



Mapping Russian interests and power repertoires in the MENA region and Ukraine

REPORT – 5 / 2026

Jakub M. Godzimirski

Acknowledgements



Norwegian Institute
of International
Affairs

The Norwegian Institute of International Affairs is a leading research institute. Established in 1959, we provide research and recommendations of relevance to Norwegian foreign policy, with a strong position in the field of conflict resolution and peace operations.

This report is a product of Russian Repertoires of Power in the MENA region (RUSMENA) research project, funded by Research Council of Norway (grant nr. 313766). The project was to examine Russian power practices in the MENA region. However, after the outbreak of the full-scale war in Ukraine in February 2022, the researchers

in the project decided to extend the scope of the examination also to this conflict and adopted a comparative approach to studying Russian power practices and repertoire. For more information about this project visit the RUSMENA [project website](#).

Any views expressed in this publication are those of the author. They should not be interpreted as reflecting the views of the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs. The text may not be printed in part or in full without the permission of the publisher.

Photo credit: kremlin.ru

Publisher: Norwegian Institute of International Affairs
Copyright: © Norwegian Institute of International Affairs 2026
Published under the CC-BY-NC-SA licence
ISSN: 1894-650X

Any views expressed in this publication are those of the author. They should not be interpreted as reflecting the views of the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs. The text may not be printed in part or in full without the permission of the publisher.

Address: Rosenkrantz' gate 22
0160 Oslo, Norway

Website: www.nupi.no
E-mail: post@nupi.no

Tel: [+ 47] 22 99 40 00

Mapping Russian interests and power repertoires in the MENA region and Ukraine

Jakub M. Godzimirski

Author



Jakub M. Godzimirski

Research Professor

NUPI

Jakub M. Godzimirski has been working on Russian foreign and security policy issues at NUPI for more than 30 years, paying special attention to the role of energy resources in Russian grand strategy. In addition he also has worked on European policy and its impact on developments in Central and Eastern Europe, including relations with Russia.

Contents

Introduction.....	6
How to understand power practices and repertoires	8
Russia's strategic interests in Ukraine and the MENA region – similarities and differences	9
Military and security interests	11
Diplomatic and geopolitical interests.....	13
Information and ideological interests	15
Economic interests	17
The MENA region on the Russian map of strategic interests	19
Diplomatic and geopolitical interests.....	19
Information and ideological interests	20
Military and security interests	20
Economic interests	21
Ukraine on the Russian map of strategic interests	24
Diplomatic and geopolitical interests.....	26
Information and ideological interests	27
Military and security interests	27
Economic interests	28
Comparing Russia's interests in Ukraine and the MENA region.....	30
Mapping Russian power practices in the MENA region and Ukraine	36
Diplomatic power practices in MENA and Ukraine	37
Information-related power practices in MENA and Ukraine	46
Military and security-related power practices in MENA and Ukraine.....	50
Economic power practices in MENA and Ukraine	57
Summing up	61
Concluding remarks: have Russian power practices helped Russia achieve its strategic objectives in MENA and Ukraine?	63
Literature.....	66

Introduction

This report presents a comparative examination of the key drivers of Russia's foreign and security policy focusing on its *power repertoires* in two geopolitical contexts: in Ukraine, where conflict has been ongoing since 2014 and entered a new phase in February 2022; and in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, where Russia has been more active since its military engagement in Syria in 2015.¹ Ukraine is a core country in what is traditionally referred to in the Russian parlance as the “near abroad” (Baev, 1996; Beachain, 2025; Emerson, 2001; Götz, 2017, 2022; Rak, 2017; Rywkin, 2003; Toal, 2017). The MENA region is an area where the Soviet Union – which is considered in this context to be Russia's strategic predecessor – had strategic interests during the Cold War. Russia decided to withdraw from it in the early phase of the post-Soviet transition, but returned once it had restored important military and political capabilities under Vladimir Putin (Averre, 2024; Bechev et al., 2021; Carrere d'Encausse, 1975; Freedman, 1975; Parker, 2015; Ramani, 2023; Rosen & Rand, 1980; Sladden et al., 2017; Trenin, 2017b).

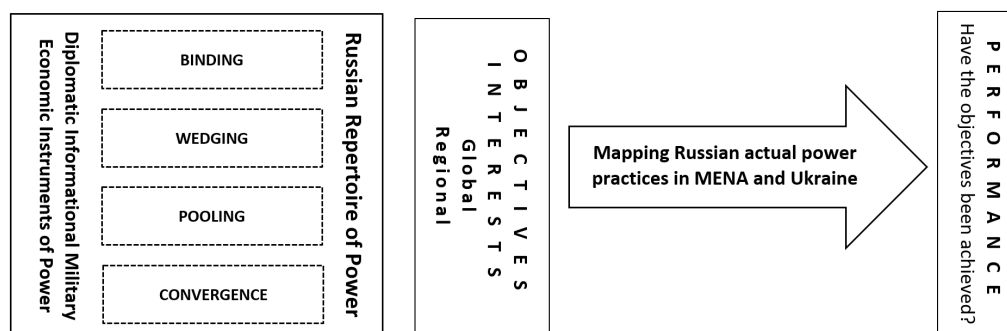
By comparing the power practices that Russia has applied in these two geographical and historical contexts, this report maps how Russian policies have been informed by how the key members of the regime viewed the strategic importance of each of the regions.

More broadly, by examining Russia's application of various power instruments in a specific temporal (post-2014) and spatial context, I expect the pattern of Russian actions to reveal general regularities and persistent factors helpful for understanding the logic of Moscow's actions in these regions and beyond (Kofman, 2019; Kotkin, 2016; Lomagin, 2004; Luttwak, 1983; Radchenko, 2024; Ragsdale, 1993; Rieber, 2007; Trenin, 2017a). Thus, I map Russian interests and objectives, as well as the power practices employed in the pursuit of these objectives. This made it possible to measure Russian strategic performance and answer the question of whether the application of power practices resulted in Russia achieving its objectives.

Different regional circumstances notwithstanding, I argue that Russian policies towards these two regions have been strongly influenced by the self-perception of Russia as a great power that seeks to be recognized by other great powers (Clunan, 2019; Defense Intelligence Agency, 2017; Hedenskog et al., 2005; Kanet, 2007; Kokoshin, 2002; Mankoff, 2011; Radvanyi & Laruelle, 2023; Reshetnikov, 2018, 2024; Smith, 2019; Wilhelmsen, 2019).

Finally, in relating to these two regions, Russian policymakers have adopted approaches rooted deeply in what we label Russian power repertoires understood as a set of available policy performance options and a relatively stable array of tactics that countries – and other actors operating on the international stage – employ when they exert various types of power, compete for influence, and seek to achieve their objectives (Goddard et al., 2019; Goddard & Nexon, 2016; Yennie Lindgren, 2021).

¹ For the purposes of this study, we define the MENA region as an area stretching from Iran in the east to Morocco and Mauritania in the west. The list of MENA countries in this context includes: Algeria, Bahrain, Central African Republic (CAR), Chad, Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Niger, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, Türkiye, United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Yemen.

Figure 1. Power repertoire, objectives, power practices, and performance

This examination of Russian actual power practices is inspired by what is sometimes referred to as the practice turn in the study of politics. In his seminal work on this turn, Iver B. Neumann (2002) summed this up in the following manner: “Text-based accounts and discourse analysis are useful to understand the preconditions for action but need to be complemented with the study of practices to account for how international politics unfolds. The goal is to establish what kind of repertoire of actions exists for a particular type of subject in a particular type of context”. In other words, the key objective of this study is to map and examine Russian power practices in two specific geographical and historical contexts – Ukraine (2014-2024) and the MENA region (2010-2024).

How to understand power practices and repertoires

In this study, we understand power practices as “socially meaningful patterns of action, which, in being performed more or less competently, simultaneously embody, act out, and possibly reify background knowledge and discourse in and on the material world” (Adler & Pouliot, 2011, p. 4). Practices draw on background knowledge and weave together the discursive and material worlds and they are embodied, shared, and patterned (Cornut, 2017).

That practices are embodied means that they are materially mediated through human bodies, and one should therefore focus on what actors do. That practices are both individually performed and shared means that they should be understood as the common way of doing things and are produced by the repetitive interaction between members of a group. They should therefore be treated as a social artefact linked to a collective (Bueger & Gadinger, 2014). Actors act in a certain way because practices “are acquired through socialization, exposure, imitation, and symbolic power relationships” (Pouliot, 2008, p. 273). Finally, the idea that practices are patterned has to do with the fact that they imply regularity and repetition, because a practice cannot be an isolated event or a unique performance and needs instead to be repeated in time and place (Cornut, 2017).

Our understanding of the concept of power repertoire is inspired by how this concept was developed by Charles Tilly. He used the concept of repertoires to study performances (of contention) and their interaction within bounded time-periods. He stressed that repertoires are useful to capture the fact that “people [...] have several pieces they can play, but not an infinity [...] Within that limited array, the players choose which pieces they will perform here and now, and in what order” (Tilly, 2008, p.14). Tilly himself has suggested that two types of such repertoires are particularly interesting, because they are by definition key to any state formation (Tilly, 1993). A state needs taxes to fund its claimed monopoly of violence, and it needs a claimed monopoly of violence to collect those taxes. Tilly describes the Netherlands and Russia as two extreme historical cases, with the Netherlands’ repertoire of economic practices being particularly evolved relative to other states, and Russia’s repertoire being historically dominated by military practices – which seems to be still the case.

“Power repertoire” should be understood as a set of practices that an actor knows and/or is prepared to perform. It is a set of strategies, tactics, or actions – or power practices – that an actor has at his disposal and can use, due to previous experience, to exert influence or control and to pursue his objectives (Goddard et al., 2019; Goddard & Nexon, 2016; Yennie Lindgren, 2021).

Before presenting a more detailed and comparative examination of Russian power practices in Ukraine and the MENA region, it is crucial to map what objectives Russia seeks to achieve in these two regions. We assume that there is a clear hierarchy of Russian objectives, with strategic objectives at the top of the list, followed by operational objectives and then tactical ones. The ability to achieve the objectives from the higher level is strongly influenced by the (in)ability to achieve objectives at the lower level. For instance, Russia’s tactical inability to achieve the operational success of decapitating the Ukrainian political elite during the first days of its intervention in Ukraine prevented Russia from achieving its strategic objective of a quick victory in what was labelled not as a war but as a “special military operation”. Which power practices are employed in a given region depends also on the role this region plays in Russian strategic designs, which is another topic examined in this report.

Russia's strategic interests in Ukraine and the MENA region – similarities and differences

To understand which strategic objectives Russia seeks to achieve in the MENA region and in Ukraine, it is important to see this problem in the broader context of the current Russian regime's understanding of national interests. Its general interests can be divided into several categories. In the following sections we will examine the general interests that Russia seeks to achieve on the international stage and then take a closer look at the role the MENA region and Ukraine play in this context.

There are different ways of measuring the level of strategic interest key actors shaping Russian foreign policy may have in various actors and issues. In this examination, we combine qualitative and quantitative approaches to measuring this interest. The qualitative part will be based on an examination of various sources dealing with the ideational part of Russian debates over national interests. It will look at the ideas that have informed Russian policies towards the MENA region and Ukraine and place these in the broader context of the official Russian and expert debate on the national interests and objectives that Russia seeks to achieve on the international stage and in the MENA region and Ukraine.

The quantitative part will look at various relevant quantitative indicators that can be used to map Russian policymakers' interest in cooperation with MENA countries and Ukraine. This will be done, for instance, by examining how many texts available at the official websites of the Russian president and Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MID) are tagged as describing Russian policies towards MENA countries and Ukraine. In the case of the Russian president, the system uses geographical tags to organize information about Russia's relations with other states, mapping the level of the Russian president's interactions with these countries (President of Russia, 2026).² When examining the MID's interest, a similar quantitative approach is adopted, focusing on how Russia's bilateral relations with MENA countries and Ukraine are presented on the ministry's official website (MID, 2026).³

There are two dimensions of the debate on Russian national interests. First is the official Russian debate on what these interests are and what needs to be done to promote and defend them. Second is the expert debate on how to understand what interests drive Russian foreign and security policy and what long-term persistent strategic objectives Russian policymakers seek to achieve at various stages of the development of the Russian state.

The official process of formulation of Russia's national interests is a continuous process of determining the fundamental needs of the state, society and the individual for security and sustainable development undertaken by Russian policymaking community. How these interests are defined depends on the current geopolitical, economic and internal realities. In the current situation characterized by the high level of tensions in Russia's relations with the collective West caused by Russian aggression against Ukraine these interests are listed in strategic documents, such as the

² This website is accessible here: <http://www.kremlin.ru/catalog/countries/>.

³ The MID website presenting these relations is accessible here: <https://mid.ru/ru/maps/>.

2021 National Security Strategy (President of the Russian Federation, 2021) and the 2023 Foreign Policy Concept (President of the Russian Federation, 2023). Table 1 presents these two official lists of national interests as described in these two documents of doctrinal character.

Table 1. Russian official lists of national interests 2021-2023

2021 National Security Strategy	2023 Foreign Policy Concept
1) preservation of the people of Russia, development of human potential, improvement of the quality of life and well-being of citizens;	1) protection of the constitutional order, sovereignty, independence, state and territorial integrity of the Russian Federation from destructive foreign influence;
2) to protect the constitutional order, sovereignty, independence, state and territorial integrity of the Russian Federation, to strengthen the country's defense;	2) maintaining strategic stability, strengthening international peace and security;
3) maintaining civil peace and harmony in the country, strengthening the rule of law, eradicating corruption, protecting citizens and all forms of property from unlawful encroachments, developing mechanisms for interaction between the state and civil society;	3) strengthening the legal foundations of international relations;
4) development of a safe information space, protection of Russian society from destructive information and psychological influence;	4) protection of the rights, freedoms and legitimate interests of Russian citizens and protection of Russian organizations from foreign unlawful encroachments;
5) sustainable development of the Russian economy on a new technological basis;	5) development of a safe information space, protection of Russian society from destructive foreign information and psychological influence;
6) environmental protection, conservation of natural resources and rational use of natural resources, adaptation to climate change;	6) preservation of the people of Russia, development of human potential, improvement of the quality of life and well-being of citizens;
7) strengthening traditional Russian spiritual and moral values, preserving the cultural and historical heritage of the people of Russia;	7) promoting the sustainable development of the Russian economy on a new technological basis;
8) maintaining strategic stability, strengthening peace and security, and the legal foundations of international relations.	8) strengthening of traditional Russian spiritual and moral values, preservation of the cultural and historical heritage of the multinational people of the Russian Federation;

	9) environmental protection, conservation of natural resources and rational use of natural resources, adaptation to climate change.
--	---

In general terms these official interests can be divided into several categories:

- State sovereignty and defence: ensuring territorial integrity, security, maintaining an independent foreign policy in the global arena.
- Preservation of the people and development of human potential: improving the quality of life, demographic development, as well as the protection of traditional spiritual and moral values.
- Sustainable economy: technological independence, financial stability and infrastructure development.
- Information and public security: protection of the country's information space and the rule of law.

The 2023 Foreign Policy Concept published after the outbreak of the full-scale war in 2022 pays much more attention to those interests that have to do with protection of the constitutional order, sovereignty, independence, state and territorial integrity of the Russian state and defines destructive foreign influence as an important source of threat. In addition, it elevates questions related to Russia's international position, strategic stability and international relations and pays relatively less attention to questions related to preservation of the people of Russia and economic questions.

Having in mind this realignment of the official list of national interests that took place between 2021 and 2023 we will now present what the expert community identified as the key drivers of Russian foreign and security policy looking at various important domains in which these interests have been pursued.

Military and security interests

At the top of the list of Russian military interests on the international stage is undoubtedly the question related to the very survival of Russia as an independent great power and state: the issue of preserving credible strategic deterrence. The focus here is on the nuclear component, because nuclear weapons are seen as the ultimate guarantee of Russia's sovereignty and great power status (Borshchevskaya, 2020; Charap et al., 2021; Dibb, 1989; Howard & Czekaj, 2019; Kofman et al., 2021; MccGwire, 1987; Petersen & Pincus, 2021; Prudnikov & Kuzmenko, 2023; Reach et al., 2022; Rumer, 2007; Sutyagin & Bronk, 2017; Westerlund, 2021).

Number two on this list is the question of securing Russia's position as an uncontested military power in the post-Soviet space, including by preventing neighbouring states from hosting foreign military forces or joining what Russian policymakers treat as hostile alliances. Russian military bases in the near abroad are also important in this context, as they may provide important leverage. The post-Soviet space is to form a strategic buffer and is treated as a zone of vital military interest – and therefore as the primary possible theatre for potential large-scale conflict (Fedorov, 2013; Kipp, 1993; Massicot, 2017; Oliker et al., 2015).

This explains why Russia has made huge efforts to block NATO expansion and the development of Western military infrastructure in this area. The main official motivation here was the idea that any NATO enlargement reduces strategic depth and warning time. Per this view, any establishment of various defence systems and air bases and the rotational deployment of foreign troops near Russia's borders would have a destabilizing effect and compel Russia to have a force posture that is NATO-calibrated – which could push Russia into a new and costly arms race (Flanagan et al., 2020; Frederick et al., 2022; Kurth, 2022; Priego, 2019; Tsygankov, 2018; Wilhelmsen & Hjermann, 2023).

The issue of rebuilding and modernizing Russian conventional forces is also high on the agenda. These reforms were to result in the transition from mass mobilization models to smaller, more professional forces capable of regional dominance, with improved readiness, command-and-control, and precision strike capabilities (de Haas et al., 2020; Golts, 2018; Herspring & McDermott, 2010; Lavrov, 2018).

After the very painful experience in the 1990s, the questions of maintaining the defence-industrial base and technological sovereignty have also become important in the context of the debate on national interests. Arms exports have played an important role, as they helped the Russian military-industrial complex survive the difficult 1990s and at the same time provided Russia with economic leverage in relations with countries that continue, for various reasons, to purchase Russian weapons systems. This very clearly serves both economic and geopolitical goals (Bukkvoll et al., 2017; Connolly et al., 2017; Päiväläinen & Rajala, 2020; Pankova et al., 2019).

Securing access to and control of strategically important chokepoints and sea lines in the maritime domain (Baltic, Black Sea, Arctic, Far East) is similarly important. The same can be said about the idea of building a strategic bastion for nuclear forces and a region for power projection and domain denial in the Arctic (Baev, 2019; Boulègue & Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2019; Dalsjö et al., 2019; Flake, 2017; Konyshov & Sergunin, 2014; Kurth, 2022; Kyle, 2019; Pedro et al., 2017; Petersen & Pincus, 2021; Zysk, 2019).

According to Kaplan's (1981) study of Soviet's use of force, which examined 190 examples of the political use of the Soviet military power, this power was used to achieve the following objectives: expanding and defending communism, including maintaining fraternal communist regimes; securing the revolution and homeland; and finally securing Soviet interests in the Third World. In the current situation, these objectives have changed and they can be said to include expanding and defending the Russian world; ensuring the security and stability of the current regime and of Russia itself; and defending Russian interests in the Global South or world majority, where Russia competes for influence with the collective West (Karaganov, 2022; Karaganov, Kramarenko and Trenin, 2023).

There have been several examples of Russia using limited military interventions to shape the security environment. The objectives to be achieved through these interventions included preventing regime collapse among partners; gaining an upper hand in diplomatic negotiations; and demonstrating Russia's willingness to use force where others hesitated. Russia's limited interventions in both the post-Soviet space (Moldova, Georgia, Ukraine in 2014) and in the far abroad (Syria 2015, several MENA countries) are good examples of how this strategy was translated into various types of power practices.

Diplomatic and geopolitical interests

Putin's Russia uses diplomacy as a strategic instrument, tightly linked to military power, economic leverage, and regime security. Diplomacy is used to help Russia deal with various types of constraints, to manage various types of strategic asymmetries, and to legitimize its actions (Ferguson & Akopov, 2021; Kragh & Åsberg, 2017; Menon, 2001; Sherr, 2013; Simons, 2014; Szostek, 2014; Tkachenko, 2019; Tsygankov & Parker-Bulgakova, 2024; Velikaya & Simons, 2020; Whelan, 1979; Wierzbowska-Miazga & Menkiszak, 2014).

Among the key diplomatic objectives pursued by the current regime is the question of recognition as a Great Power and as an interlocutor that must be involved when other great powers and other actors address issues that the Putin's regime treats as strategically important. These important issues include those related to war, peace, arms control, and regional crises, which – according to Russia – cannot be resolved without Russian participation. The diplomatic involvement of Russia is to confirm Russia's status as great power. Russia's direct participation in high-visibility summits, crisis diplomacy, and various elite clubs is especially important in this context. From this perspective, diplomatic interests are about status confirmation and not necessarily about attempts at consensus-building (Aissaoui, 2025; Dück & Stahl, 2025; Forsberg, 2014; Larson & Shevchenko, 2010, 2014; Malinova, 2014; Mankoff, 2022b; Ryzhkov, 2024; Suslov, 2024; Tkachenko, 2019; Tsygankov, 2014; Tsygankov & Parker-Bulgakova, 2024; Wierzbowska-Miazga & Menkiszak, 2014). Putin's meetings with Joe Biden in June 2021 and with Donald Trump in August 2025 are very good examples of how these questions are dealt with by the current regime (for the broader context of US-Russia relations, see Menkiszak, 2017; Shakleina, 2002; Sokolov et al., 2018; Tsygankov, 2004, 2009, 2019).

Another strategic diplomacy-related interest is the use of diplomatic tools to make others accept the idea that great powers, including Russia, have a right to spheres of influence. This helps Russia force others to accept that Russia has special interests in its immediate neighbourhood, including a Russian military presence and political leverage in its post-Soviet neighbourhood (Cooley, 2017; Ferguson, 2018; Kurth, 2022; Szostek, 2018; Toal, 2017; Trenin, 2009). Other important interests Russia have been consistently pursuing through diplomacy were preventing Russia's neighbours from joining hostile military alliances; maintaining security, economic, and political leverage over bordering states (Averre, 2009; Cadier, 2014; Jonavicius et al., 2019; Saivetz, 2012; Trenin, 2018); and ensuring access to various elements of infrastructure, transport corridors, and energy routes that are deemed important by the current regime (Godzimirski, 2022; Haines, 2015; Molchanov, 2019; Perović 2024; Valeriano & Maness, 2015).

Diplomacy is also used to help Russia preserve strategic autonomy and freedom of action on the international stage, as it helps Russia to maximize space for manoeuvre and minimize binding commitments. This is why Russian negotiators, not unlike their Soviet predecessors, prefer ambiguous formulations, flexible agreements, and reversible arrangements and avoid legal or normative frameworks that impose automatic obligations or enforcement mechanisms (Royce, 2024; Schmitt, 2019; Sherr, 2013; Tkachenko, 2019; Whelan, 1979, 1988). They also place a strong emphasis on sovereignty, non-interference, and the equality of states, at least rhetorically (Casula, 2014; Fink & Oliker, 2020; Kortukov, 2020; Malle, 2016; Sakwa, 2019; Suslov, 2020).

Furthermore, diplomacy helps Russia deal with and impose limits on what Russian policymakers view as Western institutional power and unity. Russian diplomacy therefore aims to dilute, fragment, or constrain Western diplomacy, particularly that of key Western actors such as the United States,

NATO, or the EU (Godzimirski, 2005; Priego, 2019; Royce, 2024; Rühle, 2014; Sarotte, 2010; Smirnov, 2014; Smith, 2025; Weissner, 2011).

Russia is willing to use diplomatic tools to support its military actions and efforts to achieve various political objectives through the use of military power (Borshchevskaya, 2020; Kaplan et al., 1981; McGwire, 1987; Sutyagin & Bronk, 2017). This was, for instance, very clear in the case of Russian military intervention in Syria, which was both preceded and followed by various diplomatic actions (Charap, 2013; Covington & Ryan, 2015; Hof et al., 2016; Phillips, 2016). The two Minsk Agreements from 2014 and 2015 were also used to de facto lock in gains achieved through military coercion; to freeze conflict on terms favourable to Russia or its supporters on the ground (Åtland, 2020; Boulègue, 2018); and to shift responsibility for negative outcomes onto others. In this, and in many other cases, diplomacy serves as a mechanism of consolidation, not conflict prevention or solution (Åtland, 2020; Boulègue, 2018).

Diplomatic tools help Russia to maintain its veto power in the global system of governance, which explains why Russia places diplomatic emphasis on institutions that provide it with a veto right or blocking capacity. In this case – as will be demonstrated later in this text – Russia's veto power in the UN Security Council (UNSC) is a particularly important tool. These diplomatic tools are used for various purposes, including as a tool of restraining the power of others; as a way of legitimizing Russian positions; and to prevent others from acting in ways that would be detrimental to Russia's interests (Security Council Report, 2024).

Russia uses diplomacy to build various types of flexible coalitions, including pragmatic cooperation with non-Western states, regardless of ideological orientation. This is exemplified by Russia's engagements with what is, in the Russian parlance, described as the Global South or world majority (Doroshenko & Shelkovnikov, 2025; Karaganov, 2022; Karaganov et al., 2023). The main objective here is to reduce isolation and expand options, rather than to create permanent blocs – although there are several cooperation frameworks, such as BRICS or the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), that have a more permanent and institutionalized character. An important feature of these diplomatic efforts is that they are designed to be mutually useful and not necessarily deeply institutionalized. The main objective here is to promote a broader vision of a multipolar order in which Russia is one of the key actors (Davydov, 2011; John & Marina, 2022; Lukov, 2011; Sakwa, 2019; Skak, 2019; Stent, 2025).

The idea of the multipolar order is also used to challenge Western normative power and provide support to other actors pursuing what could be defined as an anti-hegemonic and anti-Western agenda. This is very clearly visible in Russia's approach to cooperation with MENA countries, where Russia quite often plays the anti-colonial card and challenges Western interpretations of legitimacy and international order as well as their promotion of democracy and human rights. The main justification here is the idea that states have the right to choose their own models, provided that those models do not challenge Russia's position in what the current regime views as Russia's exclusive sphere of interests and influence. This motivation was strongly evident during Russia's intervention in Syria in 2015. At the same time, it can be said that the full-scale war launched against Ukraine in 2022 has clearly demonstrated the limits of Russia's willingness to accept states taking sovereign decisions about their institutional and civilizational place, if those states are located in what Russia defines as its exclusive sphere of influence (Ambrosio, 2005; Arbatov, 2000; Bladaitė & Šešelgytė, 2020; Cafruny et al., 2023; Chebankova, 2017; Locoman & Papa, 2022; Lukin, 2020; Smith, 2013; Stronski & Sokolsky, 2020).

As clearly demonstrated at various stages of the ongoing conflict between Russia and the collective West following Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine, Russia uses diplomacy to prevent isolation

and achieve tactical goals in areas where Russia competes for influence with the West (Karaganov, 2022; Karaganov et al., 2023). The organization by Russia of the Russia–Africa Summit during the war was a very clear example of how Russia uses diplomatic tools to prevent permanent isolation and normalize relations after crises without conceding core positions (Grissom et al., 2022; Limonier & Laruelle, 2021; Marten, 2019a; Stronski, 2019).

Russia is interested in using diplomacy to support regime stability at home and deal with domestic challenges. Diplomatic engagement is used to demonstrate leadership, relevance, and the ability to resist external pressure. Diplomacy is used to defend and promote the idea of sovereignty on the domestic front, and to present the problems experienced by Russians as caused by external actors responding to Russia’s “sovereign” decisions (Baev, 2013; Casula, 2014; Kortukov, 2020; Malle, 2016; Sakwa, 2019).

