

THE BLACK AND THE CASPIAN: RUSSIA'S WARM SEAS

Lasha TCHANTOURIDZE

*Ph.D., Professor,
Norwich University—The Military College of Vermont
(Northfield, VT, U.S.)*

ABSTRACT

By defeating Georgia and Ukraine in small wars, Russia has managed to consolidate its military dominance over the Black Sea, and has halted NATO's eastward ambitions. Faced with Moscow's willingness to use naked aggression and military force, the United States and its Western allies have been unable to do anything to stop and reverse Russia's territorial gains in the former Soviet Union or to counter its growing influence beyond.

Soon after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia's position in the Black Sea region appeared to be weakening, but its dominant status was once again recovered in the first decade of the 21st century. Moscow has subsequently used its controlling position in the Black Sea for a successful military campaign in Syria, where the Russian forces have aided the Syrian regime in its fight against the Islamic radicals and other opposition forces. In this Middle Eastern engagement, Russia has

demonstrated its newly found advantage in strategic force deployment, in which the Caspian Sea Flotilla played a surprising and effective role. Unlike the Black Sea, the Caspian Sea has seldom figured in anyone's strategic calculations beyond its immediate littoral states, but as Russia's Caspian Sea Flotilla has made it evident, now this landlocked sea holds an important position in Russia's overall military posture. Although the United States has managed to throw cold water on Russia's enthusiasm in demonstrating new strategic weapons systems, Washington can do nothing to stunt Mos-

cow's advances on the ground in Syria and elsewhere.

As a result, for the first time since World War II, Russia's influence and power in the Middle East exceeds that of the United States or of any other major power. Russia's continuing military presence and control over its two warm seas, the Black and the Caspian, has been crucial in expanding Moscow's influence beyond Russia's immediate neighborhood, with the Middle East occupying a prominent place in Moscow's new international political and military calculations.

KEYWORDS: *Russian foreign policy, the Black Sea, the Caspian Sea, Ukraine, Georgia, Syria, the Middle East, small wars, balance of power, cruise missiles*

Introduction

Historically, it has been widely believed that Russia needed access to warm seas in order to maintain its great powers status.¹ This was especially true in the 19th century, when Russia's seas froze for several months every year or were too far from the European centers of power. This belief was preserved throughout the 20th century, and strategic affairs of that turbulent era demonstrated that it was not misplaced at all: the last battles of the Russian civil war took place on the Black Sea coast of Russia and in the Crimea, and during World War II, the battles in the Black Sea basin leading to the German push towards Stalingrad were crucial, so was the defense of Sevastopol and Crimea. Russia's access to the Black Sea and the freedom of operation of its combat-ready Black Sea Fleet were threatened in the 1990s, and in the first decade of the 21st century, when the sea nearly became NATO's internal lake: among its littoral states, two former Soviet allies, Rumania and Bulgaria joined NATO, and two former Soviet republics, Georgia and Ukraine, expressed a strong desire to follow suit. Had Georgia and Ukraine succeeded in their plans, Russia would have ended up with a single Black Sea port of Novorossiysk, a location rather shallow and unusable for large vessels, and entirely unsatisfactory for combat readiness and credibility of Russia's Black Sea fleet. Russia's short 2008 war with Georgia, which created the self-proclaimed Russian protectorates of Abkhazia and "South Ossetia," changed Russia's position vs. NATO dramatically by drowning Western enthusiasm for further enlargement of European and transatlantic institutions.² Russia's invasion and annexation of Crimea in the spring of 2014, topped by the Moscow-fueled rebellion in southeastern Ukraine, has heavily tilted the Black Sea basin balance of power towards Moscow. The United States and its European allies possess no immediate countermeasures to Russia's military annexation of parts of Geor-

¹ See: A. Kokoshin, *Soviet Strategic Thought, 1917-1991*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 1998.

