

Dr. EXUM. Sure. Well, I mean, first off, let me just say a few words about Brett McGurk, who I think is one of the most significant U.S. diplomats over the past 20 years. I mean, the things that Brett has done in Syria and in Iraq, really, he has been a tremendous servant for the past three administrations.

Brett and I disagree on this particular issue for the reasons that I think I just laid out. It is true that the Hezbollah and Iran and the Syrian regime do not necessarily want to speak to us. That does not mean necessarily that we should speak to the Russians.

And, again, the sticking point that I would have is that while it might be tempting to believe that the Russians can deliver on cooperation in Syria, we did not see any of that evidence in 2015 and 2016. Frankly, we saw the Russians and their coalition partners use the cease-fires that we were able to negotiate to rest, refit, and reprioritize for other military objectives in Syria.

Frankly, I do believe that we do share some interests with the Russians and we do have some key interests in Syria; namely, countering terrorism, the security of the State of Israel, especially in southwestern Syria. However, I do not believe that Russia shares a broader interest with us going forward, and I would have serious reservations about what that cooperation would look like.

During 2016, we floated the idea of joint targeting of terrorists with Russia, which caused a significant amount of heartburn in my building in particular, because the idea of sharing intelligence with the Russians—I mean, the idea of marking intelligence secret while Russia was just—it was almost impossible to even imagine.

I believe Russia desires to know a lot about our sources and methods that we have spent decades developing. And with all due respect, and I hold Brett in the highest regard, especially for his service in Iraq, I would disagree with him strongly about the conclusions that he has reached. I just do not think that Russia can deliver, and I think they have a lot more to gain than we do.

Mr. CICILLINE. Thank you. Ms. Wormuth, I want to turn now to the Iranian influence in the region. We heard from Secretary Pompeo just about a year ago when he presented what he called a new Iran strategy, laying out 12 very basic requirements. And as best as I can tell, none of the conditions he set out has actually been achieved. And I am wondering whether the withdrawal from the Iran deal has done anything to limit Iranian influence in the region, and whether or not this maximum pressure policy is working at all, and frankly, and more particularly, what message that

has sent to Russia and China in the region. I know that is multilayered, but——

Ms. WORMUTH. Yes. Well, my own sense, you know, (a) I did not think it was in our national interest to withdraw from the Iran nuclear deal. I think in light of the circumstances that was the best deal we were going to get, and it did put off for many years the possibility of the Iranians getting nuclear weapons.

That said, what I think has happened now is the conditions that Secretary Pompeo has laid out, (a) I do not think Iran has any intention of meeting. By withdrawing from the nuclear agreement, we, I think, have, you know, disappointed several of our European allies. And, frankly, that has become a bit of a wedge issue with them.

And the circumstances that we are in now, I do not see a year into withdrawing from the nuclear arrangement that Iran has abated any of its malign behavior in the region. If anything, we seem to see that escalating. I think as they become more and more frustrated with the economic pressure they are under, they are lashing out more and more, and I think that is very concerning.

So, you know, where we are right now, I think, again, as Dr. Alterman alluded to, our policy I think has actually been helpful to the Russians and the Chinese because it has created so many wedges for us and has not really done anything to address the instability.

Mr. CICILLINE. Thank you. And my final question—civil society and democracy activists in the Middle East face increased challenges from the suppression of opposition voices to censorship of the press to discriminatory laws and mistreatment of marginalized communities.

And over many administrations, our country has stood up to balance our very strategic interest in the region with our need to stand up for important democratic values.

The Trump administration has decided in many ways just to ignore democracy and human rights altogether and cozying up to governments such as Saudi Arabia, which jail women and hack journalists to death and silence free speech.

And I am just wondering, with that kind of disregard for human rights, whether the emergence of Russia and China in the region—kind of how that impacts it. Dr. Alterman?

Dr. ALTERMAN. Congressman, I think a very important part of China's Middle East strategy is to make the future safe for authoritarianism. We have had a different strategy for more than a half-century, but the Chinese strategy is to make the future safe for authoritarianism because that will help secure the current government of China.