Other drivers of Russian policy in the geopolitical domain are opposition to Western hegemony and NATO expansion, which is perceived as a direct security threat; Russia’s rejection of Western “universalism” and normative power; and more focus on building a multipolar system in opposition to what has been viewed as a unipolar one dominated by the United States and the collective West (Giles, 2018; Klimentov, 2025; Pettyjohn & Wasser, 2019; Reshetnikov, 2024; Trenin, 2022; Vendil Pallin, 2015; Voskressenski, 2016).

When dealing with problems in the geopolitical domain, Russia has expressed a clear interest in being able to project its military power and use its nuclear arsenal as a credible factor deterring others from taking actions that the current regime views as detrimental to its vital strategic interests (Adamsky, 2023, 2025; Fasola & Averre, 2026; Freedman, 2023; Ven Bruusgaard, 2016).

Finally, many Russian actions in the geopolitical domain are related to Russia’s use of its energy endowment and leverage, although it seems clear that Russia overestimated the importance of this energy card when deciding to launch a full-scale war against Ukraine – which resulted in Russia’s forced withdrawal from the very lucrative and geographically close European energy market (Blumenau, 2022; Kamp, 2023; Nabers & Stengel, 2025). Russia’s ability to leverage supply relationships to gain political influence or bargaining power has misfired in the aftermath of its aggression against Ukraine, as most of Russia’s traditional energy customers in Europe decided to cut their energy ties with Russia, forcing Russia to diversify its economic partnerships by turning to Asia (Godzimirski, 2021a; Levi et al., 2026).

Russia has also expressed interest in building various types of multipolar coalitions and non-Western partnerships. This interest in building a multipolar world order by strengthening strategic cooperation and coordination with China and other actors has been one of the leitmotifs in Russian policy at least since 1996 when Y. Primakov was put in charge of the Russian foreign policy. Deepening engagement with non-aligned or revisionist states and increasing participation in groupings such as BRICS, SCO, and other flexible coalitions – including those involving several MENA countries is also high on the strategic agenda (Averre, 2024; Bechev et al., 2021; Davydov, 2011; John & Marina, 2022; Lukov, 2011; Sakwa, 2019; Skak, 2019; Stent, 2025).

Information and ideological interests

As a part of its international engagement, Russia pursues various information-related and ideological interests. Attempts at achieving this type of objectives are an important part of the Russian power repertoire, especially in a situation of deep conflict between Russia and its Western partners, as has

followed the start of Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine in 2022 (Darczewska, 2015, 2016, 2019; Darczewska & Żochowski, 2017; Herpen, 2016).

Russia has invested a lot of effort into building a relatively advanced information infrastructure that is used to convey Russian narratives and views to both domestic and international audiences. This information infrastructure is also used in Russia's attempts to project its information-related and ideological power beyond the country's borders in various types of influence operations. This section examines the question of what objectives Russia aims to achieve by using its information-related and ideological instruments of power (Bolt et al., 2023; Fedorov, 2017; Fridman, 2020; Godzimirski, 2021b; Rid, 2020; Robinson et al., 2019).

These information-related and ideological objectives include, amongst others, the promotion of what is sometimes labelled as "sovereignty absolutism", or the question of the maximization of state sovereignty – as exemplified by the concept of sovereign democracy (Heine, 2024). Key motives in the pursuit of these interests are the issue of the absolute primacy of state authority over society; the rejection of external interference in domestic affairs; and opposition to various forms of "conditionality" in Russia's relations with other actors, including those related to human rights or governance standards. The aim is to shield Russia (and to a certain degree Russia's international allies) from external pressure and delegitimize Western criticism of domestic repression or political practices (Kortukov, 2020; Makarychev, 2008; Malle, 2016; Sakwa, 2019).

Russia is also interested in using its information-related tools to limit Western hegemony in the information space. The promotion of various universal liberal values and norms by the collective West can negatively impact the current regime's ability to pursue its objectives on both the domestic and international fronts. This means that, when operating in the international information domain and trying to influence international opinion, Russia is interested in undermining three liberal ideas: that democracy is a universal model of development; that breaching universal human rights can be used as a justification for external intervention; and that there are some universal norms and what could be termed normative hierarchies, meaning that states that do not meet the liberal normative criteria are not to be treated as "normal" members of international society (Cooley & Nexon, 2020; Krickovic & Bratersky, 2016; Lomagin, 2004; MacFarlane, 2006; Monaghan, 2006; Tyushka, 2022).

There are several persistent topics in Russia's information-related campaigns that promote a certain ideological vision of the current regime. These topics include the vision of the "pluralism of civilizations"; the idea that there are multiple political paths to modernity; and the idea of equality of systems regardless of their internal structure and normative preferences. The objective to be achieved here is the weakening of Western normative authority and the promotion of the Russian vision of the global order, in which all states are equal irrespective of their domestic organization and normative foundations (Chebankova, 2017; Fink & Olikier, 2020; Locoman & Papa, 2022; Lukin, 2020; Lukin, 2021; Stronski & Sokolsky, 2020).

Another important message conveyed by those who shape Russian official narratives and promote the official vision is the question of presenting Russia as a distinct and exceptional civilization, as a specific Eurasian bridge between Europe and Asia. In this context, Russia is presented as a defender of traditional and conservative values, such as Orthodox religion, traditional family and national community. The question of the defence of civilizational diversity is high on the informational and ideological agenda, and the West is, in the Russian official narrative, presented as being on the brink of collapse (Boyle, 2016; Casier, 2013; Cooley, 2019; Diesen, 2020; Haukkala, 2008; Headley, 2012; Kaczmarek, 2017a; Liik, 2018; Loftus & Kanet, 2019; Lukin, 2015; Michalski & Nilsson, 2019; Tyushka, 2022; Trenin, 2004).

Among other information-related and ideological objectives, Russia seeks to secure – through what could be labelled delegitimization of the collective West – is the legitimacy of the current regime. This is especially important in a personalistic regime, where political power has for a long time been concentrated in the hands of its key figure, Vladimir Putin, and where representatives of various power institutions play a key role. This is also used to delegitimize domestic opposition, by presenting them as “foreign agents” (Casier, 2024; Driedger, 2023; Makarkin, 2011; Malinova, 2022; Snetkov et al., 2015; Suslov, 2024).

In relations with the Global South, information campaigns quite often play what could be termed “the anti-colonial and anti-imperialist card”, focusing on Western historical wrongdoing and exploitation and appealing directly to the sovereignty and dignity of post-colonial states (Abuamer, 2025; Narbone, 2024; Weilandt, 2025).

Economic interests

When it comes to the economic interests that Russia under Putin has been pursuing on the international stage, our understanding of their importance will to a certain extent depend on our understanding of what kind of economic system the Russian power elite is interested in building (for a detailed overview of the situation in Russian economy before the outbreak of the full-scale war in 2022, see Dabrowski, 2023; Sutela, 2012). There are those who argue that Russian actions in the economic sphere are driven by a kleptocratic approach, where personal enrichment is the main motivation (Dawisha, 2014; Zaslavskiy, 2025); and those who argue that Putin and his circle are involved in realization of an impressive economic project that is to turn Russia into a normal country (Shleifer & Treisman, 2005).

There are, however, some common economic interests to be promoted. These include securing revenue for the state and ensuring the current Putin regime’s stability and sustainability. Here, export earnings – especially from energy and raw materials – have been critical for both the solvency of the state budget and for personal reasons (Godzimirski, 2021a; Orttung et al., 2008; Perović 2024; Perović et al., 2009). Access to foreign markets is therefore viewed as a strategic rather than a purely commercial concern. However, intervention in Ukraine in 2014 and 2022 demonstrated that the regime was willing to pay what has turned out to be very high economic costs when forced to choose between addressing what it defined – not necessarily accurately – as serious security concerns and the real economic gains coming from energy trade with European partners (Godzimirski, 2016; Shagina, 2022).

Another economic objective that is pursued is the question of maximizing rents from exploitation of the country’s natural resources (Balzer, 2005, 2006). The issue of maintaining long-term demand for Russian energy exports is also high on the agenda, but questions related to development of favourable pricing mechanisms and preventing other actors from undermining Russian producers’ central market position are also to be found on the list of strategic economic interests (Godzimirski, 2013, 2022).

Many observers of Russian politics would agree that leveraging energy as an economic-political instrument has been a central feature of the Russian political reality. Energy production and exports generate revenue and provide access to foreign currency, but they also reinforce Russia’s importance to states that depend on Russia as an energy supplier. Russia’s specific interests in the energy sphere therefore include the ability to secure long-term contracts; control over transport

routes (pipelines, ports, LNG terminals); and avoidance of transit dependence on what Russia treats as politically unreliable states (Larsson, 2006; Leijonhielm & Larsson, 2004).

It is also obvious that Russia is interested in preserving its dominant economic position in the post-Soviet space by retaining privileged market access, preserving supply-chain interdependencies inherited from the Soviet period, and not least in limiting external economic presence and dominance in this space (Cadier, 2014; Dragneva & Wolczuk, 2012; Kaczmarek, 2017a, 2017b; Starr et al., 2014).

As in many other contexts, the question of sovereignty and autonomy is important in the economic context. Although Russia is not directly interested in recreating an autarchic system reminiscent of the Soviet one, the country strives to reduce its exposure to external economic vulnerability and actions undertaken by the unfriendly states (Kortukov, 2020; Malle, 2016; Sakwa, 2019).

One of the ways of dealing with what turned out to be – from the official Russian perspective – overdependence on the “unfriendly West” was the diversification of external economic partnerships that helped Russia reduce overdependence on Europe by expanding economic ties with Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America.

The MENA region on the Russian map of strategic interests

Russian policy toward the MENA region has, over the past decade (2014-2025), been driven not by a single regional strategy but rather by an opportunistic approach, where various types of interest have been at play, including security, geopolitical, economic, and status-related ones. These interests have evolved since the Soviet collapse but have become more coherent and coordinated under Putin (Averre, 2024; Bechev et al., 2021; Carrere d'Encausse, 1975; Freedman, 1975; Parker, 2015; Ramani, 2023; Rosen & Rand, 1980; Sladden et al., 2017; Trenin, 2017b).

The recent version of the foreign policy concept published in 2023 presents a set of ideas on Russia's interests in the MENA region (President of the Russian Federation, 2023). Syria was mentioned twice, as a country to which Russia intended to provide comprehensive support and one that should become a part of the process of normalizing the situation in the region. In addition, this document devoted a whole section (section 56) to outlining Russia's priorities in relations with the Islamic world and the MENA region in general. In addition to providing support to Syria, these priorities included developing the full-scale and trustful cooperation with Iran; deepening multifaceted, mutually beneficial partnerships with Türkiye, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and the other member states of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC); establishing a sustainable comprehensive regional security and cooperation architecture; promoting interfaith and intercultural dialogue and understanding; reconciling differences and normalizing relations among OIC member states, as well as between the states and their neighbours; helping resolve and overcome consequences of armed conflicts in the region; and, finally, unleashing the economic potential of OIC member states, with a view to establishing a Greater Eurasian Partnership.

Diplomatic and geopolitical interests

The situation in the MENA region provides Russia with some opportunities to increase its diplomatic leverage and play a more central role as a power broker, mediator, and guarantor in various regional conflicts. This makes Russia an indispensable actor in many situations and helps Russia use its diplomacy to convert what is often relatively limited military involvement into political influence. Drawing on a variety of political and diplomatic relationships, Russia has positioned itself as a “node state” in regional diplomacy, even though its material power is limited.

An important motivation for strategic engagement in the MENA region is Russia's interest in being recognized as a great power with global reach, which other great powers must take into account in their strategic calculations. To achieve this recognition, Russia demonstrates its presence in areas where its strategic superpower predecessor was also present and managed to at least partly compete with other great powers. The strategic return of Russia to the broadly understood MENA region serves therefore to confirm Russia's internationally recognized status as a great power (Clunan, 2019; Defense Intelligence Agency, 2017; Smith, 2019; Treyger et al., 2023; Wesslau & Wilson, 2016).

In that sense, the MENA region offers high visibility because of its increasingly important role in the context of global security and energy, and because it is an area where the other great and major powers with which Russia competes for influence also operate.

Due to the MENA's colonial history, in which several Western powers (France, the UK, the United States, and Italy) played a role, it is also relatively easy for Russia to use its policy in the region to raise opposition to Western hegemony. Russia's engagement in the region is therefore often framed as being driven by resistance to the United States and Western dominance and interventions. The key motivation is the interest in constraining Western ability to pursue its objectives in the region and challenging Western narratives of legitimacy (Doroshenko & Shelkovnikov, 2025; Karaganov, 2022; Karaganov et al., 2023; Limonier & Laruelle, 2021; McCauley, 2016; Rogers & Tyushka, 2017).

However, when operating in the MENA region, Russia also seems to pursue some objectives that have much to do with domestic affairs. For instance, what looked like a relatively successful operation in Syria in 2015 contributed to boosting domestic support to the regime and helped distract attention from the growing tensions in relations with the collective West caused by the annexation of Crimea (Czuperski & Atlantic Council of the United States, 2016; Dajani et al., 2019; Kozhanov, 2022; Lovotti et al., 2020; Parker, 2017; Phillips, 2016).

Information and ideological interests

Russia uses its engagement in the region to achieve objectives in the information sphere. The key drivers here are the promotion of ideas on sovereignty and non-interference and undermining the West's credibility by framing its actions as destabilizing or hypocritical, while presenting Russia as a defender of the post-colonial order and traditional values. This implies a focus in the information sphere on anti-Western and anti-colonial ideology and a high dose of scepticism toward Western moral claims (Narbone, 2024).

The use of information-related measures in the MENA region was also important in limiting the negative impact of the imposition of the Western restrictive measures. It was used to demonstrate that, restrictive measures notwithstanding, Russia is not isolated on the international stage and was able to maintain and strengthen its relations with the Global South or world majority (Karaganov, 2022; Karaganov et al., 2023; Narbone, 2024).

Military and security interests

Russia's many interventions in the MENA region, including various forms of deploying military power, were also justified by an interest in countering terrorist threats related to Islamic militancy that were viewed by the regime as a serious domestic security concern (Klimentov, 2025; Malek, 2015; Omelicheva, 2019). For instance, one of the justifications for the Russian intervention in Syria was concern for the return of Russian citizens and people from the other parts of the former Soviet Union who had been involved in various transnational jihadist networks in the MENA region. In addition, Russia's cooperation with local authorities on counterterrorism legitimised Russia's involvement and strengthened its position in the region. The MENA region was therefore viewed as an element of the remote strategic buffer zone and as an area where Russia could manage various types of potential threats.

Russia's presence in the MENA region also provided some opportunities to test its ability to project its military power beyond the country's borders. Russia's military hardware and technology, as well as its military concepts, could be tested in a new international environment. Gaining access to areas that were important from the Russian strategic point of view – such as military bases in Syria or facilities used by Wagner and Africa Corps mercenaries in North Africa – was also an important driver in this context (Doboš, 2024; Manfredi Firmian, 2025; Marten, 2019b; Spearin, 2025).

When operating militarily in the MENA region – and especially relatively effectively during the Syria operation in 2015 – Russia could demonstrate its ability to use military force as an effective instrument of power (Bechev, 2021; Borshchevskaya, 2020; Westerlund, 2021). This, in turn, could reinforce its ability to deter others from using military power against Russia. This was also a way of enhancing Russia's credibility as a security provider and at the same time could be used to promote the interests of its defence industry in the countries that – like Algeria and Egypt – were important buyers of Russian military hardware (Wezeman et al., 2024). Other MENA countries could be added to the list of customers for Russia's arms industry, creating old and new long-term dependencies through training and maintenance. This would have various types of strategic effects – economic, by generating export revenues; and military and diplomatic, by increasing the level of military cooperation and interactions with new and old partners.

It is important to mention here that the Russian military presence in the war in Ukraine had direct and indirect implications for Russia's military presence and strategic freedom of manoeuvre in the MENA region. For instance, Russia accused Ukraine of opening a second front in some MENA countries by providing military support to various groups fighting against local regimes supported by Russia (for more details and broader context, see Ingman, 2024; Kurbatov, 2025). On the other hand, the Wagner mutiny in June 2023 resulted in the dissolution of this organization, controlled by an unruly Yevgeniy Prigozhin, and the emergence of a state-controlled replacement in the MENA region, Africa Corps (Bauer et al., 2025; Bøås & Strazzari, 2025; Larsen, 2025; Limonier & Laruelle, 2021; Manfredi Firmian, 2025).

Economic interests

As demonstrated in Table 2, the MENA region, with the exception of Türkiye, does not play a major part in Russian trade. From the point of view of the Russian state, having a trade surplus is viewed as beneficial (Dabrowski, 2022). In 2021, the last year when complete official Russian data on trade are available, Russia had a trade surplus with all MENA countries except Bahrain. From that perspective, Türkiye was clearly the most important trade partner, generating 10% of Russia's trade surplus, followed by UAE (2.4%), Egypt (1.8%), Algeria (1.5%), and Iran (1.1%).

According to data from the Observatory of Economic Complexity (OEC, 2026), mineral fuels represented 53.3% of Russia's total exports in 2021, followed by precious stones and metals (7.59%) and iron and steel (6.5%). In the case of most important MENA trade partner, Türkiye, the situation in 2021 was more complex: Mineral fuels represented 33.7% of trade by value, followed by iron and steel (23.1%) and cereals (10.8%). For Russian exports to its second most important MENA trade partner, the UAE, the situation was different: Precious stones and metals represented 36.3% of the value of the Russian exports, followed by mineral fuels (32.3%) and iron and steel (6.86%). In the case of Egypt, the main Russian export commodity was cereals (56.8%), followed by wood (8.51%), and copper articles (7.61%). Algeria imported mostly electrical machinery and electronics (35.1%), animal and vegetable fats (14.2%) and optical, photo and film equipment, and medical

instruments (10.9%). In the case of Iran, the main Russian export commodity was cereals (66.2%), followed by animal and vegetable fats (11.2%) and wood and wood articles (6.93%).

In 2024, mineral fuels represented 62.5% of the value of the Russian exports globally and were followed by precious stones, metals, & pearls (5%), fertilizers (4%), iron & steel (3.3%) and cereals (2.9%). In the case of the most important MENA trading partners, the situation was as follows. Türkiye imported mostly mineral fuels (55.2%), iron and steel (10.4%) and cereals (5.61%). Egypt continued to import cereals (50.9%), iron and steel (16.1%) and animal and vegetable fats (8.76%). Saudi Arabia was the third most-important MENA market for exports from Russia and imported mostly mineral fuels (47.6%), cereals (32.2%), and meat (7.21%).

Table 2. Russia's trade with the MENA region 2021 by trade surplus in \$ (Source: UN Comtrade database)

	Import to Russia	Export from Russia	Balance Ex-Imp	Share of trade surplus
World	293,497,128,020	492,313,790,696	198,816,662,676	
Türkiye	6,514,509,400	26,426,295,172	19,911,785,772	10.0%
UAE	276,303,940	5,081,598,959	4,805,295,019	2.4%
Egypt	591,955,861	4,177,311,525	3,585,355,664	1.8%
Algeria	18,266,819	2,989,446,562	2,971,179,743	1.5%
Iran	972,346,366	3,068,188,156	2,095,841,790	1.1%
Saudi Arabia	335,360,382	1,916,508,908	1,581,148,526	0.8%
Israel	846,953,135	1,736,219,835	889,266,700	0.4%
Morocco	435,581,004	1,213,927,782	778,346,778	0.4%
Kuwait	337,126	595,869,707	595,532,581	0.3%
Syria	12,447,583	594,438,255	581,990,672	0.3%
Lebanon	22,634,885	520,080,279	497,445,394	0.3%
Libya	530	331,968,882	331,968,352	0.2%
Sudan	272,329	306,297,707	306,025,378	0.2%
Iraq	49,097	282,680,957	282,631,860	0.1%
Yemen	154,949	234,383,065	234,228,116	0.1%
Tunisia	145,922,539	333,025,094	187,102,555	0.1%
Jordan	67,931,283	247,926,877	179,995,594	0.1%
Oman	3,025,950	168,175,744	165,149,794	0.1%
Mali	654,139	88,656,662	88,002,523	0.0%
Qatar	51,456,621	124,182,853	72,726,232	0.0%
Somalia	23,368	14,773,514	14,750,146	0.0%
Mauritania	1,934,789	15,603,128	13,668,339	0.0%
Eritrea	130,781	9,188,916	9,058,135	0.0%
CAR	164,478	5,827,557	5,663,079	0.0%
South Sudan	3,548,229	7,748,423	4,200,194	0.0%
Chad	1,078	2,175,423	2,174,345	0.0%
Niger	156,921	1,203,587	1,046,666	0.0%
Western Sahara	15,223	198,196	182,973	0.0%
Bahrain	14,820,233	13,839,838	-980,395	0.0%

The fact that many MENA countries are important global fossil fuel producers and take part in various forms of institutionalized energy cooperation, such as the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) or the Gas Exporting Countries Forum (GECF), also shapes Russia's approach to economic cooperation with and in the region. Belonging to the same category of major global producers and exporters of fossil fuels, Russia is interested in managing global hydrocarbon markets and price stability in close cooperation with regional producers and in working together with other major producers to avoid market disruption.

Between 2021 and 2025, Türkiye became one of the most important target areas for the export of Russian energy commodities, especially after the outbreak of the full-scale war against Ukraine, which contributed to Russia's almost complete forced withdrawal from the important European energy market (Levi et al., 2026).

Some MENA countries are also important customers of the Russian military-industrial complex, with Algeria and Egypt playing a key part in this context (Wezeman et al., 2024). Iran, by contrast, was an important exporter of military hardware and technology to Russia, as demonstrated by the role Iranian Shahed drones and their Russia-produced copies have played in the ongoing war in Ukraine (for more on how the war in Ukraine has influenced relations between Russia and Iran, see Divsallar, 2024; Eslami, 2022).

Economic cooperation with MENA countries is important because, like in the case of Türkiye, it generates revenues that are important for state finances and help Russia continue its war of aggression against Ukraine. At the same time, the economic cooperation with the leading energy producers from the MENA region helps them coordinate their response to green energy transition that can threaten their position on the global market. This cooperation also helps Russia deal with some energy challenges caused by the imposition of various types of energy-related restrictive measures by the collective West.

Ukraine on the Russian map of strategic interests

Putin's policy toward Ukraine is driven by a combination of security concerns, imperial tradition, regime-survival logic, status ambitions, and ideological narratives. Ukraine seems to occupy a uniquely central position in Putin's worldview (Putin, 2021), and this may explain why he decided to escalate the conflict by launching a full-scale war in February 2022. One can understand the drivers of Russian policy towards Ukraine by examining what could be termed the Russian official narrative on Ukraine. This will be done by analysing two sets of documents. The first set are Russian documents on security available at the official website of the Russian Security Council prior to the outbreak of the full-scale war in 2022. The second set are recent statements on Ukraine made by President Putin and other political figures from his closest entourage in the period prior to and just after the outbreak of the war in February 2022.

Bearing in mind the domestic and international implications of the decision to launch a war against Ukraine in 2022, one might expect that what could be termed "the Ukrainian question" would be addressed in a comprehensive manner in Russian documents on national security. These provided – at least officially – the guidelines for Russian policymakers and are a formalised expression of their ideas on the international environment and challenges, risks, and threats that Russia must deal with.

However, a quick examination of the three doctrines dealing with security, broadly understood, that were published prior to the Russian invasion – the 2014 Military Doctrine (President of the Russian Federation, 2014b), the 2016 Foreign Policy Concept (President of the Russian Federation, 2016), and the National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation updated in 2021 (President of the Russian Federation, 2021) – reveals that the Ukrainian question was not present at all in these official statements. There are in fact only three direct references to Ukraine in these three doctrinal documents. The 2014 Military Doctrine does not mention Ukraine at all. The 2016 Foreign Policy Concept (President of the Russian Federation, 2016) mentions Ukraine twice, stating the following:

The Russian Federation is interested in developing political, economic, cultural and spiritual ties with Ukraine in all areas on the basis of mutual respect and a commitment to building partnership relations with due regard for Russia's national interests. Russia undertakes to make every effort to promote the political and diplomatic settlement of the internal conflict in Ukraine in cooperation with all the interested States and international agencies.

The third of these strategic documents – the 2021 version of the National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation (President of the Russian Federation, 2021) – contains only one mention of Ukraine and states that strengthening fraternal ties between the Russian, Belarusian, and Ukrainian peoples is one of the tasks that will facilitate the achievement of Russia's foreign policy – a statement that is difficult to comprehend bearing in mind the scope of the Russian aggression against its neighbour launched in 2022.

It might be expected that the issue of Ukraine as a country whose policy pushed Putin to launch a full-scale war was dealt with in the set of Presidential Addresses to the Federal Assembly (PAFA) that have been given over the past decades (a complete list of these documents is available at President of the Russian Federation, 2026). But here, again, little attention is paid to the Ukrainian question, apart from the 2014 address, in which Putin discussed the situation in Ukraine in more detail. This set of documents, covering the period from 2000 to 2021, contains a total of 26

references to Ukraine. In 2010, Dmitrii Medvedev mentioned Ukraine as a country offering, with other countries, “great potential for expanding the innovation aspect in [our] cooperation” (PAFA, 2010). In his address to the Parliamentary Assembly made in 2012, Putin himself mentioned Ukraine only once, when making a reference to the fact that, to the outside world, all people living in Russia, no matter their ethnic background, are perceived as Russians belonging to one nation (PAFA, 2012). In his 2013 address to the Federal Assembly (PAFA, 2013), Putin mentioned Ukraine four times in the context of the debate over its plans to join the Custom Union and the protests that this discussion triggered in Ukraine. However, he also expressed hope that these questions could be negotiated and settled by all political forces operating at that moment in the country.

The most detailed official presidential account on Ukraine can be found in Putin’s 2014 address (PAFA, 2014), in which Ukraine is mentioned 18 times. Here, he presented his view on the positive role Russia played in supporting Ukraine’s aspirations to sovereignty and underlined that Russia’s position on this question “remained unchanged” and that “Every nation has an inalienable sovereign right to determine its own development path, choose allies and political regimes, create an economy and ensure its security” – a principle that, in his own opinion, “Russia has always respected”. At the same time, however, he described the events in Kyiv as a coup and forceful takeover. He also repeated several times that Russia could not support what was happening in Ukraine. In the same speech, Putin presented the events in Ukraine as the result of a plot supported by the West and he accused the United States in particular of stirring the unrest and exerting a negative influence on Russia’s relations with its neighbours. Ukraine was already at that moment presented as a non-sovereign actor who had to follow orders coming from Washington or Brussels. In the same speech, Putin warned that Russia “will have to protect [its] legitimate interests unilaterally”.

Having paid attention to Ukraine in his 2014 speech, Putin did not mention the Ukrainian question again in his annual addresses until 2021. His address to the Federal Assembly from that year (PAFA, 2021) does not contain a detailed discussion on Ukraine and mentions it only twice. First, when referring to the fate of Ukrainian president Yanukovich, who was “removed from power via an armed coup”; and second, when he referred to Ukraine and “the coup in that country” and warned that Russia will defend its interests and will respond to any crossing of red lines in an “asymmetrical, swift and tough” manner – which Russia indeed decided to do only ten months after this speech.

When examining Russia’s relations with Ukraine, we need to examine other utterances on these questions made by the Russian president prior to the outbreak of hostilities. Both in his 2021 article (Putin, 2021) and even more so in his pre-war statements, the Russian president denied Ukraine the right to be treated as fully sovereign “normal” state. In his opinion, which was expressed during the 2008 Bucharest NATO summit, he said that Ukraine “was entirely created by Russia or, to be more precise, by Bolshevik, Communist Russia”. He also meant that Ukraine was “an inalienable part of our own history, culture and spiritual space” and that only due to Soviet policies – and nationalist sentiments that were manipulated by the political class – was the Ukrainian state and the Ukrainian nation able to emerge because of a right of secession granted unwisely, in his opinion, to all Soviet republics (President of Russia, 2022).