² See: T. Turmanidze, *Bupheruli sakhemltsifoebi* (The Buffer States), BTKK Political Research Group, Tbilisi, 2006 (in Georgian).

gia and Ukraine. Moscow has scored significant victories by unilaterally revising the political geography of the post-Cold War Europe—and this is noteworthy—no country has been able to do it unilaterally since Germany's ill-fated attempts in the 1940s. The Black Sea basin also carries international significance for all the states in the region, as well as for the international system overall, due to two factors: strategic importance of Georgia's and Ukraine's coastline, and oil and gas reserves of the Caucasus and Central Asia. These two closely linked issues dwarf all others in the region, as both the Russian Federation and the United States have primarily focused on the themes of region's energy and access capacity since the collapse of the Soviet Union. In the 1990s, the retrenching Russian state did barely enough to maintain its influential role in the Black Sea region, while the rebuilding of the Russian military under Vladimir Putin has allowed Moscow to commence more aggressive and uncompromising policies towards its neighbors. In fact, since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, some of the most significant disagreements between Moscow and Washington have developed around the issues involving developments in the Black Sea basin: the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline, Tbilisi and Kyiv's aspirations to join NATO, the August 2008 war between Russia and Georgia, Moscow's recognition of Abkhazia and "South Ossetia" as "sovereign" states, the annexation of Crimea by Russia, and the Russian invasion of southeastern Ukraine.

Russia's Great Power Status

Russia's great power status depends much more on the developments in the Black Sea region (and those in the Baltic) than on any other region in the world. On the other hand, the United States or other great powers do not see their status as great powers being dependent upon their access capacity in the Black Sea region—it is essentially a remote backwater for them. On the other hand, the historical legacy and strategic significance of the Black Sea is too great for Russia to abandon the region without a serious fight. The key to the Black Sea access capacity lays in Crimea, and specifically Sevastopol, Crimea's biggest city, sea port, and a major naval base. However, Crimea, a peninsula with a narrow land-bridge to the mainland Ukraine, is economically unsustainable in the long-term—it has historically received most of its resources such as electricity, gas, oil, and even drinking water from the mainland Ukraine. Therefore, Russia's intervention in southeast Ukraine appears to be a long-term project aimed at building a land corridor from Russia to Crimea by capturing the Luhansk and Donetsk provinces. These provinces of Ukraine, the so-called "Novorossiya," can serve Moscow's long-term plans in other ways: they can be used as bargaining chips with Kyiv and/or with the West to secure Crimea's long-term status within the Russian Federation. During the Cold War, the Black Sea was seen as an internal sea by Moscow—its dominance there was not challenged by the West—the U.S. and other NATO members respected both the Montreux Convention³ and Turkey's desire not to pursue confrontation with Russia in this sensitive region.⁴ More recently, with Bulgaria and Rumania joining NATO, and Georgia and Ukraine having displayed strong intentions of joining the Western alliance, Moscow has witnessed its "internal" sea gradually turning into an internal lake of its main rival, NATO. To counter this trend, Moscow has started pursuing a strategy of acquiring as many foreign assets as possible in the form of conquered land or capturing strategic advantages in vital areas of its neighboring regions. When time comes, these assets would grant

³ See: J. Daly, "Oil, Guns, and Empire: Turkey, Russia, Caspian 'New Oil' and the Montreux Convention," *Caspian Crossroads*, Vol. 5, No. 2, 1998.

⁴ After the August 2008 war with Georgia, Moscow did accuse Ankara of violating the Montreux Convention (see: A. Murinson, "Russia Accuses Turkey of Violating Montreux Convention," *Central Asia-Caucasus Institute Analyst*, Johns Hopkins University, available at [<http://www.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/4960>], 15 October, 2008.

Moscow more room for maneuvering and horse trading than it had in the 1990s. In this context, the Russian adventure in Syria may be viewed as a step made to acquire a very important asset.

Russia's takeover of Crimea has confirmed that Moscow had no desire to abandon its dominant military presence and operations in the Black Sea. The deployment and operation of Russian troops in Syria has further demonstrated the strategic advantages of having military dominance over the Black Sea area, and unimpeded access to the Mediterranean. For the first time since the Russian troops approached and challenged Turkish-ruled lands in the 18th century, the Turkish state finds itself nearly surrounded by combat-ready and aggressive Russian military units.⁵ Incidentally, the current Kremlin leadership has resurrected the 18th-century term "Novorossia," and has applied it liberally in reference to the areas of southern Ukraine that have become the battleground between the combined forces of the Luhansk-Donetsk rebels aided by Russian mercenaries and regulars, and the Ukrainian armed forces. Further, the Syrian engagement has not diminished Russian gains in Ukraine and Georgia, and so far, all appears to be well in terms of military successes on the ground there. On the other hand, the Russian Federation has acquired smaller but determined opponents eager to inflict damage on Russia if it ever shows any weakness.⁶ President Putin's December 2017 "victory tour" of the Middle East illustrated Russia's increased influence in the Middle East in contrast with the United States' and other Western powers' diminishing presence there. This is the first time in history for Russia, which would not have been possible without Moscow's military control of the Black Sea.