Mr. CICILLINE. May I just have one quick followup?

Mr. DEUTCH. One quick followup.

Mr. CICILLINE. I guess, how does the change in the kind of behavior of the current American President impact that strategy, if at al?

Dr. ALTERMAN. I would hope that we would work through a multilateral framework to build alliances with governments that both have governments working with us in broad concert, and also make clear to governments that there are standards and issues and pres-

sure that the U.S. will not compromise. And I think we will—we have friends in that.

We should have friends, and people should want to be our friends because they understand the U.S. package is a better package, and the reality is that many governments, especially in the Middle East, believe the Chinese package is a better package for their future.

Mr. CICILLINE. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. DEUTCH. Thank you. Mr. Mast, you are recognized.

Mr. MAST. Thank you, Chairman. Dr. Exum, rangers lead the way. That is right.

Listen, I love this committee. It saddens me when I hear just these irresponsible comparisons about the administration cozying up to Saudi Arabia. You know, numerous administrations going back forever have these relationships. Anybody could go out there and say, "President Obama, working a deal with Iran is cozying up with, you know, the greatest human rights abuser that has existed, you know, in this modern era." And so it does sadden me to see that as part of this committee. I think it is wholly irresponsible.

Beyond that, I would also say this. If any of my colleagues on this committee think that we should go out there and have further engagement in Syria, then I would encourage them to author an authorized use of military force in which you very specifically lay out exactly how many U.S. lives, U.S. limbs, U.S. treasure, anything else that you are willing to risk in advancement of anything that you see as a goal in Syria before you go out there and spout your responsible remarks.

In that, I would like to move to the conversation of China a little bit and some of the comments that were made across the board. China is assessed by everybody to be a massive economic strength. It has been mentioned in nearly everybody's comments. As we have hearings like this across the board in different subcommittees, everybody talks about China's economic prowess.

Dr. Alterman, you spoke a little bit about maybe the lack of desire for China to go out there and play that hegemonic stability role throughout the Middle East. No. 1, it costs them in treasure. No. 2, they have to go out there and pick winners and losers, and perhaps lose allies where otherwise they do not have to pick a friend or a foe or an ally or otherwise.

So what I would love to hear you all comment on, really, is hearing your analysis in that paradoxical situation is, is it better or worse to let them or maybe force them into having to play a hegemonic role throughout the Middle East? Does it push them into a place that they do not want to be, which can be good for the United States of America? Or is it better that we continue to maintain that hegemonic role or spend our treasure in our life to maintain that hegemonic role in your opinions?

You can start on whatever end you want.

Ms. WORMUTH. I will take a swing at that, Congressman. I think we should—I think we should, frankly, try to have China take more responsibility and be more a part of the security discussion in the region. I mean, they have basically been free-riding off of U.S. security guarantees in the region for some time.

They are able to get the energy they need out of the Middle East because we have historically secured it and made sure that there are free flows of oil.

Mr. MAST. Does that occur by asking nicely or by forcing them into a position where they have to maintain stability?

Ms. WORMUTH. Well, I would say this. I do not think—my own view is we should not try to force them to participate in that. I do not think you could do that. And, again, in many areas, we do not necessarily share the same interest.

That said, I do think we could continue to do—for example, under the Obama Administration, we did go to the Chinese and say, "Be a part of the anti-ISIS campaign." You know, participate. You all tell us all the time you are worried about terrorism, you are worried about the spread of Islamic extremism, so come and work with us together, you know, to fight this common threat.

They were not willing to do that at the time, but I think we should continue to ask them. Again, we also asked them to be a part of the response to ebola, which obviously was in Africa, not the Middle East. But, again, our message—I think the message of the United States to China should be, if you want to be a great power, you need to act like a great power and work on some of these common security challenges.

Mr. MAST. Certainly, Dr. Alterman.

Dr. ALTERMAN. You know, when we started shared awareness and deconfliction exercises off the coast of Somalia for counter piracy, the Chinese first said, "We do not want to have anything to do with it."