The decision to use military power to address a political issue has shaken the fundamentals of the existing European and transatlantic security architecture. There were various interpretations of what drove Russia to take this step. Mearsheimer’s (2014) text is maybe the most controversial example of a purely realist reading of Russia’s reasons to invade Ukraine. Hill and Stent (2022) presented, in turn, an interpretation rooted in what could be termed a partly constructivist reading of the impact that Putin’s worldviews had on his decision, in which the main idea was “Russia’s divine right to rule Ukraine, to wipe out the country’s national identity, and to integrate its people into a Greater Russia”. Gomza (2022), on the other hand, argued that to understand Putin’s motives it is important

to focus on the nature of Russia's aggressive personalist regime and its interest in unmaking democracy in Ukraine.

What objectives and interests has the Putin regime been pursuing in Ukraine and why was the decision made in 2022 to escalate the involvement? Here we will use the same framework as in our earlier assessments of the most important drivers of Russian policy.

Diplomatic and geopolitical interests

As in many other cases, Russia's pursuit of recognition as a great-power with an exclusive sphere-of-influence, including in Ukraine, lies at the core of Russian efforts. Russia has tried to achieve its objectives in Ukraine using diplomatic instruments since the collapse of the Soviet project, because control of Ukraine appears to be pivotal to Russia's claim to great-power status (Finkel, 2024; Gel'man, 2025; Homanyuk & Ashutosh, 2024; Michel, 2025). Having such control and influence over Ukraine signals Russia's ability to shape its regional environment, which is believed to be one of the most important attributes of great powers. By contrast, losing control over Ukraine would undermine Russia's position as an important pole in global politics that are perceived in multipolar terms. Russia's return as a great power recognized by other great powers – as a country that is able to defend its interests in what is defined by the country's ruling elite as the sphere of vital and exclusive interests – would also signal the end of the unipolar moment that many Russian decision-makers identified as the main strategic challenge facing Russia (Tyushka, 2022). Accepting Ukraine's turn to the West and the country's integration with Western institutions, especially with NATO, would demonstrate – at least from the Moscow's perspective – clear limits to Russian power.

This search for recognition of its great power status was also driven by its historical imperial experience (Beachain, 2025; Kasamara & Sorokina, 2012; Kolstø & Blakkisrud, 2016; Krickovic, 2014; Mankoff, 2022a). From this perspective, Ukraine had a special place in Russian historical and civilizational narratives, not least because Kyiv is viewed as the cradle of East Slavic statehood; Ukrainians and Russians are supposed to belong to one historical nation; and the experience of the Soviet-era integration and interdependence should therefore continue (Putin, 2021). From this post-imperial perspective, Ukrainian nationhood and statehood are treated as something artificial and incomplete, and Ukraine as an actor is deprived of any agency (Brudny & Finkel, 2011; Finkel, 2024).

This may explain why, instead of following the strategy of using instruments from the political warfare arsenal that Russia embarked on after 2014, the Kremlin decided to launch a full-scale kinetic operation against the country in February 2022, expecting a quick victory. It could seem that Russia was willing to tolerate Ukraine's limited sovereignty only in a situation when this did not contradict Russian interests, as defined by the current regime. However, once the regime decided that Ukraine had crossed what it saw as a "strategic red line", the decision was made to launch what was initially defined as a special military operation, which was to result in the complete direct or indirect subjugation of the country (Finkel, 2024; Hunter, 2022).

Other geopolitical interests that Russia has been pursuing in Ukraine were questions related to the Russian regime's stability and security and what could be referred to as a fear of political contagion (Casier, 2024; Driedger, 2023; Snetkov et al., 2015). This is often described in Russian parlance as "colour revolutions", instigated by the West in areas where Russia has strategic interests that could be undermined by malign Western actions. Ukraine's successful democratic transition could, in other words, pose a challenge the legitimacy of Putin's regime (Ambrosio, 2007; Gel'man, 2025).

Information and ideological interests

There were several information- and ideology-related interests and objectives that Russia sought to achieve in its relations with Ukraine. First and foremost, it was about ideologically driven opposition to what, in the Kremlin's parlance, was referred to as Western liberal expansion (Boyle, 2016; Loftus & Kanet, 2019; Tyushka, 2022). In this normative confrontation with the West, in which Ukraine became one of the main battlefields, Russia was interested in preventing the expansion of liberal-democratic norms that could result in the de-legitimization of Russia's authoritarian model. In this battle for hearts and minds in Ukraine, Russia pursued several information-related interests.

The first was the question of limiting Western hegemony in the information space and the negative impact that the collective West's promotion of various universal liberal values and norms could have on the current Russian regime's ability to pursue its objectives in Ukraine and in other parts of the post-Soviet space. The second was the promotion of a certain ideological vision of the global order, in which Russia occupies a privileged position as a great power that other great powers must reckon with, while Ukraine belongs to another category of states that must accept the logic of great power dominance (Bolt et al., 2023; Darczewska, 2014; Giles, 2015; Miskimmon & O'Loughlin, 2017; Pynnöniemi & Kari, 2016; Pynnöniemi & Rácz, 2016; Rogov, 2016).

Russia also promoted the idea that Ukraine belonged to a distinct and exceptional civilization, with Russia being its centrepiece as a specific Eurasian bridge between Europe and Asia (Putin, 2021). Furthermore, questions related to the religious dimension of the relationship between Ukraine and Russia were viewed as important from the Kremlin's point of view. The main objectives to be achieved in this context were preventing Ukraine from joining the normative West (Gomza, 2022) and undermining the appeal of Western integration by promoting an alternative civilizational solution based on the idea of the common civilizational past (Putin, 2021) and future. This was to appeal to Ukrainians who, in Russian propaganda, were presented as Russia's "prodigal sons and daughters", misguided and cheated by the liberal West.

Military and security interests

Among the various security-related and military interests that Russia has been pursuing in Ukraine, the issue of Ukraine forming part of the strategic buffer zone separating Russia from the unfriendly West is probably top of the agenda. This question is viewed by the Kremlin as a core security interest because it secures what Russia deems to be the best protective measure, namely strategic depth in a possible confrontation with the collective West. This was at least one of the main reasons why Russia decided to escalate the conflict in 2022. Putin, in his pre-war speech on 21 February 2022 (President of Russia, 2022), warned that,

If deployed in Ukraine, such systems [land-based attack weapons] will be able to hit targets in Russia's entire European part. The flying time of Tomahawk cruise missiles to Moscow will be less than 35 minutes; ballistic missiles from Kharkov will take seven to eight minutes; and hypersonic assault weapons, four to five minutes.

From Moscow's perspective, the short early-warning time described above was only one security-related concern. Others included the exposure of southern and western Russian regions and possible Ukrainian NATO membership that, in the opinion of the Kremlin, posed a direct military threat (Cross, 2015; Deni & Nielsen, 2024; Lieven, 1997; Smirnov, 2014; Wolff, 2015).

Another less central security-related concern was that Ukraine had long-standing military and industrial significance for Russia, as the countries shared defence-industrial chains and Ukraine was at the same time important for Russia's ability to project power to the region (see, for example, the question of naval bases on the Crimea peninsula). In the opinion of the key Russian policymakers, loss of access to Crimea would reinforce the perception of vulnerability, because control over territory was important for securing military-industrial autonomy and freedom of manoeuvre in the Black Sea region, which Russian decision-makers defined as strategically important.

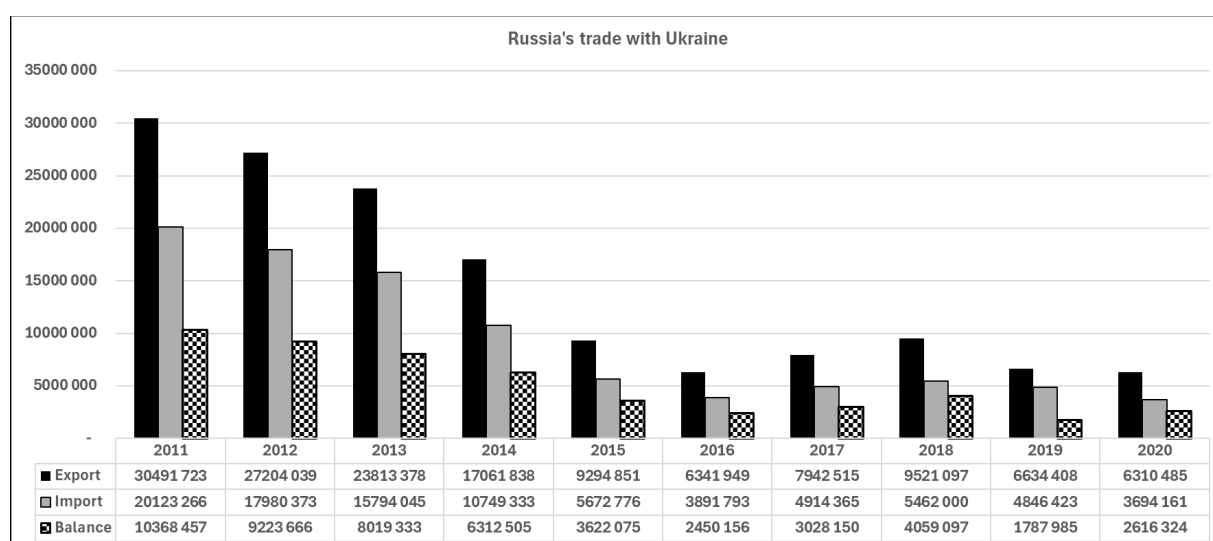
Another security-related concern was the fear that loss of control over what the regime saw as its sphere of influence could trigger a centrifugal dynamic, like the one that led to the collapse of the Soviet Union. Intervention in Ukraine could also be viewed as a sort of punishment for the country that had played a key role in the collapse of the Soviet project – and was thus framed as an adequate historical correction.

Economic interests

Until 2014, Ukraine played a relatively important role as Russia's main trading partner in the post-Soviet space, and as an important transit area for Russian energy exports to Europe that generated huge revenues for Russian energy companies and the Russian state (Balmaceda, 1998, 2013; D'Anieri, 1999; Dragneva & Wolczuk, 2016).

In 2013, the last year before Russia's direct military intervention in Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea, Russian exports to Ukraine represented slightly more than 5% of the total value of export (USD 25.6 billion), placing Ukraine 4th on the list of most important export destinations after China, Germany, and Italy. The list of commodities exported from Russia to Ukraine in 2013 included mineral fuels (64%), machinery (4.91%), iron and steel (3.05%), and electrical machinery and electronics (3.03%). The same year, Russia imported goods from Ukraine worth USD 15.2 billion, which made Ukraine the 4th most important supplier of goods to Russia with a 4.6% share, after China (16.4%), Germany (12.7%), and Belarus (4.9%). The main Russian imports from Ukraine included machinery (14.7%), iron and steel (14.2%), and railway and trams (11.5%).

Figure 2. Russia-Ukraine trade 2011–2020 in \$ million (Source: Russian Custom Service Data)



However, after the events of 2014, when Russia accused the organizers of the Revolution of Dignity of organizing a coup against its most important political asset, Viktor Yanukovich, the volume of trade between Ukraine and Russia was strongly reduced – as demonstrated in Figure 2. According to the OEC (2026), in 2021 Ukraine was “demoted” to 17th position on the list of countries to which Russia exported its goods, representing 1.5% of the value of exports (USD 7.6 billion). In subsequent years, Ukraine fell even further down the list of Russian trade partners.

After building the Nord Stream 1 gas pipeline, which became fully operational in 2011, Ukraine lost much of its importance as a gas transit area, and the planned opening of the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline in 2022 was intended to make Ukraine almost completely redundant in this context. This may explain why Ukrainians were implicated in sabotaging these two pipelines in September 2022 (Pancevski, 2026).

Comparing Russia's interests in Ukraine and the MENA region

In this section, we present a comparative examination of which strategic objectives Russia has pursued when implementing its policies in Ukraine and the MENA region. This analysis is based on an examination of several historical studies on the persistent factors shaping Russian foreign and security policy as well as the set of recent Russian official statements on these questions. The texts used in this comparative examination include Black (1962), Light (2015), Radin and Reach (2017), Stent (2018), President of the Russian Federation (2021) for the National Security Strategy 2021, and President of the Russian Federation (2022) for Putin's speech justifying the invasion.

A quick examination of these sources reveals several categories of issues with which Russia needs to deal with when shaping its relations with the MENA region and Ukraine. Ukraine and MENA play very clearly different roles in these contexts. The categories include questions related to:

- **Territorial control and spheres of influence**, and include issues such as stabilization of frontiers, unification of Russian territories, influence in the near abroad, priority for CIS as buffer zone, issues related to Russia's sphere of privileged interests in the post-Soviet space, questions related to defence of sovereignty and territorial integrity, demilitarization and denazification of Ukraine, as well as protection of Russian people. These priorities reflect Russia's goal of consolidating territorial control and reasserting dominance in its perceived geopolitical space. Control of Ukraine is clearly viewed from the Russian perspective as a core strategic interest in this context, while MENA region is of secondary importance.
- **Security and military** issues are the second important set of questions to be dealt with. Here we see questions related to national defence, defence of the country and regime, state and public security, opposition to NATO expansion and to ballistic missile defence deployment, questions related to strategic stability and terrorism. Because the focus is on eliminating external threats and maintaining a defensible strategic perimeter, Ukraine plays here a key role, while MENA region is important mostly in the context of the fight against terrorism.
- **Status of Russia as a great power** and its role in the emerging global order is the third group of issues that Russian policymakers must deal with. These questions include the issue of the recognition and vision of Russia as a great power, with access to important decision-making tables, operating in an emerging multipolar international system, working through various alliances and institutions, cooperating with other great powers as an equal partner and trying to undermine Western unity and cohesions. Ukraine is very important in this context because Russia's inability to achieve its original objective of subjugating Ukraine has undermined perception of Russia as a powerful great power. MENA countries also have a substantial role to play in this context because they represent the global south and are a part of world majority with which Russia seeks closer cooperation to avoid strategic isolation.
- **Economic questions** seem to be downgraded on the Russian strategic agenda but still play an important role. Russia is interested in assuring favourable economic conditions for its development, improving its own economic security and in entering into various forms of energy cooperation and partnerships, which are crucial for Russia's ability to pursue its international objectives and secure stability of the regime. Ukraine has over the past decade reduced its economic dependence on Russia. MENA countries, many of which are important

global producers and exporters of fossil fuels have strengthened their economic cooperation with Russia and have helped Russia with some economic challenges caused by the imposition of various Western sanctions.

- **Official ideology, regime legitimacy and information control** are other issues high on the agenda as they help Russia secure internal cohesion, control of narratives, and regime legitimacy. The topics include question of protection of traditional values, culture, historical memory, information security, non-interference in domestic affairs and rally-around-the-flag effects. The key issues here are providing justification of actions domestically and ideologically, reinforcing regime legitimacy and control of promotion of specific narratives. In this context Ukraine plays a major role, but some of these objectives are also central in Russia's relations with the MENA region, but to a much lesser degree.

This examination explains why the Russian engagement in Ukraine, including military intervention, was much more crucial from the perspective of the Russian regime than its engagement in the MENA region. This was also confirmed by Western observers. In his examination of the Russian intervention in Syria, Parker (2017) concluded, for instance, that Putin did not pursue a long-term strategy beginning in 2011–2012, but rather took one tactical step after another, which together eventually led Russia to its current position in the Middle East.

However, there have been what could be termed some clear “strategic overlaps” between Ukraine and the MENA region. The most important strategic goal Russia has sought in both cases was the question of the recognition of the country as a great power with both local and global interests. Russian intervention in Syria in 2015 was meant to divert attention from the Russian intervention in Ukraine and give Russia a stronger strategic footprint in a strategically important region in which the USSR played an active role and Russia had to abandon due to the lack of resources in the turbulent 1990s.

There have also been some “strategic paradoxes” that Russia had to cope with. For instance, Russian intervention in Syria was officially justified by Russia adhering to the internationally recognized principle of sovereignty and territorial integrity of actors operating on the international stage, but at the same time Russia's aggression against Ukraine took place in a clear violation of these important principles.

Table 3 presents what could be termed **a matrix of the relative importance of MENA countries and Ukraine** on the Russian map of strategic interests. The categories according to which these countries are ranked include:

- **KremlinRef:** The number of references to each of the countries on the website of the Russian president, which represents the geographical scope of the president's interest in each of the countries (President of Russia, 2026). This indicator is important because it demonstrates the level of engagement in relations with those countries of the most important Russian policymaker, the country's president. The range here is from 330 for Türkiye and 1 for Mauritania and Djibouti.
- **MID Ref:** The number of documents describing Russia's relations with each of the countries on the website of the Russian MID (2026). This indicator can be used to map the interest in each of the countries in question demonstrated by the most important institution dealing with Russia's relations with the outside world. The range here is from 2865 for Ukraine to 51 for Niger.
- **Population:** Countries are ranked according to the size of their population. This numerical indicator is used to map countries demographic weight, which is important bearing in mind

the interest demonstrated by the regime in having good relations with the so-called world majority. The range here is from 107.2 million for Egypt to 1 million for Djibouti.

- **DefBudg:** Countries are ranked according to the size of their defence budget. Arms trade is one of the ways of building Russia's relations with countries that are interested in acquiring Russian weapons, which gives Russia a special leverage in relations with them. However, their "defence purchasing power" depends on the size of their defence budget. The range here is from USD 69.1 billion for Saudi Arabia to 0 for several MENA countries.
- **ArmedForces:** Countries are ranked according to the size of their armed forces, based on data from the 2024 issue of IISS Military Balance. Military power is one of the key Russian instruments of power, hence the obvious interest in the military power of other actors. The range here is from ca 800 000 for Ukraine to 0 for several MENA countries.
- **ArmsTrade:** Countries are ranked according to the scope of the arms trade with Russia, based on data from the SIPRI database covering period between 2014 and 2024. This indicator is used to map the scope of the arms trade between Russia and the countries in question, because countries procuring Russian weapons are considered closer partners than ones that do not engage in arms trade with Russia. The range here is from 10% for Algeria to slightly more than 0.0% for Saudi Arabia and CAR.
- **GDP:** Countries are ranked according to the 2024 IMF ranking of GDP, measured through the use of the Purchasing Power Parity indicator. This indicator is used to map the economic power of each country. The range here is from USD 3651 million for Türkiye to 6 for Eritrea.
- **2020 Tr-Surplus:** Countries are ranked in descending order according to the value of Russia's surplus in trade with each of them in 2020. This indicator is used to map the economic attractiveness to Russia of the countries in question – we assume that the higher Russian trade surplus is, the more attractive the country is in economic terms as a source of surplus. The range here is from almost USD 11 billion in the case of Türkiye to minus USD 2.8 million in the case of Bahrain.
- **2020 Tr-vol:** Countries are ranked in descending order according to the value of trade (import+export) with Russia in 2020. This indicator is used to map the volume of the trade between Russia and the countries in question. We assume that the higher volume of trade makes countries more important in strategic terms. The range here is from more than USD 21 billion in the case of Türkiye to slightly more than USD 400 thousand in the case of Eritrea.
- **Oil:** Countries are ranked in descending order based on their production of oil in December 2024. This indicator is used to map which countries could be viewed as Russia's competitors on the global energy markets which are strategically important from the point of view of the regime that is primarily "funded" by the sales of its energy resources, first and foremost crude oil. The range here is from more than 10 million barrels of oil per day in the case of Saudi Arabia to 0 in the case of many MENA countries.
- **Gas:** Countries are ranked in descending order based on their production of gas in 2024. This indicator is used to map which countries could be perceived as Russia's competitors on the global energy markets and which could be interested in purchasing Russian gas, which would make them attractive as strategic partners. The range here is from 237.6 bcm in the case of Iran to = in the case of several MENA countries.

The categories by which the strategic importance of the countries in question for Russia is measured are chosen taking into consideration the nature of the Russian regime in which the president is responsible for the most important decisions and implementation of these decisions on the international stage is formally delegated to the Russian MID. This explains why we decided to focus on how relations with the respective states are presented in the official Russian

information channels. In addition, we also considered the set of interests Russia has been pursuing in relations with these countries, where geopolitical, power-related and economic interests were the most important ones. This explains why we decided to map how important these countries have been from the geopolitical, demographic, economic, military and energy perspectives. For the purpose of clarity we only present how they relate to each other within each of the categories.

Table 3. Relative strategic importance of MENA countries and Ukraine on the map of Russian strategic interests

KremlinRef	MID Ref	Population	DefBudg	ArmedForces	ArmsTrade	GDP	2020 Tr-Surplus	2020 Tr-vol	Oil	Gas
Türkiye	Ukraine	Egypt	S Arabia	Ukraine	Algeria	Türkiye	Türkiye	Türkiye	S Arabia	Iran
Ukraine	Syria	Iran	Ukraine	Iran	Egypt	Egypt	Egypt	Ukraine	Iraq	Qatar
Israel	Israel	Türkiye	UAE	Egypt	Iraq	S Arabia	Algeria	Egypt	Iran	S Arabia
Iran	Türkiye	Sudan	Israel	Türkiye	Iran	Iran	Ukraine	UAE	UAE	Algeria
Egypt	Iran	Algeria	Algeria	Eritrea	Syria	UAE	UAE	Algeria	Kuwait	Egypt
Syria	Palestine	Iraq	Iraq	S Arabia	Türkiye	Algeria	S Arabia	Iran	Qatar	UAE
S Arabia	Egypt	Morocco	Türkiye	Morocco	UAE	Ukraine	Kuwait	Israel	Algeria	Oman
Palestine	Iraq	S Arabia	Qatar	Iraq	Mali	Iraq	Iran	S Arabia	Libya	Kuwait
UAE	Libya	Yemen	Kuwait	Israel	Sudan	Israel	Israel	Morocco	Oman	Bahrain
Jordan	Lebanon	Ukraine	Iran	Syria	Kuwait	Morocco	Sudan	Kuwait	Yemen	Ukraine
Qatar	Algeria	Niger	Oman	Algeria	Qatar	Qatar	Morocco	Tunisia	Egypt	Libya
Iraq	S Arabia	Syria	Morocco	Sudan	Bahrain	Kuwait	Lebanon	Sudan	Sudan	Iraq
Algeria	Yemen	Mali	Egypt	Jordan	S Sudan	Oman	Tunisia	Lebanon	Bahrain	Israel
Libya	Sudan	Somalia	Jordan	S Sudan	Niger	Tunisia	Yemen	Jordan	S Sudan	Syria
Bahrain	UAE	Chad	Bahrain	UAE	CAR	Syria	Oman	Yemen	Chad	Tunisia
Lebanon	Jordan	S Sudan	Tunisia	Lebanon	S Arabia	Jordan	Syria	Oman	Syria	Türkiye
Kuwait	Eritrea	Tunisia	Mali	Oman		Libya	Jordan	Syria	Türkiye	Jordan
Sudan	Tunisia	Jordan	Chad	Yemen		Sudan	Iraq	Iraq	Tunisia	Yemen
Mali	Qatar	UAE	Niger	Niger		Bahrain	Libya	Libya	Israel	Morocco
Morocco	Morocco	Israel	Lebanon	Tunisia		Mali	Mali	Qatar	Ukraine	Niger
CAR	Kuwait	Libya	Mauritania	Chad		Yemen	Niger	Mali	Niger	CAR
Oman	Bahrain	CAR	CAR	Mali		Lebanon	Mauritania	Niger	Jordan	Chad
Chad	Mali	Lebanon	S Sudan	Kuwait		Niger	Qatar	Mauritania	CAR	Djibouti
Yemen	Oman	Oman	Eritrea	Qatar		Chad	Djibouti	Bahrain	Djibouti	Eritrea
S Sudan	CAR	Kuwait	Syria	Mauritania		Mauritania	Somalia	Djibouti	Eritrea	Lebanon

Eritrea	Somalia	Mauritania	Sudan	Somalia		Somalia	S Sudan	Somalia	Lebanon	Mali
Niger	Chad	Eritrea	Yemen	CAR		S Sudan	CAR	S Sudan	Mali	Mauritania
Somalia	S Sudan	Qatar	Somalia	Djibouti		Djibouti	Chad	CAR	Mauritania	Somalia
Tunisia	Mauritania	Bahrain	Djibouti	Bahrain		CAR	Eritrea	Chad	Morocco	S Sudan
Djibouti	Djibouti	Djibouti	Libya	Libya		Eritrea	Bahrain	Eritrea	Somalia	Sudan
Mauritania	Niger									

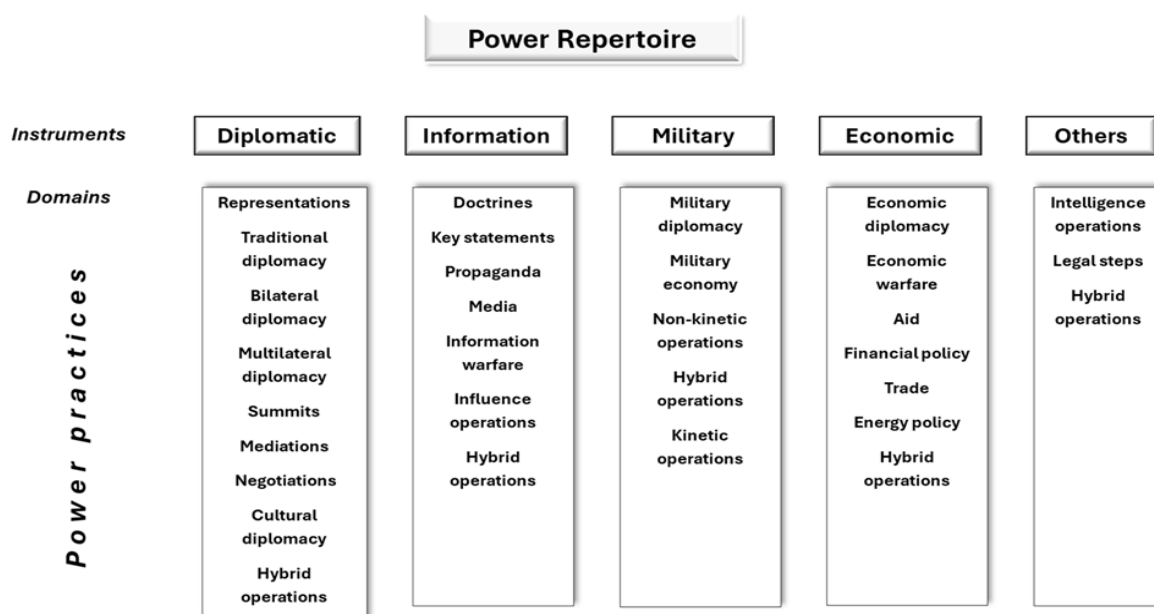
Mapping Russian power practices in the MENA region and Ukraine

Which power practices are employed in the pursuit of strategic interests depends on which power instruments an actor has at his disposal and what he learnt – or did not learn – about how to use them. In this examination of Russian power practices, we therefore adopt an approach based on our understanding of which power instruments Russia has at its disposal, how they are employed in various domains, and finally which concrete power practices could be observed in both regions. This examination of Russian actual power practices focuses therefore on what Russia has been doing to achieve its objectives. This examination will be also used to measure Russian strategic performance in the two regions by comparing what Russia has sought to achieve and the extent to which the power practices brought the desired results.

In the strategic realist context – and the realist approach, which treats international relations as a zero-sum game and security as the most important issue, is the dominant paradigm in Russia (Auer, 2015; Becker et al., 2016; Lebedeva, 2004) – power should be understood as a means/resource that makes it possible to achieve desired political objectives/ends using various available instruments of power. The aim is to influence choices made by other actors and to force them to do what they otherwise would not be willing to do. In general realist terms, power should be therefore understood as “the ability to influence or change the behaviour of others in a desired direction, or alternatively the ability to resist such influences on one’s own behaviour” (Evans & Newnham, 1998, p. 465).