By capturing Abkhazia from Georgia in 2008, Russia not only secured that part of Georgia's northwestern coastline, but has also assumed ownership and control of the old Soviet diesel submarine base in Ochamchire, not to mention better control over the Black Sea. Diesel submarines are necessary for the adequate defense of the Black Sea fleet assets, and for the deterrence of other navies operating in the sea. An additional naval base enhances Russia's Black Sea Fleet's submarines' operational effectiveness, and deprives the rival navies' potential access to the same assets. Since then, among other things, Moscow has deployed a new submarine system that has been developed and tested specifically for Black Sea operations.⁷ Prior to the August 2008 war with Georgia, Moscow had authorized a multi-billion project to make the Novorossiysk harbor suitable for its Black Sea fleet vessels.⁸ With Sevastopol firmly in the Russian hands following the conquest of Crimea in 2014, with its naval base serving as the critical strategic location for the Russian fleet, the combined Novorossiysk-Ochamchire assets have added to Russia's naval strength significantly, and enabled Moscow to exercise its military control more credibly. Sevastopol is blessed with a remarkable strategic position in the "middle" of the Black Sea, which allows the naval force stationed there to monitor, control, and address potential threats emerging from any geographic direction. New weapons, military bases, the pursuit of strategic goals with military power both in the Black Sea and in the Middle East help Moscow keep its potential adversaries in the region unstable, uncertain, and on the defensive while deterring future advances by NATO towards its southern frontiers.

⁵ The Russian Black Sea Fleet was founded by Prince Potemkin in 1783, but Russia's advance to the Black Sea shores had a long road, which included subjugation of Ukraine, destruction of the Tatar khanate in Crimea, fierce rivalry with Austria for strategic access to the Black Sea, and the sacking of Izmail (see: G.S. Thomson, *Catherine the Great and the Expansion of Russia*, Thomson Press, London, 2008, pp. 130-148; R.F. Weigley, *The Age of Battles: The Quest for Decisive Warfare from Breitenfeld to Waterloo*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, IN, 2004, p. 355; K. Osipov, *Suvorov: A Biography*, Hutchinson, New York, 1944, p. 87).

⁶ See: F. Hill, O. Taspinar, "Turkey and Russia: Axis of the Excluded?" *Survival*, Vol. 48, No. 1, Spring 2006.

⁷ According to the Russian Minister of Defense, the Black Sea Fleet is slated to receive six new submarines of Project 636 (see: "Fregaty stanut 'Admiralami'," *Rossiiskaya gazeta*, available at [<http://www.rg.ru/2015/06/29/shoigu-site.html>], 26 June, 2015).

⁸ See: "Russia Navy must Seek Alternative to Sevastopol Base—Top Brass," *RIA Novosti*, available at [http://en.rian.ru/military_news/20090718/155555161.html], 18 July, 2009.

Russia is the only great power in the world with an autarkic defense structure. Moscow has inherited this feature from the Soviet Union. No other major power in the world domestically manufactures and produces everything necessary for its homeland defense, including energy resources, fuel, and new research and development in the military industry. In comparison, the United States, the largest military power in the world, depends on oil (and other energy) imports, albeit from close allies, for the proper functioning of its military capabilities, not to mention the equipment purchased from NATO countries. The dependence on defense-related imports is even more pronounced for other major states. Further, most countries cannot defend themselves unilaterally against their potential adversaries without being involved in military alliances (NATO) or treaties (with the United States), while Moscow needs no military alliance or treaty membership to defend itself or to credibly deter any potential aggressor. In fact, the current military doctrine of the Russian Federation is written with such a self-sufficient defense structure in mind, presuming military autarky to be a natural and even desirable condition for Russia.⁹ Such autarkic defense capabilities boost Russia's international position, likely to support it for at least a few more decades, and to inform its unilateral foreign and defense policy actions.