And then finally decided to start coming, and then we said, "OK. We have got the problem fixed. We are going to stop holding."

And the Chinese said, "Please keep holding them."

So the Chinese have been willing to engage a little more militarily. I am concerned that we and the Chinese are playing very different games, and we continue to invest very heavily in military presence, security ties, and we become hived off from the genuine national interest of the governments in place.

I think in a way we have been carried too much by momentum. And as I say in the written statement, having grown up in Poughkeepsie, New York, a company—a town really nurtured by IBM. I am particularly aware that IBM kind of lost the computer market because they concentrated on the wrong piece of it, and they let other companies develop things that were much more remunerative.

I think we have to rethink what our role in the Middle East is, what are our tools, and how do we make ourselves vital to governments. I think we have to rethink part of how we engage in the region.

Mr. MAST. Absolutely. Thank you all for your comments and your testimoneys today.

Mr. DEUTCH. Thank you, Mr. Mast. Mr. Allred, you are recognized.

Mr. ALLRED. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thank you to our panel. I read your written statements and learned a lot, and I think this is a very important topic. I want to thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this.

As we are kind of tilting now to world power competition, I see the Middle East as just an extension of what we are seeing even in our own hemisphere, but certainly around the world. And so I want to, you know, talk about how we counter influence and how we can do that in a way that is consistent with our economic values as well, but also militarily.

And so I want to begin with arms sales because, as you are aware, China and Russia are selling arms to our allies, and we have even seen some of our arms in Yemen, for example, ending up in the hands of al-Qaeda. And I am wondering if they are—if we have any concerns or if you have any concerns about China and Russia getting access to classified information or to any of our military systems and better understandings of that and how and what the Congress can do in mitigating the risk to U.S. military equipment to try and prevent that.

Ms. Wormuth, do you want to take it first?

Ms. WORMUTH. Sure. Happy to do that. I think what we see with Chinese and Russian arms sales, more probably Russia than China, of course it is a source of revenue for them. But what I saw happen over the last few years is as the countries in the Middle East become less confident of whether the United States is going to be there become frustrated, frankly, sometimes with the conditions that we put on our arms sales, which we do so in most cases for very good reasons.

They have essentially engaged in hedging behavior and sort of they look particularly at Russia as an alternative. You know, when Egypt got really fed up with us for not telling them things because of the conditions that Congress, among others, put on those sales, they turned to Moscow. And I think that will keep happening I think unless we do a better job of making it clear that we are staying in the region and that we are reliable.

They may not like everything that we have to say to them, but I think right now countries are not really sure exactly what our approach is.

I do think we want to be concerned any time we are engaging with arms sales in putting in protections to make sure that the technology is not leaking or being proliferated. And there are a lot of mechanisms already in place. But I think to the extent that Congress can emphasize the importance of those conditions in the various sales that the administration may be contemplating, those are very important.

Mr. ALLRED. And so just to followup really quickly on that, because you touched a little bit on the restrictions that we put in place and the things we ask of our allies. On this committee, we have been talking about—a lot about our kind of withdrawal from global leadership on human rights and standing up for those, especially in this region.

Do you think it is possible to maintain that commitment and to be—to, you know, carry that goal while also continuing to partner in the way that we have on arms and others by perhaps, as you were saying, making sure they understand that we are here to stay, we are going to be part of this expressing some sort of overall strategy?

Ms. WORMUTH. I think it is important that we continue to have human rights and basic freedoms be an important part of our foreign policy, frankly, and I think that should be part of our conversation with countries in the region.

So while, frankly, when I was in government, it was sometimes a struggle as we were trying to work through decisions about whether to go forward with sales, given constraints that Congress had levied on us, those are important things I think to weigh.

And I would encourage Congress to think about—I do think you want to give the executive branch some wiggle room to make judgments about what the right balance is between the human rights conditions and others things, or democratization things, and sales, because sales are an important part of our relationship, but I think having some conditions in place, it is good to have those guardrails for the executive branch.