When examining Russian power practices, we assume that when decisions are made in the Kremlin on how to act to achieve objectives, they probably consider what ends they want to achieve, what resources they have at their disposal, and what methods and courses of actions must be adopted to achieve the given objectives. Power practices in this context should be understood as the ways strategic objectives are pursued using various available means/resources/instruments from the available power repertoire (For more on the basics of strategic thinking see Schnaubelt, 2024).

Like many other actors, Russia has various instruments of power in its power repertoire that can be used individually or bundled together to pursue various types of objectives, as defined by its policymaking community – including diplomatic, informational, military, and economic ones.

Figure 3. Russian power repertoire: instruments, domains, and practices

Diplomatic power practices in MENA and Ukraine

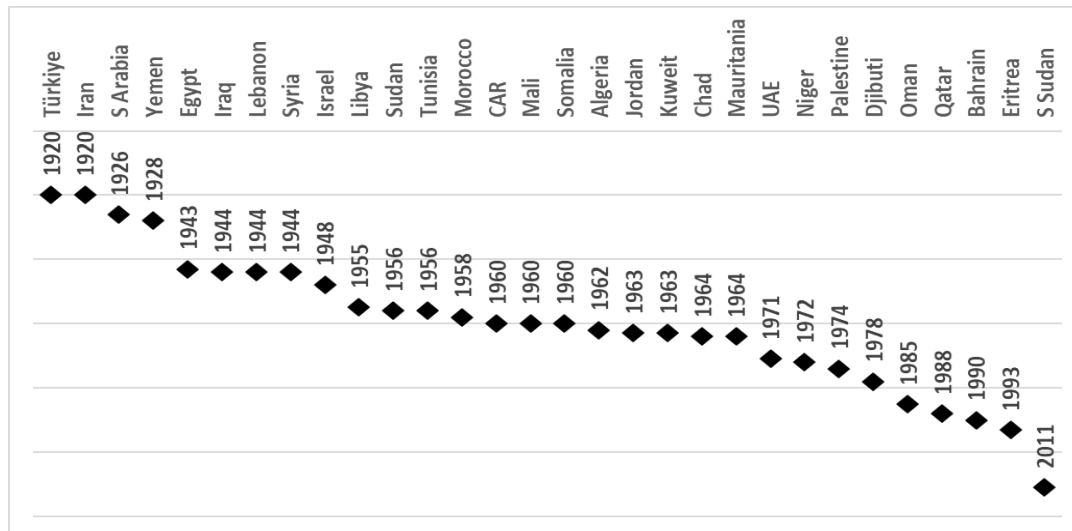
Diplomatic instruments are crucial for building alliances, resolving conflicts, and promoting various types of cooperation. Negotiations, dialogue, and communication between states are among the most important diplomatic practices from the power repertoire and a key role in this context is played by the country's diplomatic corps and bureaucracy, as well as the political leadership that formulates objectives to be achieved using diplomatic instruments.

Mutual recognition and the establishment of diplomatic relations is the most important diplomatic practice from the diplomatic repertoire. In the case of MENA countries, this process was influenced by global trends, because many of these countries were colonized and recognition of them and the establishment of diplomatic relations could take place only after they became independent. This process is illustrated in Figure 4. However, it is important to mention that this process of recognition and building diplomatic relations was interrupted in the case of two MENA countries: Israel was recognized as a state and diplomatic relations were established first in 1948, but diplomatic relations were interrupted in 1967 and only fully reestablished in 1991; diplomatic relations were established with Saudi Arabia in 1926, interrupted in 1938, and then restored in 1990. Türkiye is another interesting case, because diplomatic relations between the Russian and Ottoman empires were formally established in 1497 with the arrival of the Russian ambassador to Istanbul, but were reconfirmed in 1920 when both empires perished after the First World War.

When it comes to Ukraine, Russia recognized Ukraine as an independent state on 1 December 1991, immediately after the overwhelmingly supported Ukrainian referendum on independence. The two countries established formal diplomatic relations on 14 February 1992, and Ukraine's independence and territorial integrity were reconfirmed in several treaties signed by Ukraine and Russia – the most important of these being Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation, and Partnership signed in May 1997.

Ukraine received also security guaranties in the Budapest Memorandum signed in 1994, when Ukraine decided to give up its nuclear weapons.

Figure 4. Diplomatic relations between Russia and MENA countries – timeline



Appointing top diplomats is another important power practice, as these diplomats are supposed to play an important role in shaping relations between the two countries.

In the case of the MENA region, Russia decided to deploy a group of experienced diplomats to promote Russian interests in this region. Between 1991 and the outbreak of the war in Ukraine in 2022, Russia was represented in the region by 141 exclusively male ambassadors, who were on average 55 years old when they assumed their posts and stayed at their posts for around 1,500 days on average. Three of them – Sergey Kirpichenko, Vladimir Titorenko, and Aleksandr Shein represented Russia in four MENA countries each, and six of them – Boris Bolotin, Sergey Kuznetsov, Ilya Morgunov, Pyotr Stegnyy, Vladimir Chamov, and Valeriy Shuvayev – represented Russia in three MENA countries. There were also 30 ambassadors who have been posted in this period to two MENA countries. Between 2014 and 2024, Russia had three ambassadors in Damascus – Azamat Kulmukhametov (b.1953) (2011–2014), Aleksandr Kinshchak (b.1962) (2014–2018), and Aleksandr Yefimov (b.1958) (2018–date). All of them had previously served as deputy director of the Department of the Middle East and North Africa in the Russian MID, and Kinshchak has served as the head of this department since returning from Syria in 2018.

There were four heads of the Russian diplomatic mission in Ukraine appointed in the period in question: former Russian minister of health Mikhail Zurabov (b. 1953) (2009–2016), Sergey Toropov (b.1973) (2016), Aleksandr Lukashik (b.1959) (2016–2022), and Vladimir Zheglov (b.1969-d.2023) (2022).

However, it seems that, due to rising tensions in the bilateral relations between Russia and Ukraine caused by Russia's decisions to annex Crimea and provide support to a pro-Russian mutiny in the Donbas, Russian diplomats played only a limited role in shaping relations between the two countries. Instead, the most important decisions were taken by the Russian political leadership (Gaaze, 2014, 2025).

Top level contacts have also played an important part in Russia's pursuit of its objectives. In the case of the MENA region, Russian leaders have met MENA leaders on various occasions. An overview of top-level meetings between Russian presidents and political leaders of MENA countries, based on the data provided on the official website of the Russian president, is presented in Table 4 below.

Table 4. Top level contacts involving President V. Putin and MENA and Ukraine leaders 2014-2024 (Data from President of Russia, 2026)

	Putin's meetings 2014-2024	Putin's phone calls 2014-2024
Türkiye	50	122
Iran	39	42
Israel	18	66
Egypt	13	26
Palestine	12	10
Saudi Arabia	11	38
Syria	11	14
UAE	11	12
Qatar	8	13
Jordan	8	8
Iraq	6	6
Lebanon	5	0
Ukraine	3	32
Bahrain	3	6
Central African Republic	3	3
Sudan	3	1
Algeria	2	3
Eritrea	2	0
Mali	1	7
Libya	1	1
Morocco	1	1
Oman	1	1
Chad	1	0
Kuwait	1	0
Mauritania	1	0
South Sudan	1	0
Niger	0	1
Djibouti	0	0
Somalia	0	0
Tunisia	0	0
Yemen	0	0

When it comes to direct meetings between Russian and Ukrainian state leaders, activity in the same period was very limited. According to the same source, Putin met Ukraine's presidents only 3 times, each time within the so-called multilateral Normandy format involving German and French state leaders. Meetings with Petro Poroshenko took place on 2 October 2015 in Paris and on 20 October

2016 in Berlin, both in the Normandy format. The only meeting with Volodymyr Zelensky took place in Paris on 9 December 2019, also in the Normandy format in Paris, followed by a face-to-face meeting between the two. In the same period, Putin met officially five times with Viktor Medvedchuk, who was believed to be his first choice to lead Ukraine had Zelensky been forcibly removed – which was most probably one of the tactical, operational, and strategic objectives to be achieved in the wake of the poorly planned and executed February 2022 invasion.

In addition, there were 25 phone conversations with Poroshenko and seven with Zelensky. Fifteen of the phone conversations with Poroshenko were organized within the Normandy (Nor) format, while ten were direct and without participation of Ukraine's Western allies (dir). The seven phone conversations with Zelensky took place on 11 July 2019, 7 August 2019, 7 September 2019, 25 November 2019, 31 December 2019, 14 February 2020, and 26 July 2020.

Mediations and negotiations are other power practices from the diplomatic repertoire that have played a part in the Russian pursuit of interests in both Ukraine and the MENA region. In the case of Ukraine, the most important mediations and negotiations that Russia was involved in were the so-called Minsk Agreements 1 and 2 (Åtland, 2020; Boulègue, 2018).

On 17 December 2021, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs published two ultimatum-like documents. The aim was to make the West sign legally binding agreements that were to provide Russia with the highest level of security. However, the content of these documents and the way they were presented were found unacceptable by the West.

Several rounds of negotiations between Russia, the United States, and NATO in the ensuing weeks did not bring the results that Russia desired. Russia continued its military build-up in the region. These diplomatic negotiations aimed at addressing what in the Russian parlance was often referred to as the root causes of the Ukrainian crisis (Freedman & Williams, 2023; Pifer, 2021).

Other examples of the use of diplomatic power practices as a way of an unsuccessful dealing with this conflict include several rounds of unsuccessful negotiations on a ceasefire that were initiated after Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022, in Belarus and in Türkiye (Charap & Radchenko, 2024); the resumption of talks on the end of hostilities in 2025; and finally bilateral talks between the Russian and US presidents that took place first in June 2021 (Biden and Putin) and August 2025 (Trump and Putin).

In the case of Russian policy towards the MENA region, including Syria, power practices from traditional bilateral and multilateral diplomacy have also played a part. Many MENA leaders paid official visits to Russia, and many MENA countries have received official visits from Russia. Russia's diplomatic contacts with MENA countries also occurred at regional events addressing key regional issues and shaping regional cooperation.

The most important diplomatic effort to address the situation in Syria was the so-called Astana Process. It was driven by Russia, Türkiye, and Iran, who acted as guarantor powers, and is often seen as an alternative or complementary approach to the Geneva peace process (Cengiz, 2020). However, the end of Bashar al-Assad's rule in December 2024 has most probably put an end to efforts that even before had faced a lot of problems (Mohamad, 2023) – although there are signs that this format still can be useful in the post-Assad context (Roubanis, 2025).

One of diplomatic power practices employed by Russia, both in the Ukraine conflict and in Russia's policy towards the MENA region, is **the use of its UNSC permanent seat** to block any actions that could damage Russia's strategic interests (Security Council Report, 2024). According to available data, over the past years the USSR/Russia has cast a total of 120 vetoes, or close to half of all vetoes in the UN Security Council.

In the case of Ukraine, Russia uses its permanent seat on the UNSC to shield itself diplomatically, block international accountability, and shape global narratives around its war in Ukraine. In March 2014, Russia vetoed a resolution on the illegality of the referendum in Crimea; in February 2022, Russia vetoed a resolution demanding an immediate cessation of hostilities and withdrawal of troops from Ukraine, despite support from 11 of the 15 Council members; and, in September 2022, it voted against a resolution condemning Russian-organized referendums in four Ukrainian regions that were to be incorporated in Russia (Security Council Report, 2022). This veto power effectively paralyzed the UNSC from taking binding actions against Russia and undermined the UN's ability to uphold its own charter. Russia also uses its Permanent Seat in the UNSC to spread its strategic narratives, for instance by claiming that Ukraine was committing genocide against Russian speakers and that the 2022 invasion was in fact a self-defensive measure allowed by the UN Charter (Security Council Report, 2026b).

However, Russia's strong institutional position as a permanent member of the UNSC did not prevent Russia's MENA partners from voting against Russia after the escalation of the conflict in Ukraine in 2022. Table 5 sums up MENA countries' attitudes towards Russia by presenting how they voted in the UN General Assembly (UNGA) on questions related to Russia's war in Ukraine (Security Council Report, 2026b – see under heading Selected General Assembly Documents). In addition, we also added their participation or non-participation in the peace talks organized in Switzerland in June 2024 as a factor revealing their position on the war. This list can be used to map who could be treated as Russia's most and least loyal MENA partners on the international stage. Syria, Eritrea, Mali, CAR, Iran, Algeria and Sudan turned out to be the most Russia-friendly in this context, while the rest were much more sceptical towards Russia, with Türkiye, Qatar, Libya and Israel at the bottom of the list.

We decided to quantify these attitudes, as viewed from the Kremlin's perspective, in the following manner: countries that voted in the UNGA on questions related to war in Ukraine with Russia and against these UN resolutions receive +1 point. Those that abstained receive 0 points. Those voting in favour of resolutions criticizing Russia's actions get -1 point. Those absent (Abs in the table) are not given any points. When it comes to participation in the peace talks in Switzerland, we use the following approach: Those who decided to not come to Switzerland receive 1 point; those who sent a lower rank official (minister or envoy) receive -0.5 point; and those represented by the head of state receive -1 point.

Russia uses its veto power also to protect allied regimes and block Western-led initiatives that threaten its strategic partners. In the case of Syria, Russia has repeatedly vetoed UNSC resolutions aimed at sanctioning or investigating the Assad regime. Since 2011, Russia has cast 14 vetoes when voting on questions related to Syria (Security Council Report, 2024). In addition, Russia uses its permanent seat in the UNSC to challenge Western narratives, especially regarding interventions in Libya and Iraq, portraying itself as a stabilizing force and a critic of the policy of regime change.

Table 5. Attitudes of MENA countries towards Russian war in Ukraine (Voting in UN General Assembly and participation in peace talks in Switzerland, June 2024).

MENA Country	02.03.2022	24.03.2022	07.04.2022	12.10.2022	14.11.2022	23.02.2023	Peace talks 2024	Country totals
Syria	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	7
Eritrea	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	6
Mali	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	4
CAR	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	3
Iran	0	0	1	Abs	1	0	1	3
Algeria	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	2
Sudan	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Morocco	Abs	Abs	Abs	-1	Abs	-1	1	-1
South Sudan	0	-1	0	0	0	-1	1	-1
Lebanon	-1	-1	Abs	-1	0	Abs	1	-2
Djibouti	-1	-1	Abs	Abs	-1	-1	1	-3
Egypt	-1	-1	0	-1	0	-1	1	-3
Mauritania	-1	-1	Abs	-1	0	-1	1	-3
Oman	-1	-1	0	-1	0	-1	1	-3
Tunisia	-1	-1	0	-1	0	-1	1	-3
Yemen	-1	-1	0	-1	0	-1	1	-3
Iraq	0	-1	0	-1	0	-1	-0,5	-3,5
Kuwait	-1	-1	0	-1	-1	-1	1	-4
Niger	-1	-1	0	-1	-1	-1	1	-4
Bahrain	-1	-1	0	-1	0	-1	-0,5	-4,5
Jordan	-1	-1	0	-1	0	-1	-0,5	-4,5
Saudi Arabia	-1	-1	0	-1	0	-1	-0,5	-4,5
UAE	-1	-1	0	-1	0	-1	-0,5	-4,5
Chad	-1	-1	-1	-1	-1	-1	1	-5
Somalia	-1	Abs	Abs	-1	-1	-1	-1	-5
Israel	-1	-1	-1	-1	0	-1	-0,5	-5,5
Libya	-1	-1	-1	-1	0	-1	-1	-6
Qatar	-1	-1	0	-1	-1	-1	-1	-6
Türkiye	-1	-1	-1	-1	-1	-1	-0,5	-6,5
MENA Totals	-17	-18	2	-19	-2	-18	12,5	

Institutionalization of cooperation is another example of a diplomatic power practice employed in Russia's relations with the MENA region and in the case of Ukraine. Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, there have been several institutional frameworks shaping relations between Russia and Ukraine. The Commonwealth of Independent States was the most important institution regulating relations between the post-Soviet states, including Russia and Ukraine. However, Ukraine decided not to join other institutions established in the post-Soviet space, such as the Eurasian Economic Community or the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) and its Customs Union. The country was also not willing to join another post-Soviet organization promoted by Russia – the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), which was to form a basis of a military alliance to be joined by the post-Soviet states. It is important to mention here that the reluctance of Ukraine to join the EEU resulted in the wave of protests in Ukraine in 2013 and 2014 and was one of the key reasons for the conflict between Russia and Ukraine that led to annexation of Crimea in 2014 and indirectly to the outbreak of full-scale war in 2022.

One of the examples of this process of institutionalisation in the MENA region is the establishment in 2006 of the “‘Russia–Islamic World’ Strategic Vision Group”.⁴ Because in many MENA countries Islam is the dominant religion and Russia has a relatively large Muslim minority, creating an institution that could help Russia better coordinate its relations with predominantly Muslim countries was a rational decision. The “Russia–Islamic World” Strategic Vision Group was established on Putin's initiative following Russia's accession as an observer to the OIC (at the time, the Organisation of the Islamic Conference) in 2005. In June 2015, the first meeting of the “Russia–Islamic World” Strategic Vision Group was held in Moscow. In 2019, at a meeting held at the Russian Foreign Ministry with ambassadors of OIC member states accredited in Russia, an updated concept of the Strategic Vision Group was presented. In addition, the group held the following several meetings between 2015 and 2025 and Russian President Vladimir Putin addressed a welcoming message to each meeting of the Strategic Vision Group.

Cultural diplomacy has also played a part in Russia's pursuit of its interests in both regions. Practices related to cultural diplomacy include the promotion of Russian culture, language, and conservative values. Furthermore, Russia has been using elements from its cultural power repertoire to accuse Ukraine of persecution of the Russian culture and language. Similar accusations have been directed against the West, which was on several occasions accused of cancelling Russian culture after the outbreak of the war and in more general terms of Russophobia (Darczewska & Żochowski, 2015; Tsygankov, 2009). Perhaps the best-known example of Russian use of culture-related soft-power in the MENA region was the organization of a concert in Palmyra in 2016 after the liberation of this area from ISIS. Russia also presents itself as an anti-colonial power in the Global South and invests a lot of effort into strengthening its political and cultural position in the countries of the Global South and world majority (Doroshenko & Shelkovnikov, 2025; Karaganov, 2022; Karaganov et al., 2023).

Below are some examples of the power practices related to cultural diplomacy, broadly understood, that were implemented by Russia in the MENA region. In 2019 and 2023, Russia–Africa Summits were organized in Sochi and in St Petersburg respectively. Many African leaders took part in those events, which were presented in Russian media and in Russian propaganda as proof that Russia is not isolated on the global stage. The first of these forums saw high-level participation with 45 heads of state, while the second had 17 heads of state attending; 49 African countries were represented in total.

⁴ The official website can be found here: <https://russia-islworld.ru/>.

In February 2024, Russia organized the Forum of Supporters of the Fight against Modern Practices of Neocolonialism “For the Freedom of Nations!”, which was attended by the president of the CAR. The fight against colonialism is also flagged as one of the activities on the website of the Russian embassy in Bangui (Embassy of the Russian Federation in Central African Republic, 2025).

The two countries have since 2023 agreed to allow 75 students from CAR to study at Russian universities in civilian specialties. Since 2021, the Russian private cultural centre “Russian House” has been operating in Bangui. In April 2022, the Association of Central African graduates of Soviet and Russian universities was created (MID CAR, 2025).

In July 2023, an interdepartmental memorandum on cooperation in the field of higher education was signed. In October 2023, the Center for Open Education in Russian and Russian Language Teaching began operating at the University of Bangui (MID CAR, 2025).

In accordance with the contract signed with Algeria on 11 January 2021, 1 million doses of the Sputnik-V COVID-19 coronavirus vaccine were to be delivered to Algeria. Russia works actively with over 19,000 graduates of Russian civil and military universities who live in Algeria and, in 2021, it awarded 212 state scholarships to citizens of Algeria and three to people from Western Sahara (MID Algeria, 2026).

In November 2019, on the sidelines of the St. Petersburg International Cultural Forum, a programme of specialized bilateral cooperation for 2019–2021 was signed between the Ministry of Culture of the Russian Federation and the Cultural and Antiquities Authority of the Kingdom of Bahrain. In December 2022, the Russian Ministry of Culture held a number of specialized events in Bahrain, including the First Bilateral Cultural Forum “Diversity of Cultures as a Basis for Dialogue”, as well as the Museum Road-Show project, aimed at establishing direct ties between the leading museums of the two countries. In April 2024, the Igor Butman Quintet performed as part of the annual Bahrain Jazz Festival in Manama (MID Bahrain, 2026).

On 23 May 2024, the Cooperation Program between the Ministry of Culture of the Russian Federation and the Cultural Affairs and Antiquities Authority of the Kingdom of Bahrain for 2024–2027 was signed in Moscow, followed by a Memorandum of Understanding on holding the “Russian Seasons” cultural programme in the Kingdom of Bahrain in 2025.

In the case of Bahrain, there are also two organizations uniting representatives of the Russian community and Russian-speaking citizens of the Kingdom: the Bahraini–Russian Friendship Society and the Bahraini Association for Russian-Speakers. The approximate size of the Russian community in Bahrain is 300 people.

In October 2020, the Government of the Russian Federation, through the UN World Food Programme (WFP), provided humanitarian aid to the Republic of Chad worth USD 1 million, supplying more than 700 tons of flour. Three hundred students from Chad were allowed to study in Russia in the 2024/2025 academic year. In total, about 2,500 Chadian specialists have been trained in the universities of the USSR and Russia and, in 2024, the 5th World Forum of Chadian Students was held in Moscow (MID Chad, 2026).

In June 2024, Russia and Djibouti signed an interdepartmental memorandum of cooperation in the field of education at various levels. In April 2023, an agreement was signed on the opening of the Center for Open Education in the Russian Language and the Teaching of the Russian Language in Djibouti, where since September 2024 about 50 Djiboutian schoolchildren have enrolled in training courses in the Russian language, history, and culture. In 2024, another agreement was signed on the assignment of Russian teachers to teach Djiboutian citizens according to curricula in Russian, as part of the humanitarian project “Russian Teacher Abroad”. More than 30 Djiboutians are studying in

civilian specialties in Russia and 25 new scholarships were allocated at the expense of the Russian federal budget in 2025 (MID Djibouti, 2026).

According to the Ministry of Education and Science of Russia, more than 12,000 Egyptians study in Russian higher educational institutions. Since 2011, there is an Egyptian-Russian University located in Badr City. There are two representative offices of Rossotrudnichestvo, the organization officially responsible for promoting Russian culture and language and providing support to ethnic Russians abroad, in Egypt: the Russian Center for Science and Culture in Cairo and the Russian Center for Science and Culture in Alexandria. In 2020–2022, about 200 events were held in both countries as part of the Cross Year of Humanitarian Cooperation between Russia and Egypt (MID Egypt, 2026).

In 2017, a Russian centre was opened at Tehran University with the participation of the Russkiy Mir Foundation. A Rossotrudnichestvo office is located at the Russian Embassy and is responsible for relations and joint projects between the two countries in the humanitarian sphere. In 2021, Russia and Iran signed an agreement to establish a Russian information and cultural centre in Tehran and a similar Iranian centre in Moscow. In June 2025, the Days of Russian Culture were held in Iran and, in July 2023, the Days of Iranian Culture were held in Moscow. In February 2025, the Seventh Forum of Rectors of Universities of the two countries was held in Tehran (MID Iran, 2026).

For historical and demographic reasons, cultural diplomacy is also an essential element in Russian-Israeli relations. In Moscow and Tel Aviv, there are cultural centres of the partner country. In coordination with local veteran and compatriot organizations, the Russian Embassy in Israel regularly holds rallies and lays wreaths and flowers at 60 monuments and monuments dedicated to the Great Patriotic War. In June 2012, a memorial was opened in Netanya in honour of the victory over Nazi Germany. In January 2020, the Candle of Memory memorial dedicated to the heroic feat of the defenders and residents of besieged Leningrad was unveiled in Jerusalem. In September 2019, Moscow hosted the first conference of the global Jewish organization Keren HaYesod, which collects donations for Israel; President Putin addressed the conference (MID Israel, 2026).

In December 2009, the Russian Cultural Center was opened in Amman, the capital of Jordan. In January 2011, under the auspices of the Russkiy Mir Foundation, the Russian Center was established at the University of Jordan in Amman, with the task of disseminating and popularizing the Russian language. Of particular importance in bilateral relations is the construction of the Hospice for Russian pilgrims that was solemnly opened during Putin's visit to Jordan in 2012. Another special cultural issue in relations with Jordan is the question of cooperation with the local Circassian and Chechen diaspora. The most important institution coordinating this cooperation is the Circassian Charitable Society, which unites more than 100,000 people (MID Jordan, 2026).

Various forms of **support for Russians living abroad**, frequently referred to as compatriots, has been an important issue addressed by various practices from the Russian repertoire (Karasin, 2008; Kolstø, 1993; Kolstoe, 1995; Pieper, 2020; Pigman, 2019). In the case of Ukraine, the issue of protecting the Russian minority has played an increasingly important role in recent years (Kuzio & Wawrzonek, 2025). This question of protecting Russian compatriots was one of the official motivations for the launching of the special military operation in 2022. In a concept note presented at 5 August 2025 Arria-meeting in the Security Council, this was mentioned as the main justification of the Russian intervention in the following manner: “Having exhausted all avenues of peaceful resolution to safeguard the Russian speaking population in southeastern Ukraine – amid ongoing hostilities, forced Ukrainization and historical revisionism – the Russian Federation commenced a special military operation in February 2022, in full compliance with Article 51 of the UN Charter” (Security Council Report, 2025).

What forms of support for compatriots have actually been provided in Ukraine and elsewhere? Russia often seeks to assist Russian compatriots through established diplomatic and institutional channels, with legal complaints in international institutions and regular public statements. In addition, several institutions have been established to help Russia pursue its policy towards compatriots, including the Government Commission on the Affairs of Compatriots Abroad; Rossotrudnichestvo; the Federal Agency for Commonwealth of Independent States Affairs; Compatriots Living Abroad; International Humanitarian Cooperation; and the Russkiy Mir Foundation, which supports Russian language and culture globally and among Russian compatriots. Russian information operations aimed at Russian compatriots abroad are among most effective power practices from the information domain to influence Russian compatriots and the governments of neighbouring countries (Zakem et al., 2015).

The Russian diaspora in the MENA region – which is indeed much smaller than in the post-Soviet space – has also been targeted by Russian policy. The situation regarding more than 1.5 million Israeli citizens who speak Russian has attracted particular attention, but there are also other examples of measures that have been taken to address questions related to Russian citizens or former citizens living in the MENA region. According to Russian MID data, there are, for instance, around 30,000 Russians living in Egypt (MID Egypt, 2026), and smaller groups of Russian citizens spread all over the region. Rossotrudnichestvo is mentioned in the 2026 version of the MID official narrative as operating in four MENA countries: Egypt (MID Egypt, 2026), Jordan (MID Jordan, 2026), Palestine (MID Palestine, 2026) and Somalia (MID Somalia, 2026).

Furthermore, the question of protecting and providing help to Russian tourists visiting countries like Israel, UAE, Qatar, Egypt, Türkiye, Tunisia, or Morocco is important in this context. For instance, according to the Russian MID, there were 158,000 and 175,000 Russian tourist visiting Israel in 2023 and 2022 respectively. Tunisia is mentioned as a target country for Russian tourists – there were 650,000 of them visiting the country in 2019 and 611,000 in 2018. In 2024, more than 6.2 million Russian tourists visited Türkiye, and 1.47 million visited the UAE (MID Israel, 2026; MID Tunisia, 2026; MID Türkiye, 2026; MID UAE, 2026).