Russia/U.S.S.R.'s unilateral great power policies,¹⁰ often running counter to preferences of most of the rest of the world during the second half of the 20th century, were only possible due to the country's vast oil and natural gas reserves. The first decade of the post-Soviet period saw Russia militarily preoccupied in its immediate neighborhood, including the secessionist uprising in Chechnia. Recently, Russia has managed to recover its old military confidence, and now Moscow can sustain regional campaigns at its borders for a few years in the face of global opposition, and criticism, and even comprehensive sanctions—the latter being the most unlikely to be imposed as Russia exports large quantities of oil and natural gas—a vital supply source for today's energy-hungry global economy,¹¹ not to mention its permanent membership in the United Nations' Security Council. Without ready access to cheap oil and natural gas, Russia's unilateralism will end alongside its aggressive defense and foreign policies. When Russia exhausts its vast oil reserves, it will be a signal of the first dramatic shift in Russian foreign policy since the siege of Izmail in the late 18th century. Russia's hydrocarbon resources will diminish and end one day—there is nothing permanent under the Sun—but before that day comes, the development of strategic access points to hydrocarbon reserves elsewhere, such as in the Caucasus, Central Asia, and Middle East, will push the end of Russia's energy independence farther into the future.

Moscow has resurrected *realpolitik* in world affairs out of necessity, to reassert Russian power, and to make a strong counterpoint to its Western neighbors. Now Russia is fully ready to pursue a tit-for-tat approach in international matters. When Russia's current national security strategy was debated in the 2000s, the principle of the so-called "double standards" was vocally discussed as one of the most pressing international issues facing Russia. Russian officials complained that according to the "double standards" championed by Washington, the West under the U.S. leadership had granted itself a privilege to pursue any international policy that was deemed appropriate in Western capitals, while other states were put under much more restrictive standards of behavior.¹² The national security document approved by President Medvedev in May 2009 provided for Russia to deploy and maintain armed forces in other countries to "support strategic stability and equitable strategic partner-

⁹ See: "Voennaia doktrina Rossiiskoi Federatsii," available at [<http://kremlin.ru/supplement/461>], 5 February, 2010.

¹⁰ See: *Kholodnaia voina 1945-1963 gg. Istoricheskaia perspektiva*, ed. by N.I. Yegorova and A.O. Chubarian, Olma-Press, Moscow, 2003.

¹¹ See: A. Movchan, "New Sanctions Won't Hurt Russia," *Foreign Policy*, 26 September, 2018.

¹² See: E. Urushadze, *Rusuli sagareo politikuri azrovneba postsabchota periodshi (Russian Foreign Policy Thinking in the Post-Soviet Era)*, BTKK Political Research Group, Tbilisi, 2006, pp. 64-65 (in Georgian).

ship” in international affairs.¹³ Pundits in Russia have pointed out that the lessons of most recent history necessitate Russia’s more aggressive and assertive stance in international matters.¹⁴ Despite verbal promises made to the Soviet leadership at the end of the Cold War, NATO started to enlarge in the late 1990s and ignored vocal protests from Moscow. Presumably, it was Russia’s perceived weakness that gave the Western allies a sense of self-confidence and righteousness. This was enough to reinforce Moscow’s old guard’s perception that international politics was indeed a zero-sum game—the territories “conceded” by the Soviets as their spheres of influence were “overtaken” by its former adversary.

Since the mid-2000s, the Russian Federation has managed to reassemble all the former Soviet republics under its control, with the exception of the Baltic States. Georgia and Ukraine had been the most resistant to Moscow’s advances and both of them have paid a heavy price by losing parts of their territories to the Russians. The main lesson of this experience is this: the countries of the former Soviet Union, including those in the Caucasus, are left to face or deal with the Russians on their own. For the states of the Caucasus this means that they will have to seek individual arrangements with Moscow as any unified front among them is highly unlikely. Moscow will continue to play them against each other for its own advantage, and to pursue its unilateral foreign policies aided by formidable military power.