Mr. ALLRED. Yes. Dr. Exum?

Dr. EXUM. Yes. If I could just add one thing. I mean, I think over the past 30 years we have had this theory of the case that if we buildup Gulf—especially host nation security capacity, then we will be able to remove some of those 35,000, roughly, U.S. troops that are in the Gulf, I think 59,000 region in the alone, so it is a huge investment in our case.

The challenge—to my mind, the strategic challenge is if you buildup that host nation security capacity, they might actually use it. That has been the case in Yemen, right? Our end use monitoring regimes are pretty darn good if the weapons are in garrison. If they are deployed in an expeditionary fashion, it gets tougher to keep track of exactly where all of those weapons are going.

I would echo everything that Ms. Wormuth said. I think that the Senate has done a good job in forcing a binary choice on Turkey with respect to the F–35 and the S–400. Another area that I would put on your radar is that the restrictions that we have, some of them for very good reasons, on unmanned aircraft and UAVs, means that they are bringing in Chinese or Russian UAVs, often with Chinese or Russian engineers in close proximity to advanced U.S. weapon systems.

That is something that I think the Congress can take a hard look at to make sure that the U.S. Department of Defense and the Department of State are keeping appropriate distance between those weapon systems and foreign nationals.

Mr. ALLRED. Thank you so much. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. DEUTCH. Thank you. Mr. Trone, you are recognized.

Mr. TRONE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. China, they built their first overseas military base in Djibouti. How effective do you think this base is in projecting power in the Arabian Sea and the Red Sea? Who wants to take a stab?

Dr. ALTERMAN. Congressman, I do not think they can really project power, but it certainly helps their surveillance. They partly are watching us because we are right next door. But they care an awful lot about shipping through the Red Sea, through Bab-el-Mandeb off the coast of Yemen, and then up through the Suez Canal. And this is their first overseas base, of course. It is a big thing to say.

And it is largely about just keeping track of the shipping. I do not think it is really a force projection so much as it is to understand the flow, to do surveillance, to be present, more than to actually be able to act. The Chinese are still a little bit scarred that they had to suddenly evacuate 30,000 people out of Libya when Gaddafi fell. They had never done anything like that before. They are not going to be able to do that out of their base in Djibouti, but it begins to represent a spreading out for the Chinese navy.

Mr. TRONE. So if this is the first, which it is, where do you think they are going to build a second, or will they be building a second? And what are they trying to accomplish, just more listening surveillance?

Dr. ALTERMAN. They are certainly investing in a port in Pakistan called Gwadar that has a sort of Chinese industrial zone behind it. I do not know anybody who thinks that base makes—or that port makes sense economically, given how much the Chinese are putting into it. There is a Chinese-Pakistan economic corridor that is part of their strategy.

One of the problems the Chinese have is they expand westward and down through Pakistan. It partly takes them to the Uyghur populations that we were talking about earlier with Congressman Wilson, which is a security problem, but also brings you into some nasty areas of Pakistan.

Certainly, one of the things that the Chinese strategists have expressed concern to me about is, as you go west through the Uyghur areas and down through Pakistan, you may be setting up a highway for radicalists to come into China instead of get goods out of China. So how well that is all going to work in practice is unclear, but certainly the Gwadar port is something that people—I wrote a book with—co-wrote a book with a specialist on China more than 10 years ago. He was paying a lot of attention to Gwadar.

Gwadar is still in the early stages, so it is not moving that fast. But it is certainly something that draws a lot of attention.

Mr. TRONE. So if we looked at the container operations they set up in Abu Dhabi—in addition, and we know Athens they have done a port—the port in Athens, they have done two ports in Israel. I mean, is this all part of—it seems like at the entry points everywhere they are grabbing the ports. Is this infrastructure part of Belt and Road still surveillance is your best guess as where they are going with all of this?