Information-related power practices in MENA and Ukraine

Informational instruments of power refer to a state's ability to shape narratives, influence public opinion, and control information flows both inside the country and abroad. The power repertoire in this case includes such elements as propaganda, public diplomacy, media campaigns, and strategic communication aimed at both domestic and foreign audiences.

From the very beginning of the conflict in Ukraine, Russia has actively used various types of communication and information-related instruments to promote its own vision of events and to weaken Western cohesion and unity (Bolt et al., 2023; Darczewska, 2014, 2015, 2016; Godzimirski, 2021b; Matthews et al., 2021).

Communicating interests and objectives is an important power practice from the Russian power repertoire. Below are some examples of how this has been done in the case of the MENA region and Ukraine.

When commenting on possible Russian intervention in Syria in 2011, Vladimir Putin denied that Russia had any strategic interest in this country, claiming: “We have no special interest there, neither military bases nor major projects, nor billions in investment we would need to defend. Nothing” (Parker, 2015).

In an interview on Russian policy that Putin gave weeks after the beginning of the Russian operation in Syria in 2015, he used the media to present a set of objectives that Russia was seeking to achieve (Putin, 2015). He made it clear that, besides using the intervention in Syria to demonstrate the return of Russia as a great power, Russia needed to combat the scourge of terrorism far away from the country’s border. Later in the interview, Putin explained in more detail how the intervention in Syria was to help Russia deal with the threat of terrorism: “If we just stood by and let Syria get gobbled up, thousands of people running around there now with Kalashnikovs would end up on our territory, and so we are helping President Assad fight this threat before it reaches our borders”. At the same time, he reassured his interlocutor that active operations on Syrian soil were to be limited in time and underlined that the main task was to stabilize the legitimate government and establish conditions that would make it possible to achieve political compromise. He also repeated that Russia had no desire to get entangled in inter-religious conflicts of any sort and that the only goal was to support the lawful government and create conditions for a political settlement.

Official documents can also be used to communicate interests and objectives. Russia’s official Foreign Policy Concept from 2016 (President of the Russian Federation, 2016) stated that Russia “stands for a political settlement in the Syrian Arab Republic and the possibility for the people of Syria to determine their future based on the Geneva communiqué of 30 June 2012, statements by the International Syria Support Group and relevant UN Security Council resolutions”. The document reiterated Russian support for “the unity, independence, and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic as a secular, democratic, and pluralistic State with all ethnic and religious groups living in peace and security and enjoying equal rights”.

In the case of Ukraine, these interests and objectives were signalled first and foremost in Putin’s official statements at decisive moments. Table 6 sums up the motives and the focus of Putin’s two speeches – the Crimea annexation speech (President of the Russian Federation, 2014a) and the 2022 war speech (President of the Russian Federation, 2022) – in which he outlined the key ideas informing his policy towards Ukraine.

Table 6. Motives and focus of two key Putin speeches

Aspects	2014 Crimea annexation speech	2022 Ukraine invasion speech
Theme	Russia reclaims historical territory.	Russia defends itself from existential threat.
Objective	Justify annexation of Crimea by referring to the right of groups for self-determination.	Contain NATO, reclaim Ukraine, reassert Russia as a great power with an exclusive sphere of influence and interests.
Focus	Ethnic Russians, historical justice.	Genocide claims, NATO threat, regime change in Ukraine.
Audience	Domestic and regional publics.	Entire Russian population, military, international community.

In his war speech on 24 February 2022, Putin shared his thoughts on the threats that had to be dealt with by sending Russian troops to Ukraine. Already in the opening paragraph, he mentioned “the eastward expansion of NATO, which is moving its military infrastructure ever closer to the Russian border”, as the main security threat to Russia. In addition, he mentioned the economic threats that Russia could be exposed to if it were to react to Western blackmailing. He added that “a military presence in territories bordering on Russia” that would stay for decades or forever would “create an ever mounting and totally unacceptable threat for Russia”, which he even described as posing a threat to the very existence of Russia and its sovereignty. Later, he added that “Russia cannot feel safe, develop, and exist while facing a permanent threat from the territory of today’s Ukraine”, which should be therefore treated as one of the official reasons why Russia decided to launch its ‘special military operation’. Putin explained in this speech that Russia had no other option for defending Russia and its people – including those living in the Donbas – than launching a special military operation, a bold and immediate action that Russia was, in his opinion, forced to take in response to Western encroachments on Russia’s vital and even existential interests. To counter these grave threats to the country’s very existence, Putin signalled a willingness to use all available instruments of power and threatened those who would consider countering Russia’s actions with consequences “never seen in your entire history”. He also added that Russia’s special military operation aimed in the first place at what Putin labelled the denazification and demilitarization of Ukraine, which was, in his opinion, an important precondition for removing the existential threat to Russia and the Donbas.

The 2023 version of the foreign policy concept (President of the Russian Federation, 2023), published after the outbreak of the war, mentions Ukraine only once, as a country deprived de facto of any agency and misused by the collective West, which “used the measures taken by the Russian Federation as regards Ukraine to protect its vital interests as a pretext to aggravate the longstanding anti-Russian policy and unleashed a new type of hybrid war”.

Propaganda and disinformation are a well-known information-related practice from the Russian power repertoire and have been widely used in both the MENA region and Ukraine to shape narratives and public opinion and promote Russian views on the causes of the conflicts and ways of dealing with them. To achieve its objectives in the information sphere, the regime has created an information infrastructure and invested heavily in reaching various types of audiences.

In the MENA context, information-related power practices have played an important role. Russia has consistently used its information infrastructure (Hanley & Kuzichkin, 2021; Robinson et al., 2019) and influence industry (Briant & Bakir, 2024) to promote its interests in the region and influence public opinion and decision-makers in the region. To reach a broader audience in the MENA region, the Russian authorities decided to launch various information channels in Arabic⁵, French⁶, and English⁷. Russia launched several soft power campaigns to influence public opinion in several MENA countries, including Algeria, Libya, and Mali (Narbhone, 2024).

To promote Russia’s views on the conflict in Ukraine using the UN Security Council as a platform, Russia has organized several so-called Arria-sessions where alternative narratives on the sources of the conflict have been presented (Security Council Report, 2026a). Before the outbreak of the full-scale war in 2022 the issues discussed at these Arria-sessions included questions related to Implementation of the 2015 Minsk agreements, the situation in Crimea, tragic events in Odessa in 2014 as well as questions related to the Maidan demonstrations and their impact on the situation in

⁵ See <https://arabic.rt.com/>.

⁶ See <https://fr.sputniknews.africa/> and <https://francais.rt.com/>.

⁷ See <https://swentr.site/> and <https://en.sputniknews.africa/>.

Donbas. After 2022 these Arria-meetings focused on problems related to Neo-Nazism and radical nationalism as root causes of the crisis in Ukraine, on what was presented as the systematic war of Ukraine against the residents of the Donbas, the situation of children and their evacuation from conflict zone. Also Russian views on questions related to religious freedom in Ukraine, the crimes of the Ukrainian armed forces and disinformation and sabotage related to the ongoing conflict were discussed within this Arria-format.

In the MENA context, Russia used Arria-formula sessions to promote its interests in the region and present alternative narratives (Security Council Report, 2026a). On 20 January 2020, a session was organized by Russia to discuss the *Implementation of Security Council Resolution 2118: OPCW Fact Finding Mission (FFM) Report on Douma*. On 16 April 2021, a session was organized by Russia and China to discuss the question of *Protection of Developing Nations Against Political Pressure: Upholding the Integrity of International Non-proliferation Regimes*. On 24 March 2023, discussion focused on *Risks Stemming from the Politicization of the activities of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons* [OPCW]. On 20 February 2024, the discussion focused on *The Impact of Unilateral Coercive Measures On Global Counter-Terrorism Efforts*. On 25 November 2024, *Humanitarian Impact of Unilateral Coercive Measures* was discussed.

Various types of **influence operation** play an important role in the Russian power repertoire because the idea of promoting Russian views on various topics is only one of its objectives in the information domain. The other is to use information-related power practices to make those targeted by these operations change their views on Russian activities and their attitude towards Russia. Here, the concept of reflexive control is central to understanding the Russian approach to the use of the information domain in its strategy. Reflexive control is a technique designed to manipulate adversaries' perceptions and decision-making and to force them to make decisions that are detrimental to their own interests and advantageous to Russian objectives (Vasara, 2020).

Russia can exert various forms of influence using various channels. In the case of the MENA region, using local actors who studied in the Soviet Union or Russia and have some knowledge of and some affinity for Russia can be an option. In the official MID narrative on bilateral relations with MENA countries, there are numerous mentions of how many students from these countries have either received an education or are going to study in Russia thanks to financial support provided by the Russian state. According to these sources there are 19,000 Algerians and 20,000 Somalis who have studied in Russia; 12,000 Egyptians studying in Russia; and more than 9,000 students from Iran and more than 4,000 students from Iraq. For this group of students and graduates from Russian universities and other educational institutions, including military ones, knowledge of Russian language and culture can make them more receptive to Russian information and influence campaigns launched in the region (MID Algeria, 2026; MID Chad, 2026; MID Egypt, 2026; MID Iraq, 2026; MID Iran, 2026).

In the case of Ukraine, this type of influence operation targeted various groups in Ukrainian society that Russian decision-makers considered more receptive to the Russian arguments conveyed through various information channels. It is important here to remember that, prior to the outbreak of the full-scale war in 2022, there were some clear cleavages in Ukrainian society that could be used by Russian propaganda to undermine its cohesion and resilience. Given the fact that Russian is a language that is widely used in Ukraine and there is something that could be labelled a common historical cultural frame of reference, Russian policymakers could expect that it would be possible to convey their message to many Ukrainians of both Russian and non-Russian origins. Russia adopted this approach to information operations in Ukraine from the very beginning of the conflict in 2014 and tried to fine-tune its approach in subsequent years, in line with its understanding of the usefulness of information-related power practices (Bolt et al., 2023; Darczewska, 2014; Darczewska

& Żochowski, 2017; Hartmann et al., 2018; Jonsson & Seely, 2015; Rácz, 2015; Reisinger & Gol'c, 2014).

It is important to underline here that Russian influence operations have targeted not only Ukraine proper but also the countries that decided to provide support to Ukraine's fight against Russian aggression. Here, Russia has used various types of arguments, from threatening to use nuclear weapons in Ukraine to organizing various forms of hybrid operations aimed at undermining the cohesion of the Western societies supporting Ukraine and trying to instil fear (Conley et al., 2016; Helmus et al., 2018).

A good example of influence operations targeting a country that has played an active role in providing economic, military, and political support to Ukraine was the campaign organized by a Norwegian fringe party, FOR, on the eve of elections to the Norwegian parliament in 2025. The idea of stopping assistance to Ukraine was a key issue in their public campaign, which was funded by a Russia-based Norwegian entrepreneur and was very much in line with the ideas promoted by Russian propaganda.

Shaping various types of narratives is another information-related power practice implemented by Russia. Ideas promoted by these Russian narrative-related measures in the MENA context included questions related to national sovereignty and non-interference and presenting Western interference as a hypocritical and destabilizing factor. At the same time, Russia is presented as a defender of order, tradition, and independent statehood, using heavily anti-colonial rhetoric to undermine Western moral claims. Questions related to what was framed as Western normative hegemony, for instance in the field of human rights, were quite often raised in this context (Miskimmon & O'Loughlin, 2017; Miskimmon et al., 2017; Rogers & Tyushka, 2017).

In the case of Ukraine, the leitmotiv in Russian propaganda is the question of Ukraine's dependence on help provided by the West and the presentation of Ukraine as a non-sovereign country deprived of any agency on the international stage. Instead, Ukraine is portrayed as a country that is misused by the collective West in a Russophobic campaign that aims at the destruction of Russia as a sovereign pole in a multipolar global system (Pynnöniemi & Rácz, 2016). This line has become dominant in Russian anti-Ukrainian and anti-Western propaganda in recent years and is offered as an explanation for why the special military operation launched in 2022 has not been able to achieve its original objectives, more than four years after its launch (Klimentov, 2025; Trenin, 2024).

Military and security-related power practices in MENA and Ukraine

In line with Russian and Soviet tradition, Russia has decided to employ various power practices from its military power repertoire, combining these military instruments of power with other measures (Borshchevskaya, 2020; Charap, 2016; Kaplan et al., 1981; McGwire, 1987; Sutyagin & Bronk, 2017; Westerlund, 2021).

Military instruments of power include the direct and indirect use of armed forces, weaponry, and technology, combined with the ability to project force. Military instruments of power can be used to deter aggression, protect national interests, and provide support to allies. As demonstrated clearly in the case of Ukraine and the MENA region, military power can be employed in various manners and power practices using military instruments cover the spectrum, ranging from small scale military

intrusions involving armed groups without visible insignia (like small green men in Crimea in 2014), through deployment of some elements of the armed forces (like the Russian operation in Syria in 2015, in which Russian air-force played a key part), to a full scale combined arms operation (like the Russian invasion of Ukraine launched in February 2022).

Grabbing territory is maybe the most consequential power practice implemented by Russia through its whole history (Werth, 2025). The question of “gathering Russian lands” is one of the most important historical drivers of Russian policy (Black, 1962), but the territorial growth of the Russian empire was not possible without incorporating the territories of Russia’s neighbours (Taagepera, 1988, 1997). Judging from the fact that Russia annexed Crimea in 2014 and aims to forcibly incorporate at least 20% of the territory of Ukraine, it seems that this project of gathering of Russian lands – no matter how they are defined and how costly this may be in terms of loss of lives and reputation – is not yet concluded.

Military diplomacy is a power practice combining the use of diplomatic and military instruments of power. It was employed by Russia in both the MENA region and to a lesser degree in Ukraine, where Russia has since 2014 and even more so since February 2022 preferred to employ power practices from its kinetic military power repertoire.

Military diplomacy has resulted in strengthened military cooperation between Russia and many MENA countries through the signing of various military cooperation agreements and the building of military alliances with actors in the region who have decided to seek closer cooperation with Moscow and cut ties with the local colonial powers, first and foremost France. In the MENA region, Russia has embarked on close security cooperation with several traditional allies. According to MID notes on cooperation with MENA countries, Russia has agreements on military and strategic cooperation with Bahrain (2016), Egypt (2018), Qatar (2016), Saudi Arabia, and Tunisia (2018).

In addition, in 2015, Russia and Kuwait signed a Memorandum of Intent on Military-Technical Cooperation between Rosoboronexport and the Kuwaiti Ministry of Defence. In 2017, M. Al-Khudr, chief of the General Staff of the Kuwait Armed Forces, attended the International Military-Technical Forum “Army-2017” (MID Kuwait, 2026).

In the wake of President Putin’s visit in Saudi Arabia in 2019, the Russian MID expressed the hope that Riyadh views the new Russia, which has restored its position in the Middle East, as an alternative to the United States. Saudi Arabia was thus viewed as a kind of “window to the Persian Gulf”, opening opportunities for further Russian political, military-technical, trade, and economic penetration into the region. In February 2024, a Russian delegation headed by D.V. Manturov, Russian deputy prime minister and trade and industry minister, visited Riyadh to participate in the 2nd International Defense and Security Exhibition (World Defense Show), where more than twenty companies presented their products as part of the unified Russian exhibit (MID Saudi Arabia, 2026).

A good example of this type of military diplomatic power practice are contacts between the military and security policy elites of Russia and other countries. Iran is Russia’s important military partner in the MENA region, and it is therefore not surprising to see that contacts have been established between the secretaries of the security councils of Russia and Iran. In 2024, they met seven times. On 28 May 2024, the newly appointed secretary of the Russian Security Council, Sergey Shoigu, had the first telephone conversation with the secretary of the Supreme National Security Council of Iran, Arman Ahmadian. In August 2024, Sergey Shoigu paid a working visit to Tehran, during which he was received by Iranian President Mohammad Pezeshkian and held talks with Ahmadian and Mohammed Bagheri, chief of the General Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces. The secretaries of the security councils met again in St. Petersburg in September 2024 as part of the Meeting of BRICS High Representatives in charge of security issues. In September 2024, Shoigu again paid a working

visit to Tehran to meet Iranian officials. He also met his Iranian counterpart in Moscow in May 2025 (MID Iran, 2026).

Cooperation in the field of security, focused on the fight against international terrorism, organized crime, and piracy, is an important element in relations with Oman. Russian Navy ships calling at the Omani port of Salalah were part of this cooperation. In addition, in 2018, a training course for Omani police officers on “Tactics of Special Forces in the Fight against Terrorism” was held at the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs. In April 2018, an Omani delegation led by M. Al-Mesheikh, secretary general for military affairs of the Sultan’s Chancellery and chairman of the National Anti-Terrorism Committee, participated in the 9th International Meeting of High Representatives Responsible for Security Issues in Sochi. The Omani delegation also participated in the 10th International Meeting of, which was held in Ufa on 17–20 June 2019 (MID Oman, 2026).

Russian official accounts on Somalia note that, between 1960 and 1977, Soviet economic aid to Somalia totalled USD 300 million; Soviet military advisers contributed to the formation of the Somali army; and a Soviet naval base was established in the port of Berbera. However, military cooperation with Somalia ended after the outbreak of the conflict with Ethiopia in 1977. The collapse of the Somali state resulted in Russia closing its diplomatic mission in the country. This is a good example of a setback in military cooperation with a MENA country (MID Somalia, 2026).

Another, more recent, setback in the field of military cooperation was the freezing of the plan to establish a Russian naval base in Sudan, even though, in December 2020, an agreement was signed between Russia and Sudan on the establishment of a logistics base for the Russian Navy. However, because of the high level of regional instability, caused by a bloody conflict in Sudan, work on the base was paused in 2025 and the future of this project remains uncertain – although, at the end of 2025, the Sudanese government expressed interest in its realization.

Military economy is another tool from the Russian power repertoire. Russia has been an important supplier of arms to many MENA countries. Russia’s arms deals with Türkiye are a good illustration of how Russia can combine various elements from its power repertoire to achieve various types of strategic benefits: Russia’s sale of advanced S400 air defence system to Ankara resulted not only in economic gains, but also undermined the internal cohesion in NATO, which had serious problems letting Türkiye use a Russian system for fear that Russia would be able to access sensitive information on allies’ activity.

According to a recently published SIPRI report (Wezeman et al., 2024), there are 10 MENA countries on the list of 40 most important arms importers: Saudi Arabia was 2nd, Qatar occupied 3rd place, Egypt 7th, Kuwait 12th, UAE 14th, Israel 15th, Türkiye 17th, Algeria 21st, Morocco 29th, and Bahrain 31st. A quick search of the SIPRI database on arms trade reveals that, between 2014 and 2024, Algeria was the most important regional receiver of weapons from Russia, with an 11% share of Russia’s total arms export, followed by Egypt (7.4%), Iraq (4%), and Iran (1%). Other MENA countries have received less than 1% of Russian arm exports in this period: Syria (0.9%), Türkiye (0.7%), and UAE (0.4%), followed by Mali and Sudan (0.3% each).

When it comes to Ukraine’s role in this context, the most important “contribution” is the fact that, according to the most recent Ukrainian estimates (by the end of April 2026), Ukraine’s military forces have destroyed 11,901 Russian tanks; 24,493 armoured fighting vehicles; more than 40,000 artillery systems; almost 1,756 Multiple Launch Rocket Systems (MLRS); 1,356 air defence systems; 435 aircraft; 352 helicopters; 263,360 Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs); 4,579 cruise missiles; 33 ships; two submarines; 92,606 automobiles and tank trucks; and 4,148 pieces of special equipment

(Minfin, undated).⁸ Although it is difficult to verify these figures, the fact that Russia has suffered heavy losses of military equipment during this more-than-four-year-long conflict is not contested. It is also not contested that this war has kept the Russian military-industry complex very busy and has boosted – at least in the first years – the whole Russian economy (Buklemishev, 2024; Gustafson, 2025; Ribakova & Risinger, 2025).

Non-kinetic operations are another important power practice from the Russian power repertoire that has been deployed in both the MENA region and Ukraine. These include military exercises, power demonstrations, direct and indirect threats of the use of military force, threats of nuclear escalation, and intelligence operations against imagined or real enemies.

Here, elements of what is sometimes referred to as hybrid or political warfare – combining various active measures using diplomatic, information related as well as economic instruments of power – are used to promote Russia's interests (Bartosh, 2014a, 2014b, 2017; Robinson et al., 2019).

A good overview of the kinds of **hybrid operations** that Russia and its proxies in Poland have launched was recently published by a Polish think tank Defence 24 (Olech et al, 2026). Other Western institutions follow what Russia is doing in this hybrid domain and publish detailed reports on these issues.

Russian-Belarusian military exercises conducted in the second half of 2021 and combined with Russia's deployment of its troops along Ukraine's borders in the same period are another example of the use of non-kinetic instruments of power in the pre-war phase of the conflict.

Intelligence gathering belongs to the category of non-kinetic operations and often has many of the traits of hybrid actions. It should therefore be treated as another important power practice employed by Russia in both Ukraine and the MENA region. In the case of the conflict in Ukraine, the actions of the Fifth Department of the Federal Security Service (FSB), led by Sergey Beseda (Kommersant, 2025), were supposed to play a key part in the preparatory phase of the conflict. According to some sources, these pre-war intelligence gathering operations provided Russian decision-makers with a false picture of the situation in Ukraine and contributed to a strategic failure during the initial phase of the war.

Law enforcement instruments have also been used by Russia with relative frequency, as exemplified by the fact that many critics of the Russian war in Russia have been persecuted and received long prison sentences, while others have been heavily fined or defined as foreign agents. The closure of various media in Russian can be seen in this law enforcement context. Another power practice is charging various Ukrainian combatants and soldiers with crimes committed against Russian citizens or other actors during various phases of the conflict in Ukraine, or putting various foreign figures, like Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas or Ukrainian Presidents Zelensky and Poroshenko, on Russian and international most wanted lists.

Kinetic operations are other power practices employed by Russia in both the MENA region and in Ukraine. In both regions, Russia has been testing not only traditional solutions from its military power repertoire but also some strategic innovations.

The use of private military companies (PMC) as Russia's proxies in the conflicts is viewed as maybe the most important of these strategic innovations (Larsen, 2025). According to various sources, the best known of these Russian PSCs, the Wagner Group, operated in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan, Libya, Madagascar, Angola, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, the Central African Republic (CAR), Ukraine (in the Donbas), Syria, and Sudan. Since 2021, Wagner and

⁸ By the end of April 2026, according to <https://index.minfin.com.ua/russian-invading/casualties/>.

other Russian PSCs have enlarged the scope of their engagement and were found in Chad, Burkina Faso, and Mali, and they played an active role in Russia's incursion in Ukraine, where they were deployed to help Russian regular troops take control of strategic locations on the frontline (Bauer et al., 2025; Doboš, 2024; Dörfler, 2025; Gould-Davies, 2023; Marten, 2019b). However, when Wagner organized a mutiny against Russian authorities in June 2023, this meant an effective end to its existence as an independent power actor in Russia (Gould-Davies, 2023).

One of the best places to get a detailed overview of the kinetic power practices employed by Russia in Ukraine is a study published in 2025 by Finnish military analyst Juha Kukkola (2025). This study is based on a thorough examination of Western experts' analysis of how Russia has been adapting to changing tactical, operational, and strategic circumstances on the battlefield. For obvious space-related reasons, we are not going to present a detailed examination of the Russian "battlefield adaptation efforts" examined by Kukkola. Suffice to say, he identified 25 practices at the tactical level, 33 practices at the operational level, 36 power practices at the operational-strategic level, and 43 practices at the strategic level that Russia has employed when pursuing its political and military objectives in Ukraine. An overview of these practices is presented in Table 7

Table 7. Russian kinetic power practices on the battleground in Ukraine: tactical, operational and strategic levels (source: Kukkola 2025)

TACTICAL PRACTICES

Massive artillery fires and semi-mechanized infantry attacks.
Ad hoc deployment with poorly trained troops.
Using infantry storm battalions.
Mechanized breakthrough units.

Line battalions in regiment or brigade formations.

Slow and shallow infantry assault.
Fast mechanized raids.
Assaults seeking tactical penetration of defence lines.

Deployment of infantry inside defender's position.

Reconnaissance by small, expendable infantry groups.
Use of fires to attrition the identified defender positions.
Armoured or light mobility vehicle assault in waves.
Use of drones to disrupt Ukrainian troops supply and rotation.
Using lightweight all-terrain vehicles for reconnaissance.
Regimental defence zones.
Massed fire tactics.
Precise and dispersed artillery strategies.
Drones for reconnaissance missions.
Loitering and kamikaze drones.

Increased use of unmanned ground vehicles (UGVs).
Use of hypersonic and other types of missiles.
Deployment of short-range EW assets.
Deploying air defence systems on rooftops and other platforms.

OPERATIONAL PRACTICES

Formation of small mobile groupings of well-equipped forces.
Consolidation of areas of control.
Attempts to breach the line of contact.
Attritional approach aimed at the infliction of maximum damage.
Continuous, tactical, partly mechanized meatgrinder offensives.
Open new fronts when considered advantageous.
Enveloping targets from two sides.
Drones and indirect fire used to disrupt supplies and rotations.
Using assault units to attack weaknesses in defensive positions.
Concentration of forces.
Combined arms counteroffensive.

Tactical attacks from multiple directions.
Employing fire-reconnaissance complex.

Protecting supply lines.

Use of the Wagner Private Military Company.
Redeploy troops between Groups of Forces.
Employing elite units in a "fire-brigade" role.
Organized character of drone warfare.
Drone-strike units capable of being rapidly redeployed
UAV regiments are being established.
Establishment of a dedicated UAV branch.
Creating interdiction zones.
Coordination of fires.

Anti-drone measures such as fences, nets, and barriers.
 Attack helicopters to support defensive operations.
 Use of 250 to 1500 kg glide bomb kits (FABUMPK/UMBP).

The maturation of the Russia's RUK concept.

Human-wave attacks.
 Consecutive small-unit attacks.

Elements of "active defence".
 Defending its field forces, command posts, logistics, and occupied areas.
 Construction of fortifications.
 Creating and maintaining an integrated air defence system
 Streamlining supply chains.
 Relocating depots closer to the front.
 Pulling logistics elements backward and dispersing them.
 Creating a new force structure through mobilization and the recruitment.

OPERATIONAL STRATEGIC LEVEL PRACTICES

A surprise attack to capture Ukraine's state apparatus.

An effort to destroy Ukraine's armed forces in the Donbas.
 Multiple parallel, continuous operations mainly in the Donbas.
 Capturing territory and wearing down Ukrainian forces.
 Politically motivated offensives.

Redeploying units from other sectors into defensive roles.
 Supporting them with air assets and drone units.
 Deployment forces at points where Ukrainian defences were weak.
 Parallel and consecutive operations.

A shift to a more coordinated, multi-army operation.

A year-long operation toward Pokrovsk with three to four armies.
 Invading Ukraine from the Sumy direction.
 Kursk offensive as a successful joint operation.

Strike campaign against Ukrainian energy and civilian infrastructure.
 The integrated use of drones, cruise missiles, and ballistic missiles.
 Retaliatory strikes to punish Ukraine for attacks on Russian territory.
 Strategic operation aimed at undermining the will of Ukrainians.
 The restructuring of military administration in the middle of the war.
 Calculated risk-taking and adaptive use of available resources.
 Promoting military service as a patriotic and honourable duty.
 Amphibious landing in support of the Mariupol axis.
 Naval mining operations.

STRATEGIC LEVEL PRACTICES

Abandonment of strategy of indirect a surprise attack.
 Adoption of a more costly strategy of attrition.