Missile Messages in Syria

Russia’s other warm sea, the Caspian, has been virtually neglected in the international balance of power calculations. Themes concerning the developments around the Caspian Sea only occasionally emerge in discussions of international affairs. The April 2017 missile attack on a Syrian airbase by the U.S. Navy signaled a change in such calculations, as the Americans sent the first credible message to Moscow since August 2008. More directly, the American Tomahawk cruise missiles countered Moscow’s spectacular October 2015 demonstration of force and strategic capabilities. Back then the Russians targeted select locations in the Syrian section of the so-called “Islamic State,” more commonly known as ISIS, and other Syrian militant groups, and the first salvo was launched from the Caspian Sea. As Russia entered the Syria war in the fall of 2015, it undertook the first round of cruise missile attacks from the Caspian Sea: it was fired by Russia’s Caspian Sea Flotilla—an entirely unexpected and dramatic demonstration of Russia’s unparalleled military capabilities, and newly found confidence. The attack underscored how much strategic significance the Caspian Sea had acquired without anyone suspecting its rising importance in the international balance of power. The strike, launched by four Russian warships on 7 October, 2015, President Putin’s 63rd birthday, originated from the neutral waters off the coast of Azerbaijan with nuclear warhead-capable 26 sophisticated cruise missiles.¹⁵ The Caspian cruise missile strike reached its targets as it appeared to be a complete surprise for NATO—always an unpleasant combination of words when “missile attack” and “surprise” are used in the same sentence. Further, the *Kalibr (Club)* missile system used by Russia to carry out this attack is capable of carrying nuclear warheads. Four warships participated in the launch of the missiles, meaning that Russia has a significant and very dangerous strategic force in the Cas-

¹³ *Ukaz Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii of 12.05.2009, No. 537 “O Strategii natsionalnoi bezopasnosti Rossiiskoi Federatsii until 2020”*, available at [<http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/bank/29277/page/1>].

¹⁴ See: D. Trenin, *Should We Fear Russia?* Polity Press, Malden, MA, 2016.

¹⁵ See: “Russian Missiles ‘Hit IS in Syria from Caspian Sea’,” *BBC News*, 7 October, 2015.

pian Sea. The maximum range of the *Kalibr* missiles is stated to be 2,500 kilometers—the Caspian flotilla with these missiles covering the entire Caucasus, the Black Sea, most of the Middle East including the Persian Gulf, major parts of the Red and Arabian Seas, eastern parts of the Mediterranean Sea, parts of NATO members of southeastern Europe, and can reach any part of Turkey, Central Asian states, including Afghanistan, and Pakistan. Most importantly, the Caspian Sea flotilla can easily support Russia's Black Sea fleet in combat—a unique situation given that the Caspian Sea is landlocked and separated from the Black Sea by three states and a series of mountain ranges. This is especially noteworthy if one remembers the strategic importance of the Black Sea for Russia. In October 2015, the Russian cruise missiles from the Caspian Sea entered Iranian airspace and then crossed into Iraq before hitting targets inside Syria¹⁶—Moscow had permissions to fly over their airspace from both Iran and Iraq—a good indication of close cooperation among these three. Russia has used the war in Syria for an effective demonstration of its conventional and strategic military capabilities—a very useful method of deterring potential adversaries contemplating conventional military operations—but the *Kalibr* missile attack had a far-reaching message.

As it was mentioned above, *Kalibr/Club* cruise missiles are capable of delivering nuclear payloads. This missile system is the most sophisticated in its class as it reportedly has two stages, the final stage engaging as the missile approaches its target. The *Kalibr* missiles, and cruise missiles in general, fly very low, almost hugging the surface and their long-range detection by radar is impossible. The cruise-missile can be detected at about 24 or 26 kilometers (about 15 miles) from their target, and it is possible to intercept and destroy it, but at this point the missile's second stage engages and gives it a supersonic speed, making it nearly impossible to shoot it down. The message the Russians sent to Washington in October 2015 communicated in no uncertain terms that Moscow possessed devastating weapons against which the Western allies had no defense. In other words, the strategic balance between Russia and NATO is now in Russia's favor. The cruise missile deployments have been restricted since the late 1980s following the U.S.-U.S.S.R. treaty restricting the intermediate nuclear forces in Europe, the so-called INF Treaty. Among other things, cruise missiles are banned from the land-based launch systems, but are allowed for water-based launch vessels. The range for cruise missiles is restricted, but if the range restriction is removed, such missiles from the Caspian Sea can reach any part of the European continent with potential targets having no advance warning. Similarly, these nuclear warhead-capable missiles can easily penetrate the American defense and successfully attack targets on the American soil from somewhere in the Atlantic or Pacific Ocean. Further, if rivalry between Russia and NATO were to escalate, and if Russia were to withdraw from the 1987 treaty, the initial strategic balance would be in Moscow's favor.¹⁷