Dr. ALTERMAN. Well, they are certainly interested in trade. The report gives an opportunity to talk about win-win. What amazes me about the Belt and Road, frankly, is how little money they have put into the Middle East and how much benefit they have gotten out of the Middle East, because everybody projects their country to be the central node for the Belt and Road in the region.

So the Iranians I think are getting a lot of investment and are very enthusiastic about it, and that is something I talk about in my testimony, that this is sort of the way China thinks about Iran.

But the Egyptians are very enthusiastic. The Emiratis are very enthusiastic. The Saudis are enthusiastic. The Qataris are enthusiastic. Everybody seems to think that Belt and Road is going to put them front and center with a rising power in the world.

And I think, frankly, the United States has not had a counter to it. We tie people up in regulations. It all seems tedious. This——

Mr. TRONE. Let's just over the technology a second with Huawei. We talked—you may have talked about that already before. I missed it. But, I mean, with Huawei, they are taking over the communications gear, they are low bidding it to get in and get down—and I am a business guy—to buy into the market. What dangers do you see in our intelligence in loss of data privacy?

Dr. ALTERMAN. I think some of my other colleagues might talk better—it is a profound issue and gives them profound insight should they choose to use it.

Ms. WORMUTH. I think, Congressman, I would just add, the concern I think that we have to have front and center with Huawei is the fact that it is essentially a State—it is not a State-owned Chinese company, but it is probably a State-directed Chinese company. And, hence, you know, anything like that that—you know, if they have a global presence, if you will, on posture into the 5G network, for example, they are going to have—the Chinese government is going to have access to that as a result of the fact that Huawei is a State-directed company.

And I think that is the reason we have to be so concerned about that. I would encourage the administration to really start thinking in a comprehensive way about how do we talk to our allies and partners around the world, whether it is in Europe, in Asia, in the Middle East, to help level-set everyone to what the threat is, so that we can have a more coordinated——

Mr. TRONE. So you believe it compromises our data that is being transmitted through the 5G eventually.

Ms. WORMUTH. I am no IT expert, but I would be very concerned about it based on what I know.

Mr. TRONE. Thank you.

Mr. DEUTCH. Thanks very much. Thanks again to the witnesses. I want to just go back to Russia and comments that were made earlier. Russia is an all-weather ally, a reliable partner that will not leave. And, Ms. Borshchevskaya, you talked about Iran. We can't expect them to affect Iran.

I want to talk about Russia and Iran. What do we make of where the relationship is going? We know of Russia's relationship with Israel and the agreement that they seem to have reached where Israel is about to do what it needs to do to protect itself. But what should we expect of Russia? Can we expect Russia to play any role in helping long term with Iranian presence, Iranian malign activities, or when you say they do not lecture, should we just expect the relationship between Russia and Iran to grow stronger? Yes.

Ms. BORSHCHEVSKAYA. Sure. So first, you know, there is oftentimes—oftentimes when a conversation starts about Russia and Iran, there is an emphasis on the history between these two countries, and the history is one of largely animosity. The problem is that that is increasing—that has not been relevant in the last several years, and certainly Syria, in particular, brought the Russia-Iran partnership to new heights.

And, frankly, if you look at what Russia did in Syria, one reason why they have been so successful in Syria is because they have relied on Iran to do all of the heavy lifting.

So, you know, back when the intervention started, many had thought that this would be another Afghanistan for Russia. The reason why it was not is because Iran did the hard work.

And, you know, Russia is interested in trade with Iran. Hezbollah has learned from Russia. They have operated side by side. There have been reports of Hezbollah using a Russian flag as a cover to avoid getting hit by Israel. Hezbollah have traveled to Moscow. Putin had invited them to Moscow. So the Russian-Iran partnership, really it is unprecedented in the grand scope of the history of these two countries in 500 years.

Now, at the same time, Russia certainly has good relations with Israel, and that is important for the Kremlin as well. They have been able to—the Kremlin has been able to balance these relationships. And as you said, they have reached an agreement. Israel has been able to conduct its strikes, but at the same time Russia, by its very presence, by its nature of presence in Syria, is able to collect intelligence on Israel, not just on the U.S. and the U.S. coalition but also on Israel.