Semi-mobilization.

Production of nationalist and ideological narratives.
 Economic benefits and expanded financial incentives.
 Political officers have been reintroduced to monitor soldiers.
 Criminalization of public criticism of the military.
 Establishment of detention centres for deserters.

Recalibrating coercion and incentives to maintain regime integrity.
 Limiting losses or shifting them onto particular units and groups.
 Developing new, more "positive" methods of recruitment.
 Better pay for soldiers.
 Prisoners and criminal suspects are promised freedom.
 Public and private institutions participate in recruitment.
 Indoctrination of schoolchildren.

Use of private military companies to enlist army sceptics.
 Recruitment of foreign fighters and foreign troops.

Reinvigorating defence industry.

Import-substitution practices.

Maintaining the support of external partners.

Countering Western efforts to isolate Russia.
 Peace negotiations.

Attempted naval blockade.	Re-establishment of Military Districts and divisions.
Failed attempt to establish air superiority.	The reconstruction of conventional deterrence.
A close air support role for air force.	Preparation for a possible war with NATO.
Russian air force as a part of Russia's integrated air-defence system.	Readiness to manage regional conflicts.
Employment of indirect, and non-military means.	Indirect actions at the strategic level.
Information warfare.	Information operations to erode external support for Ukraine.
Economic pressure.	Attacks on Western infrastructure.
Assassinations.	Recruitment of spies, saboteurs, and sympathizers.
Sabotage.	Pressure through international institutions.
Subversion operations.	Covert operations in Africa.
Tactical-operational espionage.	Weaponization of migration flows.
Cyber-enabled information strike against civil and military targets.	Testing the stability of border arrangements.
Continuous influence and destabilization efforts, with proxies.	Energy blackmail.
Cyber-attacks against Ukrainian infrastructure, media and state.	Manipulation of grain deliveries.
Cyber capabilities and kinetic strikes against infrastructure.	Nuclear and cyber signalling to limit Western support for Ukraine.
	Deployment of tactical nuclear weapons to Belarus.
	Below-threshold cyber operations.
	Revising its nuclear doctrine.
	Employing space capabilities.
	The subjugation of Ukraine.
	Leveraging latent patriotic sentiment.

How to understand these developments in Russia's use of military practices from its power repertoire? In his study on the usefulness of military power in the pursuit of strategic interests, Art (1980) identified four key reasons why states decide to use military instruments: defence, deterrence, compellence, and swaggering.

He describes the defensive use of force as the deployment of military power for two key purposes: to ward off an attack and to minimize damage to oneself if attacked. The deterrent use of force is, according to him, the deployment of military power to prevent an adversary from doing something that one does not want him to do and that he might otherwise be tempted to do by threatening him with unacceptable punishment if he does it. The compellent use of force is the deployment of military power either to stop an adversary from doing something that he has already undertaken or to get him to do something that he has not yet undertaken.

Finally, swaggering is the deployment of military power for purposes other than defence, deterrence, or compellence. The purpose is more diffuse, ill-defined, and problematic than and almost always involves only the peaceful use of force. It is usually expressed in one of two ways: displaying one's military might at military exercises and national demonstrations; and buying or building the era's most prestigious weapons. According to Art, the swagger use of force aims to enhance the national pride of a people or to satisfy the personal ambitions of its ruler.

It seems that, in the case of Putin's Russia, the use of military power through implementation of various military power practices in both Ukraine and the MENA region can be read through Art's prism.

Russian aggression against Ukraine is, in the official parlance, presented as the defensive use of military power, after the deterrent and the compellent use of military power prior to the full-scale invasion turned out to be ineffective from the viewpoint of Russian strategists. At the same time, one

can also see elements of the swaggering use of military power, for instance when Russia has threatened its adversaries with the use of nuclear power. This swaggering use of military power was also a key element in Putin's deterrence strategy when, in 2018, he presented new Russian superweapons that were intended to make Russia almost invulnerable in military terms.

Economic power practices in MENA and Ukraine

Economic instruments of power include trade, sanctions, foreign aid, investments, and economic partnerships (For more on economic statecraft see Blackwill & Harris, 2017 and Baldwin & Kapstein, 2020). These instruments have played various roles in Russian power practices and have been used to influence other states' behaviour and decisions, not only in the economic sphere but also at the strategic level (On the Russian approach to economic warfare see Kashin et al., 2025).

Leveraging economic dependence is a practice used by Russia in its relations with Ukraine and in some countries of the MENA region. In the case of Ukraine, Russia used its energy resources to make Ukraine dependent on Russia, and it had worked at least until 2014, when Russia decided to use other tools from its repertoire and economic cooperation between Russia and Ukraine changed in nature. For instance, Ukraine stopped importing Russian gas from 2015 and thus became much less dependent on Russia.

Russia also tried to leverage the energy dependence of some of the Ukraine's Western allies to make them less willing to provide support to Ukraine in the pre-war period. The use of energy resources to create a situation of asymmetric dependence with actors who relied on access to Russian energy resources to cover their own energy needs is maybe the most obvious example of the use of economic instruments before the outbreak of the conflict in 2014 (Godzimirski et al., 2024). The result was that at the start of the full-scale war in 2022, several European countries relied heavily on energy supplies from Russia. Finland covered 100% of its gas and 78% of its oil needs by imports from Russia; 81% of Poland's oil needs were covered by imports from Russia; and Germany depended on Russia to cover 54% of its gas and 23% of its oil needs (BCG, 2022b).

An important measure that was to help Russia strengthen its leverage over Germany was the construction of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline between 2014 and 2022. This was to make Germany more dependent on supplies of gas coming directly from Russia and thus – hopefully, from the point of view of the Kremlin – less willing to provide support to Ukraine in case of conflict escalation.

The outbreak of the full-scale war has therefore had a huge impact on energy relations between Russia and its major energy partners. According to a BCG study on these issues, uncertainty over risks threw energy markets into greater turmoil as many buyers and traders were unwilling to deal in Russian oil. Responding to the Russian invasion, many energy importers decided to reduce their reliance on Russia, but transition away from Russia was challenging and took a relatively long time, as documented by CREA (Levi et al., 2026). What must have come as a shock to decision-makers in Moscow was the swift shift away from Russia in the case of the major European importer of Russian energy resources, Germany, which was sometimes described as an energy *Zeitenwende* (Blumenau, 2022; Kamp, 2023; Nabers & Stengel, 2025).

In the case of some MENA countries, Russia could use its supplies of agricultural products as leverage. Russia and Ukraine are major producers and exporters of agricultural products: According to a BCG (2022a) analysis of the possible impact of the war on the global situation in this sector, 12% of global exports in 2021 came from Ukraine and 17% from Russia. In the case of corn, Ukraine

accounted for 17% of the global export and Russia for 2%. Three MENA countries – Egypt, Lebanon, and Türkiye – topped the list of consumers of wheat in the same year and they remained important buyers of cereals from Russia in 2024 and 2025. In 2024, the main destinations of Russia's cereals exports were: Egypt (USD 3.06 billion), Türkiye (USD 1.45 billion) and Saudi Arabia (USD 1.1 billion). Grain supplies to other MENA countries from Russia increased substantially in 2025: Iran imported 5 million tonnes of grain from Russia (up from 1.8 million in 2024), while Sudan and Saudi Arabia increased their imports of cereals from Russia in 2025 (OEC, 2026).

Russia's central position on the global energy market could also be used in this context, because Russia as a major producer of oil and gas could compete for access to markets with other energy producers, including those from the MENA region, such as Iran (Godzimirski, 2024). Because Russian energy supplies to Europe dwindled in the aftermath of the war, Russia had to find new markets for its oil and gas, which created a need to squeeze some MENA energy actors out of these new markets.

Sanctions and countersanctions are a part of the Russian economic power repertoire. Western sanctions against Russia and Russia's countersanctions against the West are therefore good examples of the use of economic instruments of power in the context of the conflict around Ukraine. After the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the introduction by the West of various restrictive measures against Russia, Russia responded by imposing its own sanctions on the import of food from what the Russian authorities defined as unfriendly countries (Connolly, 2018).

The use of various types of **import bans** is also a traditional measure from the Russian arsenal of economic power tools.

In addition, Russia has embarked on **transfer of knowledge on how to deal with sanctions** with Iran, a MENA country that had been heavily sanctioned by a common enemy, the collective West (Divsallar, 2024; Kirkham, 2022).

Another important sanctions-related economic power practice implemented by Russia was cooperation with several MENA countries on **circumventing Western sanctions**. Türkiye, UAE, and Iran are listed in official European Union assessments as countries that play a major role in this context, serving as hubs through which Russia can gain access to various types of sanctioned goods (Wiśniewska & Rudnik, 2025). The most important practices introduced in this context were reduced customs duties on selected goods, legalisation of parallel imports, increasing duty-free allowance for goods brought into the country by individuals, the use of third countries as transit points for goods subject to sanctions, the use of companies based in third countries for the re-export, establishment of intermediary entities spanning several countries, as well as taking advantage of the lack of harmonisation between the sanctions regimes imposed on Russia and Belarus.

In response to Western sanctions aimed at Russian energy supplies, Russia decided to strengthen its energy cooperation with major energy producers from the MENA region by joining OPEC+. Russia has used **economic diplomacy** to advance its energy interests by strengthening cooperation with Saudi Arabia and other MENA energy producers to coordinate oil production and stabilize global energy markets. Russia's ability to continue intervention in both the MENA region and even more so Ukraine depends, amongst others, on its ability to fund its war effort – for which petroleum revenues play an important, though diminishing, role.

Efforts to **diversify partnerships** beyond traditional allies, including outreach to Gulf monarchies and North African states, were also an important economic strategic measure implemented by Russia in response to Western sanctions and attempts to isolate Russia on the international stage. Another important practice implemented by Russia to secure petroleum revenues was the

redirection of oil flows from the European market to Asia, first and foremost China, India, and Türkiye, as very convincingly demonstrated by various available examinations of this new trend.

A very interesting case of the use of economic diplomacy was the agreement on the transit of Russian gas through Ukraine, signed between Russia, Ukraine, and the EU in 2019. This agreement was to secure the transport of Russian gas to Europe through Ukraine and survived the outbreak of the full-fledged war in 2022; it was ended, as originally planned, by the end of 2024.

In more general terms, this was a part of the Russian response to growing tensions in its relations with the collective West and was framed by Russian authorities as **Russia's turn to East**. This could be labelled as a sort of strategic innovation because at this time Russia's main economic and political interests linked the country with its European partners.

In response to Western economic sanctions, Russia has also tried to deploy some practices from its financial repertoire. For instance, Russia **demanding payment for energy in roubles**; de facto **re-nationalized Western assets** in Russia; and tried to convince its non-Western partners to implement various **de-dollarization measures** to weaken the collective West's grip on the global economy.

In its economic relations with MENA countries, Russia has also decided to set up institutions to promote its economic interests in the region. The Russian-Arab Business Council (RABC) and Russian-Emirates Business Council are examples of multilateral organizations that help Russia promote its economic interests. In addition, Russia signed bilateral economic agreements and established bilateral economic institutions with most MENA countries. The so-called intergovernmental commissions for coordinating economic, trade, and technical cooperation were established in relations with Algeria (1993), Bahrain (2017), Egypt (1992), Iran (1997), Iraq (1993), Israel (1995), Jordan (2013), Kuwait (1994), Lebanon (1997), Morocco (1994), Oman (2025), Palestine (2015), Qatar (2010), Saudi Arabia (2017), Sudan (2013), Syria (1993), Tunisia (1999), Türkiye (1992), UAE (1994), and Yemen (1991).

Economic cooperation in the field of energy – first and foremost oil and gas – is at the top of the list of Russia's interactions with MENA countries. In the official 2026 MID narrative on bilateral relations (MID, 2026), only four out of 30 MENA countries are not mentioned in this context – CAR, Djibouti, Jordan, and Palestine. The term “нефть” (oil in Russian) is mentioned no less than 162 times in this collection of texts on Russia's relations with these 26 countries: Algeria (6), Bahrain (10), Chad (3), Egypt (5), Eritrea (1), Iran (1), Iraq (7), Israel (2), Kuwait (22), Lebanon (9), Libya (8), Mali (1), Mauritania (1), Morocco (4), Niger (8), Oman (23), Qatar (2), Saudi Arabia (20), Somalia (1), South Sudan (3), Sudan (3), Syria (2), UAE (18), and Yemen (1). Russia's Rosneft is mentioned in this context eight times – of this, four times in the description of relations with Lebanon, and once each with Egypt, Iraq, Qatar, and UAE. Lukoil, the second biggest Russian oil company, has six mentions (Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Oman, Saudi Arabia, UAE). Zarubezhneft is mentioned twice (Egypt and Oman) and Gazprom, the most important Russian gas producer, nine times (3 in Kuwait, 2 in UAE, 1 each in Bahrain, Iraq, Libya, and Oman).

One of the areas of economic cooperation promoted by Russia in its relations with MENA countries is the peaceful use of nuclear energy. Discussions on these questions are reported in relations between Russia and Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Libya, Mali, Niger, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Tunisia, and UAE. Rosatom is mentioned nine times – three times in Mali, twice in Egypt, and once each in Kuwait, Niger, Oman, and Saudi Arabia (MID, 2026).

Developmental aid has also been an important tool from the Russian power repertoire employed in pursuit of its strategic interests in the MENA region. There are three areas that Russian authorities

tend to prioritize when it comes to the use of this tool: the former Soviet republics and unrecognized entities on the territory of the post-Soviet republics, including the two non-recognized entities on the territory of Ukraine, the Luhansk People's Republic (LNR) and the Donetsk People's Republic (DNR); the Global South, of which the MENA region is an important part; and, finally, countries that are perceived as Russia's friends, such as Mongolia or Serbia (Sayamov, 2023).

When it comes to the use of various economy-related practices in the Russian-Ukrainian context, there has been a clear conflict-escalation-related evolution in this sphere over the past decade. As mentioned earlier, until the outbreak of the conflict in 2014, there had been very strong economic ties between Russia and Ukraine. It is also worth mentioning in this context that the differing opinions on whom Ukraine should seek closer economic ties with were at the core of the political conflict in relations between Russia and Ukraine. The immediate result was a confrontation between the state controlled by Viktor Yanukovych and Ukrainian society, which ended in Yanukovych's ousting from power and indirectly led to the Russian annexation of Crimea and the outbreak of the conflict between post-Yanukovych Ukraine and Putin's Russia.

There were both direct and indirect economic consequences of the Russian aggression against Ukraine. In bilateral Russian-Ukrainian economic relations, the most visible consequence was the end of gas imports from Russia that Ukraine managed to implement in 2015. Other forms of economic exchange between the two countries have almost ceased to exist, especially after the outbreak of the full-scale conflict in February 2022. However, the most painful consequence of this war was the imposition of various political and economic restrictive measures on Russia by the collective West, which had been Russia's main economic partner until February 2022. These restrictive measures, including 20 EU packages, have targeted many Russian economic actors and interests, including the country's energy sector – the most important money-making machine of the Russian regime. In that sense, the war in Ukraine has forced Russia to adapt to a new situation in the economic sphere, for instance by implementing various types of practices related to **import substitution** and **circumventing sanctions**.

After the outbreak of the full-scale war in 2022, the most important economic tool employed in Russia's pursuit of strategic interests in Ukraine are **economic incentives for participation in the war**. According to a 2024 study (Savina, 2024), the Russian authorities offer very strong economic incentives to make people join the country's war effort in Ukraine. These incentives were introduced after the launching of the full-scale war in 2022, but the offered sums increased exponentially to motivate Russian citizens and others to join Russian troops in Ukraine. For instance, whereas in February 2024 Sverdlovsk Oblast offered 20,000 roubles to those who decided to sign a contract, by the end of 2024 the sum had reached 1.5 million roubles – which was still only half of the amount new soldiers could get when signing contracts in Belgorod and Nizhny Novgorod Oblasts (Inozemtsev, 2026; Laruelle, 2025).

Similar economic incentives were offered to those willing to consider joining Russian private security companies, such as Wagner, whose mercenaries fought both in Ukraine and MENA, and to those who wanted to join Russia's Africa Corps. Russia has also tried to recruit soldiers from other countries, including in the MENA region, offering them economic incentives.

Summing up

When mapping Russian power practices employed in the pursuit of objectives in various domains, it is important to note that these practices are often combined and have therefore what could be termed a ‘hybrid character’. Which practices are employed and how they are deployed depends on the importance assigned to the objectives by key Russian decision-makers. They seem to be very keen to bundle various instruments of power from their power repertoire to employ what could be labelled combined power practices, because this could facilitate the achievement of the strategic, operational, or tactical objectives they pursue. The detailed examination of Russian power practices in Ukraine and in the MENA region presented above, as well as other studies on Russian power practices, allow us to draw some more general conclusions on the Russian approach the idea of bundling various instruments of power. We argue that there are four generic approaches to the use of available instruments from the Russian power repertoire.

Binding is an approach characterized by Russia seeking to reduce the autonomy of a targeted actor by strengthening its dependence on Russia (Goddard & Nexon, 2016). This approach was employed when Russia built its energy relations with countries, so that they became more dependent on energy coming from Russia. A similar approach could be seen in Russia’s relations with client states, be it non-recognized entities in the post-Soviet space – such as Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Transnistria – or traditional Soviet and Russian clients in other parts of the world. A good example of continuity in the binding approach, combining various instruments of power going back to Soviet time, is that of providing young leaders from the Third World/Global South access to education in Russia. This has allowed the Soviet Union and Russia to build a network of actors with strong ties to Russia, which can be used to promote Russia’s political, economic, cultural, and other interests. This approach has also been very well demonstrated in Russia’s policy towards the MENA region, especially in the case of Syria, where Russia made the Assad regime very dependent on Russia’s military, political, and economic support. Similar elements of binding could also be found in Russia’s policy towards pre-2014 Ukraine, where Russia combined diplomatic, economic, financial, legal, cultural, intelligence, and military instruments of power to strengthen the strategic bonds between Russia and the changing leaderships in Ukraine.

Division, also known as *wedging*, is an approach characterized by Russia seeking to insert wedges between other actors to facilitate the achievement of its objectives (Goddard & Nexon, 2016). This division approach can also be traced back to the Soviet period, when the Soviet authorities used various types of instruments to drive wedges in Western societies to weaken the unity of the West and deepen polarization in countries that were treated as the main political, geopolitical, military, ideological, or economic rivals. Various Soviet influence campaigns targeted groups in Western societies – supported by ideological instruments that appealed to some leftist groups and played on anti-American feelings in many Western societies and in the Global South – are good examples of how this division approach was employed historically. Russia’s interest in influencing the outcomes of elections in countries like France, the UK, the United States, Germany, or Italy by providing covert and overt support to actors who would adopt more Russia friendly policies is another good example of this division game. Russia also used this division approach when it sold advanced S-400 air defence systems to NATO country Türkiye – a decision that caused deep rift in the Western alliance, weakening its internal cohesion. Weakening NATO is one of the key long-term strategic objectives of the Kremlin and they must have understood that this decision would have a devastating effect on the alliance. This may also explain why Russia tried to influence elections in the United States in 2016, bearing in mind signals coming from Donald Trump’s camp that revealed his deep scepticism towards cooperation within European NATO partners.

Pooling is an approach characterized by Russia bundling various power instruments to achieve its strategic, operational, and tactical objectives. Russia's approach to the construction of both Nord Stream pipelines is a very good example of how Russia has pooled its diplomatic, economic, communicational, financial, and other instruments of power from its repertoire to implement this strategic project. This aimed not only to reduce Russia's dependence on the transit of gas through Ukraine but also to make Germany more dependent on gas from Russia. At the same time, it aimed to have a wedging effect, contributing to growing tensions and polarization in the EU and NATO, where some other member states were very critical of this project.

Conversion is an approach where Russia seeks to transform one set of power resources into another. Russia's use of its economic instruments of power, such as energy resources, as a political lever is a good illustration of this approach. Selling gas and oil serves not only as an economic instrument but also as an instrument giving Russia political and geopolitical leverage. The Russian arms trade performs a similar role, as it not only generates economic benefits but has also a strong geopolitical dimension, creating a strong political and security link between Russia and buyers of Russian weapons, which gives Russia also a long-term geopolitical leverage.

Concluding remarks: have Russian power practices helped Russia achieve its strategic objectives in MENA and Ukraine?

The key question we asked in the introduction was whether the application by Russia of various power practices from its power repertoire in the pursuit of strategic objectives in the MENA region and Ukraine has resulted in Russia's achieving these objectives or not. In this context, it is important to understand that, in most situations, Russian efforts to achieve strategic, operational, and even tactical objectives combine various instruments of power from its power repertoire. Thus, it employs what could be labelled combined power practices to facilitate the achievement of these objectives. However, although expectations are high when employing these complex combined power practices, in which military instruments can play a crucial role, there is no guarantee that results will always be positive from the point of view of Russian decision-makers.

The balance and effective utilization of this broad array of power tools requires a great deal of coordination and effective performance by those who are to employ these complex power practices. A deep gap between what was planned and what was achieved can have a very detrimental effect on the perception of a state's overall power and influence on the global stage. Russia's "strategic record" in Ukraine and the MENA region is definitely very mixed.

When it comes to which factors have been key in driving Russian policy towards the MENA region, we argue that, in most general terms, Russian interests in the MENA region consisted of strengthening the perception of Russia as a great power with global interests engaged in a normative conflict with the collective West – whose policies in the region have, according to the Russian official anti-colonial narrative – caused problems for local actors. Russia implemented a policy of promoting Russian political, geopolitical, military, and economic interests in the region, in which personal relations play an important role. This is demonstrated by the fact that the Russian president has been involved in direct contacts with many MENA leaders. This policy was based on a flexible and partly transactional and opportunistic approach to cooperation with various actors, who often have conflicting interests in the MENA neighbourhood. For instance, Russia's decisive support for the Assad regime in Syria did not prevent Russia from developing relatively good relations with Israel and Türkiye, which also had high stakes in this conflict.

Russia used its engagement in the region for various purposes, including to maximize its strategic space for manoeuvre in the region and globally; to avoid entrapment and isolation at both the regional and global levels; and to hedge against various types of geopolitical, economic, and security risks stemming from the region, including challenges and risks related to terrorism.

Russia's future position in the MENA region will depend on Russia's ability to adjust to changing circumstances on the ground. Despite setbacks, such as the fall of the Assad regime in Syria in December 2024, Russia has been adapting to this new situation by refocusing its engagement to other parts of the region – such as Libya, which provides Russia with a good opportunity to control developments in this part of the MENA region. Russia has invested a lot of resources and prestige

and managed to impose some costs on its Western rivals, some of whom, like France, have been pushed out of the region.

In the case of the MENA region, Russia has apparently managed to achieve some of its strategic objectives. In strategic terms, the most important achievement was that Russia managed to return to the region as a great power that other regional and global powers had to reckon with. In operational terms, the most important achievement in the initial phase of the Russian engagement was that it saved the Assad regime, reinforcing Russia's image as a loyal ally and establishing it as a military power in the region. In addition, it forced regional actors (Israel, Türkiye, the Gulf states) to engage with Russia diplomatically due to its increasing leverage in the region. Russia's limited operation in Syria has strengthened, in the opinion of many observers, Russia's international position or at least the perception of Russia as a great power with not only regional but also global ambitions and capabilities.

The Putin regime's policy toward Ukraine has, since 2014, been driven by a combination of various factors. Officially, the main concerns justifying the full-scale attack on Ukraine in 2022 were related to a broad conception of security, including military security and what was presented in the Russian official narrative as a threat to the very existence of the Russian state as a sovereign and independent great power with which other powers had to reckon. Ukraine, which key Russian decision-makers treated as a *de facto* part of the Russian motherland, was at the same time viewed as an important element of the buffer zone separating Russia from what the regime presented as an increasingly unfriendly collective West, and as an area from which Western powers could project their military might against Russia.

There were also those who argued that another driver of the policy towards Ukraine between 2014 and 2022 was the concern for the security and stability of the Russian regime itself, whose legitimacy and even existence could be challenged by a successful democratic transformation of Ukraine.

In addition, there were clearly some identity-related concerns. One of these were the partly mutually exclusive perceptions of Ukraine as either a separate nation or as an extension of the Russian nation. The latter was strongly promoted by the Russian political leadership but rejected by Ukrainian leaders and many citizens of Ukraine, who were apparently willing to risk their lives to prove this wrong – as demonstrated by the stiff resistance to Russia's full-scale war launched in 2022.

Another important identity-related driver of Russian policy towards Ukraine was the interest in Russia being recognized as a member of the international club of great powers with special rights in a multipolar international system, including the right to have a special, and preferably exclusive, zone of interests – which Ukraine was to be an important and subordinate part of.

However, Russia's apparent inability to accomplish its Plan A in Ukraine – a swift victory on the battlefield and political control over its neighbour, which Putin labelled as the demilitarization and denazification of Ukraine – has had a very negative impact on the perception of Russia as a responsible and capable great power.

In an interview with *the Guardian* (Beaumont, 2022) conducted only a few months after the launching of the Russian war on Ukraine, Lawrence Freedman, a leading Western expert on strategy, said that the use of "military force had been quite good for Putin up until now". He made direct reference to its effective use by Russia in Chechnya, Crimea, Georgia, Syria, and the Donbas in 2014. However, Freedman was much more critical when it came to the use of military power by Russia in the first months of the war in Ukraine. He argued that Putin did not realise the gamble he was taking, because he thought Ukraine would crumble quite quickly. A key failure, in Freedman's view, was that

while Russian intelligence had widely infiltrated Ukraine, the key figures around Putin either did not understand Ukraine or acted as an echo chamber for him.

Although Russia has in recent years tried to adapt to a changing situation on the battlefield in Ukraine, the war has lasted longer than the Great Patriotic War fought by Russia against Nazi Germany, and Russia has still not been able to achieve its original strategic objectives. In a brief summing up of the situation in Ukraine at the end of 2025, RUSI experts concluded that Russia has failed in four of its five strategic objectives: the political subjugation of Ukraine; achieving Russia's economic sustainability; securing regime stability; and securing its international standing. Only in territorial control did it hold what they have labelled "a pyrrhic advantage" (Dixon & Beznosiuk, 2025).

It is possible that, in the longer run, Russia will be able to deal with this initial debacle in Ukraine by devising a more innovative approach to its use of military power in combination with other instruments of power. It could be the case that Russia is going to expand its power repertoire and employ other types of power practices to achieve its strategic objectives in Ukraine. However, what Russia will be able to achieve will also be strongly influenced by which power practices both Ukraine and other actors are willing and able to employ from their own power repertoires in order to persuade Russia to stop its aggression. The best and most desirable solution, from the point of view of war-torn Ukraine and the rest of the world, would be to make Russia learn a lesson that even a bad peace is better than a war that has incurred very high human and material costs on both Ukraine and Russia. It would also involve Russia learning how to use other instruments of power from its power repertoire in a less confrontational and costly way. Russia, should in other words, try to follow in the footsteps of other great powers of the past and learn how to adapt to new circumstances, amongst other by rejecting its Soviet and imperial past – including its propensity to use military instruments to address political questions.