The April 2017 American response on the Al-Shayrat air base in Syria was designed to deter Russia from pursuing that path. The pretext for the attack was the presumed chemical attack by the Assad regime on al-Qaeda-affiliated rebels near the Turkish border a few days earlier. American warships in the Mediterranean launched 59 Tomahawk cruise missiles, whose performance is similar to that of the Russian *Kalibr* missiles, but they do not have a supersonic stage, they are older and somewhat inferior. These missiles can be shot down, but instead of making it a surprise, the American military warned its Russian counterparts of the upcoming missile attack. Despite the advance warning, all missiles reportedly reached their targets inside the air base, in other words, even though the Russians knew about the incoming Tomahawks and they could theoretically intercept and destroy them, they could not manage to destroy even a single Tomahawk. The Tomahawks, just like the *Ka-*

¹⁶ See: "Syria Crisis: Russian Caspian Missiles 'Fell in Iran'," *BBC*, 8 October, 2015, available at [<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34479873>]; "Rossiia oprovergla *fake* o padenii 'Kalibra' v Irane," *Vzgliad*, 9 October, 2015, available at [<http://www.vz.ru/society/2015/10/9/771400.html>].

¹⁷ See: R. Legvold, *Return to Cold War*, Polity Press, Malden, MA., 2016.

libr missiles, can be detected by Russian radars when they are about 24-26 kilometers away from their targets, at which point the tracking device will direct the ground-based computerized missile interceptors to shoot them down. Each Tomahawk missile will need at least two Russian anti-missile systems firing simultaneously, and if successful, the incoming missile can be brought down at about 8 kilometers from its intended target. In other words, to repel the American attack with 59 cruise missiles, the Russians had to have at least 118 advanced missile interceptors at the Al-Shayrat base. However, no Russian air base can ever have such an extensive anti-cruise missile defense infrastructure, let alone an expeditionary base, and even if they had enough radars and interceptors, nothing prevents the U.S. Navy from launching twice as many Tomahawks in the following round. In short, the United States may not possess the cruise missiles as advanced as those in Russia's possession, but it can always overwhelm the Russian defenses by the sheer quantity of inferior but equally deadly weapons. In the spring of 2017, Washington made sure the Russians and everyone else involved in the Middle East understood that the Americans were back in the balance of threat game with the Russians, the engagement which they abstained from since August 2008. Moscow received this message with some annoyance, but aside from affirming the strategic balance between the two countries, the American missile response could take nothing away from Russia's success on the ground in the Middle East and elsewhere.

Conclusion

Russia's successful military campaigns in the Black Sea basin have withdrawn the eastern regions of the former Soviet Union from NATO's influence. Although Western leaders have consistently rejected the idea of "new dividing lines" in Europe, what the Europeans are getting now is a continent divided between NATO and Russian spheres of influence, and the dividing line crosses over Ukraine and Georgia. Russia's success in Syria has demonstrated the crucial role that the control over the Black Sea plays for Moscow, while the effective deployment of the Caspian Sea Flotilla-based cruise missile systems has emphasized the significance of this seemingly unimportant region in the international balance of threats. However, there are the costs and consequences in this: this new rump assembly of Eurasian states and quasi-states effectively limits Russian influence to its own side of the dividing line. At the same time, Moscow is no longer being trusted in Western capitals, and besides, its favored tit-for-tat approach can only be effective to a point. Moscow has acquired a stronger voice in European affairs through fear and without being a member of either the European Union or NATO. The Russians have achieved this by developing an aggressive and unilateralist line in foreign and defense matters, and while the line is holding, they are unlikely to step away from it anytime soon.¹⁸ President Putin has confirmed his intention to stay in power as long as he can, but even under someone else's leadership, it will be nearly impossible to convince Russia's military and political class to abandon it. It takes force or threat of force to change Russia's behavior, and the European states are not likely to return to Cold War-style policies anytime soon.¹⁹ Europe is under a huge strain not only due to the resurgent Russia, but also because of European countries' ill-conceived policies that supported the overthrow of secular dictatorships in the Middle East, which all but guaranteed long-term instabilities at its southern and southeastern frontiers. When Europeans bicker among themselves over major issues, such as refugee affairs or Brexit, it translates into disunity and misunderstanding

¹⁸ See: A.E. Stent, *The Limits of Partnership: U.S.-Russian Relations in the Twenty-First Century*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 2014.

¹⁹ See: G. Kasparov, *Winter is Coming: Why Vladimir Putin and the Enemies of the Free World Must Be Stopped*, Public Affairs, New York, 2015.

that also affects their trans-Atlantic links. The Americans are unlikely to argue with the Russians over the European problems, about which the Europeans themselves have no unity. This does not exclude future friction between the United States and Russia; however, future conflicts between them are likely to remain largely symbolic and marginal.