And certainly, you know, the fact of the matter is, Israel's freedom of action is dependent on Russia. Yes, they have given it, but they are dependent, and I think that is the point. So——

Mr. DEUTCH. Thank you, Ms. Borshchevskaya.

Ms. Wormuth, let me just go to you on this. Is there—longer term, should we expect this relationship to grow?

Ms. WORMUTH. I am not sure that it is going to grow. It strikes me that the Russia-Iran relationship is complicated. You know, in the short term, Iran has been an expedient partner to Russia and Syria for all of the reasons that Ms. Borshchevskaya explained. But now you see a situation where I think Russia is trying to get Assad to perhaps make some concessions, but Iran is actively whispering in his ear to hold firm and not make concessions, because they want to stay there.

So there are tensions there that I think to me do not necessarily mean that that relationship will continue, much less get much, much stronger.

Mr. DEUTCH. So then what do we do, Dr. Exum?

Dr. EXUM. Well, actually, the one thing we haven't talked about—and it surprises me—we haven't talked about oil and we haven't talked about——

Mr. DEUTCH. I was getting there, but go ahead, please.

Dr. EXUM [continuing]. Russia's relationship with OPEC in particular. Saudi Arabia has absolutely pressured Russia to distance itself from Iran and has thus far been unsuccessful. But the relationship between OPEC and Saudi Arabia and Russia, that is a relationship that has grown deeper over the past 2, 3 years.

I think if you were to poll, you know, analysts of the oil markets and—you know, 2 years ago and ask them if they thought that the near-term agreement between Russia and OPEC would have endured as long as it had, I think they would have been a bit surprised, but it has, and that is a relationship that is increasingly important.

I think that the Saudis can be an important voice in terms of balancing Russia's relationship with Iran.

Mr. DEUTCH. Yes. Dr. Alterman?

Dr. ALTERMAN. And, frankly, the Saudis are looking to show a tip toward Russia and China as a way to get us to back off. One of the things I heard from some Saudis in recent weeks was that Mohammed bin Salman especially is interested in demonstrating to the United States that he has other options if the United States is going to continue to talk about human rights and other kinds of things.

And he is interested in showing that he can go toward Moscow or Beijing. He does not have to rely on Washington.

Mr. DEUTCH. And Moscow may not lecture in the region, but for the Saudis, if their relationship with Iran is there are no strings attached, that is going to start to affect the relationship between Saudi and Russia.

Let me just, Dr. Alterman, stick with you. On the issue of oil, the administration has ended all waivers for purchases of Iranian oil, including China. Do you expect China is going to stop buying all oil—all of the oil it buys from Iran?

Dr. ALTERMAN. I think there are a couple of things that are going to happen. First, the Chinese are going to smuggle some oil. They are probably going to smuggle a little more oil. Exactly how much we will know about, I am not sure.

I think the Chinese also will pursue efforts to find workarounds to our sanctions. It seems to me that every time we use sanctions we run the same risk that hospitals develop and having penicillin-resistant germs and everything else. If you keep using it, people will find ways to get around it, and I worry that we may be in the——

Mr. DEUTCH. So how is it going to do it this time?

Dr. ALTERMAN. Excuse me?

Mr. DEUTCH. How is it going to do it this time, get around the sanctions?

Dr. ALTERMAN. Well, there are ways to do things with swaps. I think the Russians, as I understand it, could do things with swaps and be selling more Urals blend oil than they are actually producing. You could set up some small things, not enough to get Iran up to its normal level of sales. But I think that the world is exploring ways to work around American sanctions.

Mr. DEUTCH. Just one other question quickly. In recent years, Chinese has rallied cooperation in the tech sector. In 2016, Chinese investment in Israeli high tech, VC, approached $1 billion. Does their growing involvement—China's growing involvement in Israel's high-tech industry raise security concerns, and should it, and is there enough attention being paid to that?