Literature

- Abuamer, M. (2025). Disinformation as an authoritarian strategy: the populist playbook in Egypt and Tunisia. *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13530194.2025.2479515>
- Adamsky, D. (2023). *The Russian Way of Deterrence: Strategic Culture, Coercion, and War*. Stanford University Press.
- Adamsky, D. (2025). Quo Vadis, Russian Deterrence? Strategic Culture and Coercion Innovations. *International Security*, 49(3), 50–83. https://doi.org/10.1162/isec_a_00502
- Adler, E., & Pouliot, V. (2011). International Practices. *International Theory*, 3, 1–36.
- Aissaoui, A. (2025). Understanding Russian Strategic Culture through the ‘Special Operation’ in Ukraine – European and Global Implications. *Russian Politics*, 10(2), 274–296. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.30965/24518921-01002005>
- Ambrosio, T. (2005). The Third Side? The Multipolar Strategic Triangle and the Sino-Indian Rapprochement. *Comparative Strategy*, 24(5), 397–414.
- Ambrosio, T. (2007). Insulating Russia from a Colour Revolution: How the Kremlin Resists Regional Democratic Trends. *Democratization*, 14(2), 232–252. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510340701245736>
- Arbatov, A. (2000). Russia's National Security in a Multipolar World. *Mirovaya Ekonomika i Mezhdunarodnie Otnosheniya*(10), 21–28. (reprinted in Melville and Shackleina 2005, pp. 311–325)
- Art, R. J. (1980). To What Ends Military Power? *International Security*, 4(4), 3–35. <https://doi.org/10.1162/isec.4.4.3>
- Åtland, K. (2020). Destined for deadlock? Russia, Ukraine, and the unfulfilled Minsk agreements. *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 36(2), 122–139. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1060586X.2020.1720443>
- Auer, S. (2015). Carl Schmitt in the Kremlin: the Ukraine crisis and the return of geopolitics. *International Affairs*, 91(5), 953–968. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2346.12392>
- Averre, D. (2009). Competing Rationalities: Russia, the EU and the 'Shared Neighbourhood'. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 61(10), 1689–1713.
- Averre, D. (2024). *Russian strategy in the Middle East and North Africa*. Manchester University Press.
- Baev, P. (1996). The Russian Debate about the Near Abroad. In J. M. Godzimirski (Ed.), *Russia and Europe*. NUPI Report (Vol. 210).
- Baev, P. K. (2013). Sovereignty is the Key to Russia's Arctic Policy. *Strategic Analysis*, 37(4), 489–493. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09700161.2013.802523>
- Baev, P. K. (2019). Threat Assessments and Strategic Objectives in Russia's Arctic Policy. *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, 32(1), 25–40. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13518046.2019.1552662>
- Baldwin, D. A., & Kapstein, E. B. (2020). *Economic statecraft*. Princeton University Press.
- Balmaceda, M. M. (1998). Gas, Oil and the Linkages between Domestic and Foreign Policies: The Case of Ukraine. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 50(2), 257–286. <https://doi.org/10.2307/153460>
- Balmaceda, M. M. (2013). *The politics of energy dependency : Ukraine, Belarus, and Lithuania between domestic oligarchs and Russian pressure*. University of Toronto Press.
- Balzer, H. (2005). The Putin Thesis and Russian Energy Policy. *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 21(3), 210–225.
- Balzer, H. (2006). Vladimir Putin's Academic Writings and Russian Natural Resource Policy. *Problems of Post-Communism*, 55(1), 48–54.
- Bartosh, A. (2014a, 10 October). Gibridnye vojny v strategii SSHA i NATO. *Nezavisimoye Voennoye Obozreniye*.
- Bartosh, A. (2014b, 26 September). Zhestkaya i myagkaya sila. Strategicheskie prioritety NATO i natsional'naya bezopasnost' Rossii. *Nezavisimoye Voennoye Obozreniye*. http://nvo.ng.ru/concepts/2014-09-26/4_nato.html
- Bartosh, A. (2017, 7 April). Gibridnaya vojna stanovitsya novoj formoj mezhgosudarstvennogo protivoborstva. *Nezavisimoye Voennoye Obozreniye*. http://nvo.ng.ru/concepts/2017-04-07/1_943_gibryd.html
- Bauer, R., Gerber, A., Mueller, E. E., Weinbaum, C., Cormarie, P., Sotubo, O., Kong, W., Brown, A., Shostak, M., & Abdurahaman, Z. F. (2025). *Russian Mercenary and Paramilitary Groups in Africa: Examining Changes and Impacts Since the Wagner Rebellion*. RAND Corporation. <https://doi.org/10.7249/RR2613-1>
- BCG. (2022a). War in Ukraine: Initial view on Supply Chain Impact. Boston Consultancy Group.
- BCG. (2022b). War in Ukraine: View on Energy Impact. Boston Consultancy Group.
- Beachain, D. Ó. (2025). *Unfinished Empire. Russian Imperialism in Ukraine and the Near Abroad*. Agenda Publishing.

- Beaumont, P. (2022 21 August). Autocracies tend to make catastrophic decisions. That's the case with Putin, interview with Lawrence Freedman. *The Guardian*
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/aug/21/lawrence-freedman-autocracies-tend-to-make-catastrophic-decisions-thats-the-case-with-putin>
- Bechev, D., Popescu, N., & Secieru, S. (2021). *Russia rising Putin's foreign policy in the Middle East and North Africa*. I.B. Tauris.
- Bechev, D. P. N. S. S. (2021). *Russia rising Putin's foreign policy in the Middle East and North Africa*. I.B. Tauris.
- Becker, M. E., Cohen, M. S., Kushi, S., & McManus, I. P. (2016). Reviving the Russian empire: the Crimean intervention through a neoclassical realist lens. *European Security*, 25(1), 112–133.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09662839.2015.1084290>
- Black, C. E. (1962). The Pattern of Russian Objectives. In I. Lederer (Ed.), *Russian Foreign Policy. Essays in Historical Perspective* (pp. 3–38). Yale University Press.
- Blackwill, R. D., & Harris, J. M. (2017). *War by Other Means. Geoeconomics and Statecraft*. Harvard University Press.
- Bladaitė, N., & Šešelgytė, M. (2020). Building a Multiple 'Security Shelter' in the Baltic States after EU and NATO Accession. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 72(6), 1010–1032.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2020.1785396>
- Blumenau, B. (2022). Breaking with convention? Zeitenwende and the traditional pillars of German foreign policy. *International Affairs*, 98(6), 1895–1913. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iia166>
- Bøås, M., & Strazzari, F. (2025). Borders Ending Nowhere: The Geopolitical Imaginaries and Practices of Russia's Spheres of Interest in Africa. *Geopolitics*, 1–25.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2025.2585297>
- Bolt, N., Shapir, V. M., Fridman, O., Winter, C., Daukšas, V., Venclauskienė, L., Urbanavičiūtė, K., Kubs, J., Michalowska, A., & Levin, M. (2023). *Kremlin Communication Strategy for Russian Audiences Before and After the Full-Scale Invasion of Ukraine*. NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence.
https://stratcomcoe.org/publications/download/Kremlin_Communication_Strategy_DIGITAL.pdf
- Borshchevskaya, A. (2020). The Role of the Military in Russian Politics and Foreign Policy Over the Past 20 Years. *Orbis*, 64(3), 434–446. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.orbis.2020.05.006>
- Boulègue, M. (2018). La guerre dans le Donbass trois ans après les Accords de Minsk 2. *Revue défense nationale*, 809, 107–112.
- Boulègue, M., & Royal Institute of International Affairs. (2019). Russia's military posture in the Arctic : managing hard power in a 'low tension' environment.
https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/2019-06-28-Russia-Military-Arctic_0.pdf
- Boyle, M. J. (2016). The Coming Illiberal Order. *Survival*, 58(2), 35–66.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2016.1161899>
- Briant, E. L., & Bakir, V. (2024). Situating the digital Influence Industry. In E. L. Briant & V. Bakir (Eds.), *Routledge Handbook of the Influence Industry* (pp. 35–50). Routledge.
- Brudny, Y. M., & Finkel, E. (2011). Why Ukraine Is Not Russia: Hegemonic National Identity and Democracy in Russia and Ukraine. *East European Politics & Societies*, 25(4), 813–833.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0888325411401379>
- Bueger, C., & Gadinger, F. (2014). *International Practice Theory. New Perspectives*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Bukkvoll, T., Malmjöf, T., & Makienko, K. (2017). The defence industry as a locomotive for technological renewal in Russia: are the conditions in place? *Post-Communist Economies*, 29(2), 232–249.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14631377.2016.1267967>
- Buklemishev, O. V. (2024). Russian economic development under forceful defense spending growth [10.32609/j.ruje.10.141382]. *Russian Journal of Economics*, 10(4), 319–331.
<https://doi.org/10.32609/j.ruje.10.141382>
- Cadier, D. (2014). Eastern Partnership vs Eurasian Union? The EU–Russia Competition in the Shared Neighbourhood and the Ukraine Crisis. *Global Policy*, 5, 76–85. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1758-5899.12152>
- Cafruny, A., Fouskas, V. K., Mallinson, W. D. E., & Voynitsky, A. (2023). Ukraine, Multipolarity and the Crisis of Grand Strategies. *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 25(1), 1–21.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/19448953.2022.2084881>
- Carrere d'Encausse, H. (1975). *La Politique Soviétique au Moyen Orient, 1955-1975*. National Political Science Foundation.
- Casier, T. (2013). The EU–Russia Strategic Partnership: Challenging the Normative Argument. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 65(7), 1377–1395. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2013.824137>

- Casier, T. (2024). The war against Ukraine and the transformation of the political regime in Russia. *Contemporary Politics*, 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13569775.2025.2514697>
- Casula, P. (2014). The Road to Crimea: Putin's Foreign Policy Between Reason of State, Sovereignty and Bio-Politics *Russian Analytical Digest*, 148(2 May 2014), 2–5.
- Cengiz, S. (2020). Assessing the Astana Peace Process for Syria: Actors, Approaches, and Differences. *CONTEMPORARY REVIEW OF THE MIDDLE EAST*, 7(2), 200–214, Article 2347798920901876. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2347798920901876>
- Charap, S. (2013). Russia, Syria and the doctrine of intervention. *Survival*, 55(1), 35–41.
- Charap, S. (2016). Russia's Use of Military Force as a Foreign Policy Tool Is There A Logic? In *PONARS Policy Memos* (Vol. 443).
- Charap, S., Geist, E., Frederick, B., Drennan, J. J., Chandler, N., & Kavanagh, J. (2021). *Russia's Military Interventions: Patterns, Drivers, and Signposts*. RAND Corporation. <https://doi.org/10.7249/RR-A444-3>
- Charap, S., & Radchenko, S. (2024). The Talks That Could Have Ended the War in Ukraine. *Foreign Affairs*. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/ukraine/talks-could-have-ended-war-ukraine>.
- Chebankova, E. (2017). Russia's idea of the multipolar world order: origins and main dimensions. *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 33(3), 217–234. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1060586X.2017.1293394>
- Clunan, A. L. (2019). Russia's Pursuit of Great Power Status and Security. In R. E. Kanet (Ed.), *Routledge Handbook of Russian Security* (pp. 3–16). Routledge.
- Conley, H. A., Mina, J., Stefanov, R., & Vladimirov, M. (2016). *The Kremlin Playbook. Understanding Russian Influence in Central and Eastern Europe*. CSIS and CSD and Rowman & Littlefield. https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/1601017_Conley_KremlinPlaybook_Web.pdf
- Connolly, R. (2018). *Russia's Response to Sanctions: How Western Economic Statecraft is Reshaping Political Economy in Russia*. Cambridge University Press.
- Connolly, R., Sendstad, C., & Royal Institute of International, A. (2017). Russia's role as an arms exporter : the strategic and economic importance of arms exports for Russia. <https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/files/chathamhouse/publications/research/2017-03-20-russia-arms-exporter-connolly-sendstad.pdf>
- Cooley, A. (2017). *Whose Rules, Whose Sphere? : Russian Governance and Influence in Post-Soviet States*. https://carnegieendowment.org/files/6302017_AlexanderCooley_WhoseRules.pdf
- Cooley, A. (2019). Ordering Eurasia: The Rise and Decline of Liberal Internationalism in the Post-Communist Space. *Security Studies*, 28(3), 588–613.
- Cooley, A., & Nexon, D. H. (2020). *Exit from hegemony : the unraveling of the American global order*. Oxford University OPress.
- Cornut, J. (2017). *The Practice Turn in International Relations Theory*. Oxford University Press.
- Covington, S. R., & Ryan, K. (2015). The Meaning of Russia's Campaign in Syria. In *Paper, Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs* (pp. 10). Harvard: Harvard Kennedy School.
- Cross, S. (2015). NATO–Russia security challenges in the aftermath of Ukraine conflict: managing Black Sea security and beyond. *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 15(2), 151–177. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14683857.2015.1060017>
- Czuperski, M., & Atlantic Council of the United States. (2016). *Distract, Deceive, Destroy : Putin at War in Syria*. The Atlantic Council of the United States. <http://publications.atlanticcouncil.org/distract-deceive-destroy/assets/download/ddd-report.pdf>
- D'Anieri, P. J. (1999). *Economic interdependence in Ukrainian-Russian relations*. SUNY Press.
- Dabrowski, M. (2022). Thirty years of economic transition in the former Soviet Union: Macroeconomic dimension *Russian Journal of Economics*, 8(2), 95–121. <https://doi.org/10.32609/j.ruje.8.90947>
- Dabrowski, M. (Ed.). (2023). *The Contemporary Russian Economy. A Comprehensive Analysis*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Dajani, D., Gillespie, M., & Crilley, R. (2019). Differentiated visibilities: RT Arabic's narration of Russia's role in the Syrian war. *Media, War & Conflict*, 1750635219889075. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1750635219889075>
- Dalsjö, R., Berglund, C., & Jonsson, M. (2019). *Bursting the Bubble? Russian A2/AD in the Baltic Sea Region: Capabilities, Countermeasures, and Implications*. FOI Swedish Defence Research Agency. <https://www.foi.se/rest-api/report/FOI-R--4651--SE>
- Darczewska, J. (2014). The anatomy of Russian information warfare. The Crimean operation, a case study. In *OSW Point of View* (Vol. 42). Warsaw: OSW.

- Darczewska, J. (2015). The devil is in the details. Information warfare in the light of Russia's military doctrine. In *Point of View* (Vol. 50). Warsaw: OSW.
- Darczewska, J. (2016). Russia's armed forces on the information war front. Strategic documents. In *OSW Studies* (Vol. 57). Warsaw: OSW.
- Darczewska, J. (2019). *Between overt disinformation and covert practice. The Russian special services' game*. Centre for Eastern Studies OSW. <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/point-view/2019-03-28/between-overt-disinformation-and-covert-practice>
- Darczewska, J., & Żochowski, P. (2015). Russophobia in the Kremlin's strategy. A weapon of mass destruction. In *Point of View* (Vol. 56). Warsaw: OSW.
- Darczewska, J., & Żochowski, P. (2017). Active measures. Russia's key export. In *Point of View*. Warsaw: OSW.
- Davydov, V. (2011). BRICS in the Emerging Polycentric World. *International Affairs*, 57(4), 111–118.
- Dawisha, K. (2014). *Putin's kleptocracy : who owns Russia?* Simon&Schuster.
- de Haas, M., Gaberščik, E., Jenkins, T., & Kumar, A. (2020). Russia's Military Action in Syria Driven by Military Reforms. *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, 33(2), 292–299. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13518046.2020.1756705>
- Defense Intelligence Agency. (2017). *Russia Military Power. Building a Military to Support Great Power Aspirations*. Defense Intelligence Agency DIA. <https://www.dia.mil/Portals/27/Documents/News/Military%20Power%20Publications/Russia%20Military%20Power%20Report%202017.pdf?ver=2017-06-28-144235-937>
- Deni, J. R., & Nielsen, E. (2024). Ukraine in NATO: Beyond the 'Irreversible Path'. *Survival*, 66(5), 127–146. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2024.2403220>
- Dibb, P. (1989). Is Soviet Military Strategy Changing? In F. Heisbourg (Ed.), *The Changing Strategic Landscape* (pp. 18–30). Macmillan Education UK. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-11129-9_3
- Diesen, G. (2020). The Crisis in Liberalism and Renewal of Ideological Conflicts. In G. Diesen & A. Lukin (Eds.), *Russia in a Changing World* (pp. 105–122). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Divsallar, A. (Ed.). (2024). *Struggle for Alliance Russia and Iran in the Era of War in Ukraine*. I.B. Tauris.
- Dixon, W., & Beznosiuk, M. (2025). Russia is Losing – Time for Putin's 2026 Hybrid Escalation. In *Commentary: RUSI Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies*.
- Doboš, B. (2024). The Wolf I Feed: Typology of the Wagner Group in Africa. *Russian Politics*, 9(4), 555–578. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.30965/24518921-00904005>
- Dörfler, T. (2025). The Wagner Group, Yevgeny Prigozhin, and PMC–State Relations in Russian Foreign Policy: Explaining the Enlistment of Private Military Companies During the Ukraine War. *Politische Vierteljahresschrift*, 66(1), 189–211. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11615-024-00559-6>
- Doroshenko, G., & Shelkovnikov, A. (2025). Russia's Policy Towards the Gulf: A Factor in Promoting 'Global Majority' Organisations. *Asian Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies*, 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1080/25765949.2025.2588108>
- Dragneva, R., & Wolczuk, K. (2012). Russia, the Eurasian Customs Union and the EU: Cooperation, Stagnation or Rivalry? *Chatham House Briefing Paper*. http://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/public/Research/Russia%20and%20Eurasia/0812b_p_dragnevawolczuk.pdf
- Dragneva, R., & Wolczuk, K. (2016). Between Dependence and Integration: Ukraine's Relations With Russia. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 68(4), 678–698. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2016.1173200>
- Driedger, J. J. (2023). Risk acceptance and offensive war: The case of Russia under the Putin regime. *Contemporary Security Policy*, 44(2), 199–225.
- Dück, E., & Stahl, B. (2025). Introduction: The Russia–Ukraine War as a Formative Event in Global Security Policy? *Politische Vierteljahresschrift*, 66(1), 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11615-025-00603-z>
- Embassy of the Russian Federation in Central African Republic. (2025). *Istoricheskiye materialy (Historical materials)*. Embassy of the Russian Federation in Central African Republic. Retrieved 20 August 2025 from https://rca.mid.ru/ru/press-centre/istoricheskiye_materialy/
- Emerson, M. (Ed.). (2001). *The Elephant and the Bear. The European Union, Russia and their Near Abroads*. Centre for European Policy Studies.
- Eslami, M. (2022). Iran's Drone Supply to Russia and Changing Dynamics of the Ukraine War. *Journal for Peace and Nuclear Disarmament*, 5(2), 507–518. <https://doi.org/10.1080/25751654.2022.2149077>
- Evans, G., & Newnham, J. (1998). *The Penguin Dictionary of International Relations* Penguin Books.
- Fasola, N., & Averre, D. (2026). Current Russian perspectives on strategic stability and deterrence through the prism of strategic culture. *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 1–37. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390.2025.2602557>

- Fedorov, A. (2017). *Informatsionnaia bezopasnost' : politicheskaya teoriya i diplomaticheskaya praktika (Information security: political theory and diplomatic practice)* MGIMO.
- Fedorov, Y. E. (2013). Continuity and change in Russia's policy toward Central and Eastern Europe. *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, 46(3), 315–326. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.postcomstud.2013.06.003>
- Ferguson, I. (2018). Between New Spheres of Influence: Ukraine's Geopolitical Misfortune. *Geopolitics*, 23(2), 285–306. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2017.1402299>
- Ferguson, I., & Akopov, S. (2021). The Politics of Russian Revisionism: Diplomacy of a Worldview, 2011–14. *Russian Politics*, 6(4), 453–477. <https://doi.org/10.30965/24518921-00604004>
- Fink, A. L., & Olicker, O. (2020). Russia's Nuclear Weapons in a Multipolar World: Guarantors of Sovereignty, Great Power Status & More. *Daedalus*, 149(2), 37–55. https://doi.org/10.1162/DAED_a_oi788
- Finkel, E. (2024). *Intent to Destroy: Russia's Two-Hundred-Year Quest to Dominate Ukraine*. Basic Books.
- Flake, L. E. (2017). Contextualizing and Disarming Russia's Arctic Security Posture. *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, 30(1), 17–29. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13518046.2017.1271647>
- Flanagan, S. J., Binnendijk, A., Chindea, I. A., Costello, K., Kirkwood, G., Massicot, D., & Reach, C. (2020). *Russia, NATO, and Black Sea Security*. RAND Corporation. <https://doi.org/10.7249/RR357-1>
- Forsberg, T. (2014). Status conflicts between Russia and the West: Perceptions and emotional biases. *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, 47(3), 323–331. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.postcomstud.2014.09.006>
- Frederick, B., Charap, S., Boston, S., Flanagan, S. J., Mazarr, M. J., Moroney, J. D. P., & Mueller, K. P. (2022). *Pathways to Russian Escalation Against NATO from the Ukraine War*. RAND Corporation. <https://doi.org/10.7249/PEA1971-1>
- Freedman, L. (2023). The Russo-Ukrainian War and the Durability of Deterrence. *Survival*, 65(6), 7–36. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2023.2285598>
- Freedman, L., & Williams, H. (2023). Russia and the Ukraine crisis, 2013–23. *Adelphi series*, 61(493–495), 97–126. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19445571.2021.2260271>
- Freedman, R. O. (1975). *Soviet Policy towards the Middle East since 1970*. Prager.
- Fridman, O. (2020). 'Information War' as the Russian Conceptualisation of Strategic Communications. *The RUSI Journal*, 165(1), 44–53. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03071847.2020.1740494>
- Gaaze, K. (2014). Poker dlya odnogo. Kto i kak v Rossii prinimaet resheniya, kotorye opredelyayut sud'bu 140-millionnoj strany. *New Times*. <http://www.newtimes.ru/articles/detail/86540>
- Gaaze, K. (2025). *Kuda dreyfuyut diktatury? Rossiyskaya avtokratiya i vtorzhenie v Ukrainu (Where Are Dictatorships Drifting? Russian Autocracy and the Invasion of Ukraine)*. Meduza.
- Gel'man, V. (2025). *Russia's Gamble: The Domestic Origins of Russia's Attack on Ukraine*. Polity.
- Giles, K. (2015). The Next Phase of Russian Information Warfare. In. Riga: NATO StratCom COE.
- Giles, K. (2018 forthcoming). *Moscow Rules. How Russia Sees the West and Why It Matters*. Brookings Institution Press.
- Goddard, S. E., MacDonald, P. K., & Nexon, D. H. (2019). Repertoires of statecraft: instruments and logics of power politics. *International Relations* 33(2), 304–321. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0047117819834625>
- Goddard, S. E., & Nexon, D. H. (2016). The Dynamics of Global Power Politics: A Framework for Analysis. *Journal of Global Security Studies*, 1(1), 4–18. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jogss/ogv007>
- Godzimirski, J. M. (2005). Russia and NATO. Community of values or community of interests? In J. Hedenskog, V. Konnander, B. Nygren, I. Oldberg, & C. Pursiainen (Eds.), *Russia as a Great Power. Dimensions of Russian Security* (pp. 57–80). Routledge.
- Godzimirski, J. M. (Ed.). (2013). *Russian Energy in a Changing World: What is the Outlook for the Hydrocarbons Superpower*. Ashgate.
- Godzimirski, J. M. (2016). Russia–EU energy relations: from complementarity to distrust?. In J. M. Godzimirski (Ed.), *EU leadership in Energy and Environmental Governance? Global and Local Challenges and Responses* (pp. 89–112). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Godzimirski, J. M. (2021a). Russian Grand Strategy and Energy Resources: The Asian Dimension. In E. Buchanan (Ed.), *Russian Energy Strategy in the Asia-Pacific* (pp. 57–83). Australian National University Press. <https://press.anu.edu.au/publications/russian-energy-strategy-asia-pacific>
- Godzimirski, J. M. (2021b). Russian Strategic Communication Towards Europe: Goals, Means and Measures. In H. Mölder, V. Sazonov, A. Chochia, & T. Kerikmäe (Eds.), *The Russian Federation in Global Knowledge Warfare. Influence Operations in Europe and Its Neighbourhood* (pp. 51–78). Springer.
- Godzimirski, J. M. (2022). Energy, climate change and security: The Russian strategic conundrum. *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, 13(1), 16–31. <https://doi.org/10.1177/18793665211054518>

- Godzimirski, J. M. (2024). Why Russian Energy Interests Cannot Match Iranian Ones. In A. Divsallar (Ed.), *Struggle for Alliance Russia and Iran in the Era of War in Ukraine*. I.B. Tauris.
- Godzimirski, J. M., Myhre, M. H., & Onderco, M. (2024). Caught in the liberal pragmatic trap? How political parties viewed energy dependence on Russia in three European countries 2012–2022. *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, 18793665241253281. <https://doi.org/10.1177/18793665241253281>
- Golts, A. (2018). *Military Reform and Militarism in Russia* (t. b. M. Kipp, Trans.). Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Gomza, I. (2022). Putin's Inevitable Invasion. *Journal of Democracy*, 33(3), 23–30. <https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/articles/putins-inevitable-invasion/>
- Götz, E. (2017). Putin, the State, and War: The Causes of Russia's Near Abroad Assertion Revisited. *International Studies Review*, 19(2), 228–253. <https://doi.org/10.1093/isr/viw009>
- Götz, E. (2022). Near Abroad: Russia's Role in Post-Soviet Eurasia. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 74(9), 1529–1550. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2022.2133086>
- Gould-Davies, N. (2023). The Wagner Revolt: Implications for Russia, Lessons for the West. *Survival*, 65(4), 25–30. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2023.2239053>
- Grissom, A. R., Charap, S., Cheravitch, J., Hanson, R., Massicot, D., Mouton, C. A., & Reimer, J. R. (2022). *Russia's Growing Presence in Africa: A Geostrategic Assessment*. RAND Corporation. <https://doi.org/10.7249/RR4399>
- Gustafson, T. (2025). *Perfect Storm: Russia's Failed Economic Opening, the Hurricane of War and Sanctions, and the Uncertain Future*. Oxford University Press.
- Haines, J. R. (2015). The Geopolitics of Russia's Networked Energy Infrastructure. *Orbis*, 59(4), 557–599. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.orbis.2015.08.010>
- Hanley, M., & Kuzichkin, A. (2021). *Russian Media Landscape: Structures, Mechanisms, and Technologies of Information Operations*. NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence. https://stratcomcoe.org/publications/download/Report_Russian_Media_Landscape_2021.pdf
- Hartmann, M., Adler-Nissen, R., & Golovchenko, Y. (2018). State, media and civil society in the information warfare over Ukraine: citizen curators of digital disinformation. *International Affairs*, 94(5), 975–994. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiy148>
- Haukkala, H. (2008). The Russian Challenge to EU Normative Power: The Case of European Neighbourhood Policy. *International Spectator*, 43(2), 35–48.
- Headley, J. (2012). Is Russia Out of Step with European Norms? Assessing Russia's Relationship to European Identity, Values and Norms Through the Issue of Self-Determination. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 64(3), 427–447. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2012.661924>
- Hedenskog, J., Konnander, V., Nygren, B., Oldberg, I., & Pursiainen, C. (Eds.). (2005). *Russia as a Great Power. Dimensions of Security Under Putin*. Routledge.
- Heine, J. (2024). Active non-alignment, the sovereignty paradox and the Russia-Ukraine war. *Contemporary Security Policy*, 45(4), 698–707. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13523260.2024.2413337>
- Helmus, T. C., Bodine-Baron, E., Radin, A., Magnuson, M., Mendelsohn, J., Marcellino, W., Bega, A., & Winkelman, Z. (2018). *Russian Social Media Influence: Understanding Russian Propaganda in Eastern Europe*. RAND Corporation. <https://doi.org/10.7249/RR2237>
- Herpen, M. v. (2016). *Putin's Propaganda Machine : Soft Power and Russian Foreign Policy*. Rowman & Littlefield.
- Herspring, D. R., & McDermott, R. N. (2010). Serdyukov Promotes Systemic Russian Military Reform. *Orbis*, 54(2), 284–301. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.orbis.2010.01.004>
- Hill, F., & Stent, A. (2022). The World Putin Wants: How Distortions About the Past Feed Delusions About the Future. *Foreign Affairs*, September/October online <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/russian-federation/world-putin-wants-fiona-hill-angela-stent>
- Hof, F. C., Inozemtsev, V., Garfinkle, A., & Ross, D. (2016). The Kremlin's Actions in Syria. Origins, Timing and Prospects. The Atlantic Council.
- Homanyuk, M., & Ashutosh, I. (2024). Inscribing Ukraine: The symbolic dimensions of Russian reterritorialization through war. *Political Geography*, 109, 103052. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2024.103052>
- Howard, G. E., & Czekaj, M. (Eds.). (2019). *Russia's military strategy and doctrine*. The Jamestown Foundation.
- Hunter, R. (2022). The Ukraine Crisis: Why and What Now? *Survival*, 64(1), 7–28. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2022.2032953>
- Ingman, C. (2024). *Great power ambitions and proxy wars : Sudan as a battlefield between Russia and Ukraine* (Series 3: Working Papers no.39, Issue.