Dr. ALTERMAN. It does. The Israelis are paying more attention to it. There was a reform in Foreign Policy a couple of months ago saying that the Israeli National Security Council prepared a report about foreign investment, which was really about Chinese investment in Israel.

I am going over there in a couple of weeks and will be talking to people specifically about this issue. And, frankly, I have been surprised at the level I have been able to set up meetings to talk about this issue.

Mr. DEUTCH. All right. Terrific. Thank you very much.

Mr. Mast had an additional question or two.

Mr. MAST. Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I was worried after 13 minutes we stopped alternating sides here. So thank you for the time.

Mr. DEUTCH. We just wanted to get through all of the questions.

Mr. MAST. Yes. As would I. Thank you.

I would like to go back to Iran and Russia. I got to speak earlier about China and Russia. Would love to hear from each of you, in your opinion, did the Iran deal, the JCPOA, did it bring the United States and Iran closer together, or did it bring Russia and Iran closer together through the parameters of the joint comprehensive plan of action?

Ms. WORMUTH. I will take a swing at that again. I think one of the things I think that the Iran nuclear deal did with the United States and Iran is it did open a channel of communications at very senior levels that I think had some utility.

And I do not think we necessarily have the same channels at the same levels right now. So, for example, you know, where it had some utility was I am sure you will recall, Congressman Mast, when our sailors found themselves in Iranian waters and were taken prisoner essentially. That situation was resolved, I believe, more quickly than it probably would have been because there was dialog.

Beyond that, I am not sure—you know, I would not argue that it brought the United States and Iran closer. I think, you know, many of us who worked in government at the time did not have a lot of illusions about the possibility that, you know, peace and happiness is going to break out.

Mr. MAST. Did it bring Russia and Iran closer together?

Ms. WORMUTH. My own sense is what brought Russia and Iran closer together was, frankly, the cooperation in Syria more, really, than JCPOA itself. That is my personal assessment.

Mr. MAST. Dr. Exum? Dr. Alterman?

Dr. EXUM. Yes. I am doing this with some trepidation because there are very few people I respect more than Christine. But I think that the JCPOA was fine as far as addressing Iran's nuclear issue. But there were some outsized hopes within the last administration that it would open the door for a broader dialog with Iran, and I think those hopes were unfounded.

We saw plenty of evidence that the Iranians were happy to talk to us about nuclear issues and about the JCPOA and about enforcement, any issues around that. But Syria is the best example of Iran not wanting to speak about issues that did not have to do with the JCPOA.

I would agree with Ms. Wormuth that I do not see it really affecting the Iranian-Russian relationship. I think Syria was what cemented that. But I think the JCPOA, which I also supported and which I think was fine for addressing one of the three threats Iran posed—the other being its asymmetric activities and its conventional weapons buildup—it is fine for those purposes, but it did not lead toward any greater thaw in the relationship. And I just think we have to be honest about that.

Dr. ALTERMAN. Congressman, I, frankly, think we are going to have hostile relations with Iran for the rest of my professional career. I do not think the JCPOA would have changed that. But I

think what it did is it got us on the side with all of the economies of the world that matter, with a number of allies to pressure the Iranians, and the fact is the Russians and the Chinese were with us holding the Iranians to account.

What it seems to me it partly explains Russia and Iran coming together is they both have an interest in splitting us off from our allies. And one of the things I really worry about is that we are much more isolated in the world in carrying out policy.

When the administration had their meeting in Poland, it highlighted not the world's revulsion at excesses of the Iranian government, but the fact is the U.S. was adopting a policy that its allies did not, that our policy through the JCPOA is shared by four countries in the world and all of our allies are on the other side.

And that is what I really worry about in the region is for so many of these hard problems it feels to me like we are taking them on by ourselves, and that is exactly what opens the door to the Russians and the Chinese doing better.

Where we are most powerful is when we speak for 100 countries at once. There is no country in the world besides the United States that can gather 100 countries behind it, and we are not trying to gather 100 countries behind us.

Mr. MAST. Thank you all for your thoughtful responses.

Ms. BORSHCHEVSKAYA. Yes. If I could just—if I could just add a comment. I agree that it was really Syria that mattered more for bringing Russia and Iran together. With regard to the JCPOA, you know, Russian officials complained for years that tough sanctions hurt the Russian-Iran trade. They really wanted trade.

And with the agreement, several important things happened. The Kremlin had touted this as their diplomatic victory. In fact, they have Tweeted, you know, that this was Russian diplomacy. Russian diplomacy was so important in helping achieve the JCPOA.

What they had also done is they sold the S–300 to Iran immediately after the deal. That was an important element.

What is also interesting is that they certainly—you know, and the Russia-Iran dynamic is very complex. It is a very complex relationship. They were worried about the Iranian nuclear program, but also at the same time they sort of downplayed its seriousness.

So there was a very complex dynamic going on. And, yes, I just want to highlight the sale of the S–300 after the JCPOA.

Mr. DEUTCH. Great. Thanks. I want to thank the witnesses for being here today, and the members who have been here to ask questions. Thanks for your testimony.

Members of the subcommittee may have some additional questions for you, and we ask our witnesses to please respond to those questions in writing. I would ask my colleagues that any witness questions for the hearing be submitted to the subcommittee clerk within 5 business days.

And with that, without objection, the subcommittee is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 3:31 p.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

APPENDIX

SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING NOTICE
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6128

Subcommittee on the Middle East, North Africa, and International Terrorism

Ted Deutch (D-FL), Chairman

May 9, 2019

TO: MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

You are respectfully requested to attend an OPEN hearing of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, to be held by the Subcommittee on the Middle East, North Africa, and International Terrorism in Room 2172 of the Rayburn House Office Building (and available live on the Committee website at https://foreignaffairs.house.gov/):

DATE: Thursday, May 9, 2019

TIME: 1:30 p.m.

SUBJECT: Chinese and Russian Influence in the Middle East

WITNESSES: Jon B. Alterman, Ph.D.
Senior Vice President
Zbigniew Brzezinski Chair in Global Security and Geostrategy
Director of the Middle East Program
Center for Strategic and International Studies

Andrew Exum, Ph.D.
Executive
Hakluyt & Company
(Former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Middle East Policy)

The Honorable Christine Wormuth
Director, International Security and Defense Policy Center
Senior Fellow
RAND Corporation
(Former Under Secretary of Defense for Policy)

Ms. Anna Borshchevskaya
Senior Fellow
Washington Institute for Near East Policy

By Direction of the Chairman

The Committee on Foreign Affairs seeks to make its facilities accessible to persons with disabilities. If you are in need of special accommodations, please call 202/225-5021 at least four business days in advance of the event, whenever practicable. Questions with regard to special accommodations in general (including availability of Committee materials in alternative formats and assistive listening devices) may be directed to the Committee.

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

MINUTES OF SUBCOMMITTEE ON *Middle East, North Africa, and International Terrorism* HEARING

Day *Thursday* Date *05/09/19* Room *2172*

Starting Time *2:11 PM* Ending Time *3:31 PM*

Recesses *0* (____to____) (____to____) (____to____) (____to____) (____to____) (____to____)

Presiding Member(s)

Chairman Theodore E. Deutch

Check all of the following that apply:

Open Session ☑
Executive (closed) Session ☐
Televised ☑

Electronically Recorded (taped) ☑
Stenographic Record ☑

TITLE OF HEARING:

Chinese and Russian Influence in the Middle East

SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

See Attached

NON-SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT: *(Mark with an * if they are not members of full committee.)*

N/A

HEARING WITNESSES: Same as meeting notice attached? Yes ☑ **No** ☐
(If "no", please list below and include title, agency, department, or organization.)

STATEMENTS FOR THE RECORD: *(List any statements submitted for the record.)*

TIME SCHEDULED TO RECONVENE _____
or
TIME ADJOURNED *3:31 PM*

Subcommittee Staff Associate

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING

SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE MIDDLE EAST, NORTH AFRICA, AND INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM

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