- https://www.doria.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/190578/Ingman_Great%20power%20ambitions%20and%20proxy%20wars_online.pdf
- Inozemtsev, V. (2026). *Deathonomics: The Social, Political, and Economic Costs of War in Russia* (Russie.Eurasie.Visions, No. 141). IFRI. https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/2026-02/ifri_inozemtsev_deathonomics_en_2026.pdf
- John, K., & Marina, L. (2022). The First Fifteen Years of the BRICS. *INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS RESEARCH JOURNAL*, 17(INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS RESEARCH JOURNAL), 7–30. <https://iorj.hse.ru/en/2022-17-2/663278687.html>
- Jonavicius, L., Delcour, L., Dragneva, R., & Wolczuk, K. (2019). *Russian Interests, Strategies, and Instruments in the Common Neighbourhood* (EU-Strat Working Papers, Issue. EU-Strat. <http://eu-strat.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/EU-STRAT-Working-Paper-No.-16.pdf>
- Jonsson, O., & Seely, R. (2015). Russian Full-Spectrum Conflict: An Appraisal After Ukraine. *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, 28(1), 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13518046.2015.998118>
- Kaczmarek, M. (2017a). Non-western visions of regionalism: China's New Silk Road and Russia's Eurasian Economic Union. *International Affairs*, 93(6), 1357–1376. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iix182>
- Kaczmarek, M. (2017b). Two Ways of Influence-building: The Eurasian Economic Union and the One Belt, One Road Initiative. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 69(7), 1027–1046. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2017.1373270>
- Kamp, K.-H. (2023). The Zeitenwende at Work: Germany's National Security Strategy. *Survival*, 65(3), 73–80. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2023.2218698>
- Kanet, R. E. (Ed.). (2007). *Russia: Re-emerging Great Power*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Kaplan, S. S., Tatu, M., Robinson, T. W., Zimmerman, W., Zagoria, D., S., Zagoria, J. D., Jabber, P., Kolkowicz, R., Rubinstein, A. Z., Hall, D. K., & Legum, C. (1981). *Diplomacy of Power: Soviet Armed Forces as a Political Instrument*. Brookings Institution. <https://books.google.no/books?id=Gym5QgAACAAJ>
- Karaganov, S. (2022). Ot ne-Zapada k Mirovomu bol'shinstvu. *Rossiia v global'noy politike*, 20(5), 6–18.
- Karaganov, S., Kramarenko, A., & Trenin, D. (2023). *Politika Rossii v otnoshenii Mirovogo bol'shinstva* Higher School of Economics https://globalaffairs.ru/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/doklad_politika-rossii-v-otnoshenii-mirovogo-bolshinstva.pdf
- Karasin, G. (2008). Russia and the Compatriots. *International Affairs. A Russian Journal of World Politics, Diplomacy and International Relations*, 54(1), 86–94.
- Kasamara, V., & Sorokina, A. (2012). Imperial ambitions of Russians. *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, 45(3-4), 279–288. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.postcomstud.2012.07.002>
- Kashin, V., Yankova, A., & Kondakova, K. (2025). The Russian Approach to Geoeconomics: Russian Economic Statecraft since the Beginning of the War in Ukraine. In Vinod K. Aggarwal, and Tai Ming Cheung (eds). *The Oxford Handbook of Geoeconomics and Economic Statecraft* (pp. 431–454). Oxford University Press.
- Kipp, J. W. (1993). *Central European security concerns : bridge, buffer, or barrier?* F. Cass.
- Kirkham, K. (2022). *The Political Economy of Sanctions: Resilience and Transformation in Russia and Iran*. Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-04055-9_1
- Klimentov, V. (2025). Foreign Threat(s): Vladimir Putin's Securitisation of Separatism, Terrorism and the West. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 77(9), 1434–1457. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2025.2572815>
- Kofman, M. (2019). Drivers of Russian Grand Strategy In. Stockholm: Stockholm Free World Forum.
- Kofman, M., Fink, A., Gorenburg, D., Chesnut, M., Edmonds, J., Waller, J., Stricklin, K., & Bendett, S. (2021). *Russian Military Strategy: Core Tenets and Operational Concepts* CNA Research Memorandum, Issue. https://www.cna.org/CNA_files/PDF/Russian-Military-Strategy-Core-Tenets-and-Operational-Concepts.pdf
- Kokoshin, A. (2002). What Is Russia: A Superpower, a Great Power or a Regional Power? *International Affairs (Moscow)*, 48(6), 100–125.
- Kolstø, P. (1993). The New Russian Diaspora: Minority Protection in the Soviet Successor States. *Journal of Peace Research*, 30(2), 197–217.
- Kolstø, P., & Blakkisrud, H. (2016). *The New Russian Nationalism. Imperialism, Ethnicity and Authoritarianism 2000–15*. Edinburgh University Press.
- Kolstoe, P. (1995). *Russians in the Former Soviet Republics*. Hurst and Company.
- Kommersant. (2025). General Sergey Beseda: chem izvesten ochen' problemnyy dlya Ukrainy chelovek. *Kommersant*. <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/6279790>
- Konyshov, V., & Sergunin, A. (2014). Is Russia a revisionist military power in the Arctic? *Defense & Security Analysis*, 30(4), 323–335. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14751798.2014.948276>

- Kortukov, D. (2020). 'Sovereign Democracy' and the Politics of Ideology in Putin's Russia. *Russian Politics*, 5(1), 81–104. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.30965/24518921-00501004>
- Kotkin, S. (2016). Russia's Perpetual Geopolitics. Putin Returns to the Historical Pattern. *Foreign Affairs*, 95(May/June), 2–9. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/ukraine/2016-04-18/russias-perpetual-geopolitics>
- Kozhanov, N. (Ed.). (2022). *Russian Foreign Policy Towards the Middle East. New Trends, Old Traditions*. Hurst and Company.
- Kragh, M., & Åsberg, S. (2017). Russia's strategy for influence through public diplomacy and active measures: the Swedish case. *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 1–44. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390.2016.1273830>
- Krickovic, A. (2014). Imperial nostalgia or prudent geopolitics? Russia's efforts to reintegrate the post-Soviet space in geopolitical perspective. *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 30(6), 503–528. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1060586X.2014.900975>
- Krickovic, A., & Bratersky, M. (2016). Benevolent hegemon, neighborhood bully, or regional security provider? Russia's efforts to promote regional integration after the 2013–2014 Ukraine crisis. *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, 57(2), 180–202. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15387216.2016.1211026>
- Kukkola, J. (2025). *Russia's Adaptation in the War against Ukraine (2022–2025)* (Vol. 41). National Defence University, Department of Warfare. <http://www.doria.fi/handle/10024/73990>
- Kurbatov, A. (2025). *Zakharova rasskazala ob otkrytom Ukrainoy vtorom fronte v Afrike*. Lenta.ru. Retrieved 22 March 2026 from <https://lenta.ru/news/2025/06/19/zaharova-rasskazala-ob-otkrytom-ukrainoy-vtorom-fronte-v-afrike/>
- Kurth, J. (2022). From the Baltic to the Black Sea: NATO'S Drive to the East Versus Russia's Sphere of Influence. *Orbis*, 66(4), 577–596. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.orbis.2022.08.012>
- Kuzio, T., & Wawrzonek, M. (2025). *Russia's War on Ukraine. The Four Roots of Putin's Invasion*. Cambridge University Press.
- Kyle, J. (2019). Contextualizing Russia and the Baltic States. *Orbis*, 63(1), 104–115. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.orbis.2018.12.004>
- Larsen, K. P. (2025). *Symphony in the Shadows: The Wagner Group and the Russian State University of Copenhagen*. https://research.diis.dk/files/27686675/Karen_Philippa_Larsen_PhD_2025.pdf
- Larson, D. W., & Shevchenko, A. (2010). Status Seekers : Chinese and Russian Responses to U.S. Primacy. *International Security*, 34(4), 63–95. <https://doi.org/10.2307/40784562>
- Larson, D. W., & Shevchenko, A. (2014). Russia says no: Power, status, and emotions in foreign policy. *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, 47(3), 269–279. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.postcomstud.2014.09.003>
- Larsson, R. (2006). Russia's Energy Policy: Security Dimensions and Russia's Reliability as an Energy Supplier. In *FOI Scientific Report*. Stockholm: FOI - Swedish Defence Research Agency.
- Laruelle, M. (2025). *War as Social Elevator. The Socioeconomic Impact of Russian Military Keynesianism* (RUSSIE.EURASIE.VISIONS, No. 139) IFRI. https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/2025-06/ifri_laruelle_rev_139_us_2025.pdf
- Lavrov, A. (2018). Russian Military Reforms from Georgia to Syria. In. Washington DC: CSIS.
- Lebedeva, M. A. (2004). International Relations Studies in the USSR/Russia: Is there a Russian National School of IR Studies? *Global Society*, 18(3), 263–278.
- Leijonhielm, J., & Larsson, R. L. (2004). *Russia's Strategic Commodities: Energy and Metals as Security Levers*. FOI Swedish Defence Research Agency.
- Levi, I., Wickenden, L., Katinas, P., & Raghunandan, V. (2026). *Fourth year of full-scale invasion: Russian fossil fuel revenues tank to 27% below pre-invasion levels* T. C. f. R. o. E. a. C. A. (CREA). https://energyandcleanair.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/CREA_RU_Analysis_Four-years-of-invasion_24.02.2026.pdf
- Lieven, A. (1997). Restraining NATO: Ukraine, Russia, and the West. *Washington Quarterly*, 20(4), 55–77. <Go to ISI>://WOS:A1997XX27200004
- Light, M. (2015). Russian Foreign Policy Themes in Official Documents and Speeches: Tracing Continuity and Change. In D. Cadier & M. Light (Eds.), *Russia's Foreign Policy Ideas, Domestic Politics and External Relations* (pp. 13–29). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Liik, K. (2018). Winning the Normative War With Russia. An Eu-Russia Power Audit. In. London: European Council On Foreign Relations.
- Limonier, K., & Laruelle, M. (2021). Russia's African Toolkit: Digital Influence and Entrepreneurs of Influence. *Orbis*, 65(3), 403–419. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.orbis.2021.06.005>

- Locoman, E., & Papa, M. (2022). Transformation of alliances: Mapping Russia's close relationships in the era of multivectorism. *Contemporary Security Policy*, 43(2), 274–307. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13523260.2021.1994692>
- Loftus, S., & Kanet, R. E. (2019). The Russian challenge to the liberal world order. In R. E. Kanet (Ed.), *Routledge Handbook of Russian Security* (pp. 58–72). Routledge.
- Lomagin, N. (2004, Mar 17, 2004). Persistent Factors of Russian Foreign Policy: Ideas of Hegemony and the Stabilisation of Frontiers. The annual meeting of the International Studies Association, Le Centre Sheraton Hotel, Montreal, Quebec, Canada.
- Lovotti, C. h., Ambrosetti, E. T., Hartwell, C. A., & Chmielewska, A. (Eds.). (2020). *Russia in the Middle East and North Africa: Continuity and Change*. Routledge.
- Lukin, A. (2015). Consolidation of the Non-Western World During the Ukrainian Crisis: Russia and China, SCO and BRICS. *International Affairs. A Russian Journal of World Politics, Diplomacy and International Relations*, 61(2), 30–46.
- Lukin, A. (2020). Russia and the Changing World Order: In Search of Multipolarity. In G. Diesen & A. Lukin (Eds.), *Russia in a Changing World* (pp. 39–69). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Lukin, V. (2021). A Multilevel World and a Flat Worldview: A Realist and Progressive Synthesis for Russia. *Russian Politics*, 6(4), 435–452. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.30965/24518921-00604003>
- Lukov, V. (2011). BRICS: A Factor of Global Importance *International Affairs*, 57(4), 104–110.
- Luttwak, E. N. (1983). *The Grand Strategy of the Soviet Union*. St. Martin's Press.
- MacFarlane, S. N. (2006). The 'R' in BRICs: is Russia an emerging power? *International Affairs*, 82(1), 41–57.
- Makarkin, A. (2011). The Russian Social Contract and Regime Legitimacy. *International Affairs*, 87(6), 1459–1475.
- Makarychev, A. S. (2008). Russia's Search for International Identity Through the Sovereign Democracy Concept. *International Spectator*, 43(2), 49–63.
- Malek, M. (2015). Kampf dem Terror? Russlands Militärintervention in Syrien. *Osteuropa*, 65(11/12), 3–22.
- Malinova, O. (2014). Obsession with status and resentment: Historical backgrounds of the Russian discursive identity construction. *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, 47(3), 291–303. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.postcomstud.2014.07.001>
- Malinova, O. (2022). Legitimizing Putin's Regime: The Transformations of the Narrative of Russia's Post-Soviet Transition. *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, 55(1), 52–75. <https://doi.org/10.1525/j.postcomstud.2022.55.1.52>
- Malle, S. (2016). Economic sovereignty. An agenda for Militant Russia. *Russian Journal of Economics*, 2(2), 111–128. <https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ruje.2016.06.001>
- Manfredi Firmian, F. (2025). Russia's state capture strategy in Africa, from Wagner to the Africa corps. *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 36(4), 783–812. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09592318.2024.2432832>
- Mankoff, J. (2011). *Russian Foreign Policy: The Return of Great Power Politics*. Rowman & Littlefield.
- Mankoff, J. (2022a). *Empires of Eurasia: How imperial legacies shape international security*. Yale University Press.
- Mankoff, J. (2022b). Unravelling the enigma: Russian foreign policy in the twenty-first century. *Routledge Handbook of Diplomacy and Statecraft* (pp. 71–81). Routledge.
- Marten, K. (2019a). Russia's Back in Africa: Is the Cold War Returning? *The Washington Quarterly*, 42(4), 155–170. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0163660X.2019.1693105>
- Marten, K. (2019b). Russia's use of semi-state security forces: the case of the Wagner Group. *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 35(3), 181–204. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1060586X.2019.1591142>
- Massicot, S. & Boston, S. (2017). *The Russian Way of Warfare. A Primer*. RAND Corporation. <https://doi.org/10.7249/PE231>
- Matthews, M., Demus, A., Treyger, E., Posard, M. N., Reininger, H., & Paul, C. (2021). *Understanding and Defending Against Russia's Malign and Subversive Information Efforts in Europe*. RAND Corporation. <https://doi.org/10.7249/RR3160>
- McCauley, K. N. (2016). *Russian Influence Campaigns against the West. From the Cold war to Putin*. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform.
- MccGwire, M. (1987). *Military objectives in Soviet foreign policy*. Brookings Institution.
- Mearsheimer, J. J. (2014). Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West's Fault. The Liberal Delusions That Provoked Putin. *Foreign Affairs*(September/October) at <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/141769/john-j-mearsheimer/why-the-ukraine-crisis-is-the-wests-fault>).
- Menkiszak, M. (2017). Russia's best enemy. Russian policy towards the United States in Putin's era. Warsaw: OSW.

- Menon, R. (2001). Structural constraints on Russian diplomacy. *Orbis*, 45(4), 579–596.
[https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/S0030-4387\(01\)00093-X](https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/S0030-4387(01)00093-X)
- Michalski, A., & Nilsson, N. (2019). Resistant to Change? The EU as a Normative Power and Its Troubled Relations with Russia and China. *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 15(3), 432–449.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/fpa/ory008>
- Michel, C. (2025). Narrating the war: Analyzing Russia's narratives for its invasion of Ukraine. In. Washington D.C.: Atlantic Council.
- MID. (2026). *Rossiya v sisteme mezhdunarodnykh otnosheniy*. Ministry of Foreign Affairs RF.
<https://mid.ru/ru/maps/>
- MID Algeria. (2026). *Alzhir*. Ministry of Foreign Affairs RF. Retrieved 22 March 2026 from
<https://mid.ru/ru/maps/dz/>
- MID Bahrain. (2026). *Bakhrein*. Ministry of Foreign Affairs RF. Retrieved 26 April 2026 from
<https://mid.ru/ru/maps/bh/>
- MID CAR. (2025). *Tsentral'noafrikanskaya Respublika* Ministry of Foreign Affairs RF. Retrieved 22 March 2026 from <https://mid.ru/ru/maps/cf>
- MID Chad. (2026). *Irak*. Ministry of Foreign Affairs RF. Retrieved 22 March 2026 from
<https://mid.ru/ru/maps/td/>
- MID Djibouti. (2026). *Dzhibuti*. Ministry of Foreign Affairs RF. Retrieved 22 March 2026 from
<https://mid.ru/ru/maps/dj/>
- MID Egypt. (2026). *Egipet*. Ministry of Foreign Affairs RF. Retrieved 22 March 2026 from
<https://mid.ru/ru/maps/eg/>
- MID Irak. (2026). *Irak*. Ministry of Foreign Affairs RF. Retrieved 22 March 2026 from
<https://mid.ru/ru/maps/iq/>
- MID Iran. (2026). *Iran*. Ministry of Foreign Affairs RF. Retrieved 22 March 2026 from
<https://mid.ru/ru/maps/ir/>
- MID Israel. (2026). *Izrael*. Ministry of Foreign Affairs RF. Retrieved 22 March 2026 from
<https://mid.ru/ru/maps/il/>
- MID Jordan. (2026). *Yordaniya*. Ministry of Foreign Affairs RF. Retrieved 22 March 2026 from
<https://mid.ru/ru/maps/jo/>
- MID Kuwait. (2026). *Kuveyt*. Ministry of Foreign Affairs RF. Retrieved 22 March 2026 from
<https://mid.ru/ru/maps/kw/>
- MID Oman. (2026). *Oman*. Ministry of Foreign Affairs RF. Retrieved 22 March 2026 from
<https://mid.ru/ru/maps/om/>
- MID Saudi Arabia. (2026). *Saudovskaya Araviya*. Ministry of Foreign Affairs RF. Retrieved 22 March 2026 from
<https://mid.ru/ru/maps/sa/>
- MID Somalia. (2026). *Somali*. Ministry of Foreign Affairs RF. Retrieved 22 March 2026 from
<https://mid.ru/ru/maps/so/>
- MID Tunisia. (2026). *Tunissiya*. Ministry of Foreign Affairs RF. Retrieved 22 March 2026 from
<https://mid.ru/ru/maps/tn/>
- MID Türkiye. (2026). *Turtsiya*. Ministry of Foreign Affairs RF. Retrieved 22 March 2026 from
<https://mid.ru/ru/maps/tr/>
- MID UAE. (2026). *OAE*. Ministry of Foreign Affairs RF. Retrieved 22 March 2026 from
<https://mid.ru/ru/maps/ae/>
- Miskimmon, A., & O'Loughlin, B. (2017). Russia's Narratives of Global Order : Great Power Legacies in a Polycentric World. *Politics and Governance*, 5(3), 111–120.
- Miskimmon, A., O'Loughlin, B., & Roselle, L. (2017). *Forging the world : strategic narratives and international relations*. University of Michigan Press.
- Mohamad, F. A. (2023). *The Astana Process Six Years On: Peace or Deadlock in Syria?*.
<https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/2023/08/the-astana-process-six-years-on-peace-or-deadlock-in-syria?lang=en>
- Molchanov, M. A. (2019). Russian security strategy and the geopolitics of energy in Eurasia. In R. E. Kanet (Ed.), *Routledge Handbook of Russian Security* (pp. 181–191). Routledge.
- Monaghan, A. (2006). 'Calmly critical': Evolving Russian views of US hegemony. *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 29(6), 987–1013. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390601016451>
- Nabers, D., & Stengel, F. A. (2025). Crisis and Change in Post-Zeitenwende German Security Policy. *Politische Vierteljahresschrift*, 66(1), 19–44. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11615-024-00584-5>

- Narbone, L. (Ed.). (2024). *Russia's Soft Power Strategies in the MENA Region and Africa*. Luiss Mediterranean Platform. <https://mp.luiss.it/archives/russias-soft-power-strategies-in-the-mena-region-and-africa/#2>.
- Neumann, I. B. (2002). Returning Practice to the Linguistic Turn: The Case of Diplomacy. *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 31, 627 – 651.
- OEC. (2026). *The Observatory of Economic Complexity*. The Observatory of Economic Complexity. <https://oec.world/en>
- Olech, A., Smoleń, J., & Wojciechowska, A. (2026). *Poland as a Target of Russian Hybrid Attacks*. Defence 24, at <https://defence24.com/geopolitics/report-poland-as-a-target-of-russian-hybrid-attacks>
- Oliker, O., Chivvis, C. S., Crane, K., Tkacheva, O., & Boston, S. (2015). *Russian Foreign Policy in Historical and Current Context: A Reassessment*. RAND Corporation at <http://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PE144.html>
- Omelycheva, M. Y. (2019). Russia's regional and global counterterrorism strategies. How Moscow's vision of the new global order affects its approach to terrorism. In R. E. Kanet (Ed.), *Routledge Handbook of Russian Security* (pp. 266–276). Routledge.
- Orttung, R., Perović, J., Pleines, H., & Schröder, H.-H. (Eds.). (2008). *Russia's Energy Sector between Politics and Business*. Forschungsstelle Osteuropa an der Universität Bremen. <http://www.laenderanalysen.de/pages/arbeitspapiere/fsoAP92.pdf>.
- Päiväläinen, A., & Rajala, K. (2020). *Competitiveness of Russia's Defence Industry: Weak but Steady* Analysis of Economic Indicators (Working Papers Issue. <https://www.doria.fi/handle/10024/177052>
- Pancevski, B. (2026). *The Nord Stream Conspiracy. The Inside Story of the Explosions That Shook the World*. Penguin. <https://www.penguin.co.uk/books/474845/the-nord-stream-conspiracy-by-pancevski-bojan/9781804958377>
- Pankova, L. V., Kazennov, S. Y., & Gusarova, O. V. (Eds.). (2019). *Voenno-ekonomicheskoe razvitie v svete global'nykh transformatsii. Sbornik materialov konferentsii*. IMEMO RAN. https://www.imemo.ru/files/File/ru/publ/2019/2019_10.pdf.
- Parker, J. W. (2015). *Understanding Putin Through a Middle Eastern Looking Glass*. National Defence University Press.
- Parker, J. W. (2017). *Putin's Syrian Gambit: Sharper Elbows, Bigger Footprint, Stickier Wicket*. National Defense University Press.
- Pedro, N. D., Manoli, P., Sukhankin, S., Tsakiris, T., & Fayos, F. G. D. L. (2017). Facing Russia's strategic challenge: Security developments from the Baltic to the Black Sea. European Parliament Directorate-General For External Policies.
- Perović, J. (2024). *Fuel and Power: Energy, Trade, and Russian Foreign Relations from Lenin to Putin*. Cambridge University Press.
- Perović, J., Orttung, R. W., & Wenger, A. (2009). *Russian energy power and foreign relations : implications for conflict and cooperation*. Routledge.
- Petersen, M. B., & Pincus, R. (2021). Arctic Militarization and Russian Military Theory. *Orbis*, 65(3), 490–512. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.orbis.2021.06.011>
- Pettyjohn, S. L., & Wasser, B. (2019). *Competing in the Gray Zone: Russian Tactics and Western Responses*. RAND Corporation. <https://doi.org/10.7249/RR2791>
- Phillips, C. (2016). *The Battle for Syria: International Rivalry in the New Middle East*. Yale University Press.
- Pieper, M. (2020). Russkiy Mir: The Geopolitics of Russian Compatriots Abroad. *Geopolitics*, 25(3), 756–779. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2018.1465047>
- Pigman, L. (2019). Russia's Compatriots: Instrument or Responsibility? *The RUSI Journal*, 164(2), 24–35. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03071847.2019.1621480>
- Pouliot, V. (2008). The Logic of Practicality: A Theory of Practice of Security Communities. *International Organization*, 62(2), 257–288. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40071867>
- President of Russia. (2022). *Security Council meeting 21 February 2022* Administration of the President of the Russian Federation. Retrieved 10 November 2023 from <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67825>
- President of Russia. (2026). *Geografia.Mir*. President Administration. <http://www.kremlin.ru/catalog/countries>
- President of the Russian Federation. (2014a). *Obrashcheniye Prezidenta Rossiyskoy Federatsii 18 marta 2014 goda*. President Administration. Retrieved 26 March 2026 from <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20603>

- President of the Russian Federation. (2014b). *Voyennaya doktrina Rossiyskoy Federatsii (The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation)*. Moscow: President of the Russian Federation Retrieved from <http://www.scrf.gov.ru/security/military/document129/>
- President of the Russian Federation. (2016). *Kontseptsiya vneshnei politiki Rossiiskoi Federatsii (Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation)* Moscow: President of the Russian Federation Retrieved from <http://www.scrf.gov.ru/security/international/document25/>
- President of the Russian Federation. (2021). *Strategiya natsionalnoy bezopasnosti Rossiyskoy Federatsii (Strategy of National Security of the Russian Federation)* Moscow: President of the Russian Federation Retrieved from <http://static.kremlin.ru/media/events/files/ru/QZw6hSk5z9gWq0pID1ZzmR5cER0g5tZC.pdf>
- President of the Russian Federation. (2022). *Address by the President of the Russian Federation on 24 February 2022*. Retrieved 23 March 2026 from <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67843>
- President of the Russian Federation. (2023). *Kontseptsiya vneshnei politiki Rossiiskoi Federatsii (Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation)*. Presidential Administration Retrieved from https://mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/fundamental_documents/1860586/
- President of the Russian Federation. (2026). *PAFA Poslaniye prezidenta Federal'nomu Sobraniyu (the President's address to the Federal Assembly)*. President Administration Retrieved from <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/60250>
- Priego, A. (2019). NATO enlargement. A security dilemma for Russia? In R. E. Kanet (Ed.), *Routledge Handbook of Russian Security* (pp. 257–265). Routledge.
- Prudnikov, L. A., & Kuzmenko, A. V. (2023). *Primeneniye nevoyennykh mer v interesakh obespecheniya voyennoy bezopasnosti Rossii (Application of non-military measures in the interests of ensuring military security of Russia)*. *Voyennaya Mysl*(1). <https://vm.ric.mil.ru/Stati/item/461891/>
- Putin, V. (2015). *Interview to Vladimir Solovyov* [Interview]. Office of the President of Russia. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/50482>
- Putin, V. (2021). *On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians*. kremlin.ru. Retrieved 20 October 2022 from en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/66181
- Pynnöniemi, K., & Kari, M. J. (2016). Russia's New Information Security Doctrine: Guarding a besieged cyber fortress. In *FIIA Comment*. Helsinki: Finnish Institute of International Affairs.
- Pynnöniemi, K., & Rácz, A. (2016). Fog of Falsehood: Russian Strategy of Deception and the Conflict in Ukraine. In *FIIA Report*. Helsinki: Finnish Institute of International Affairs.
- Rácz, A. (2015). Russia's Hybrid War in Ukraine: Breaking the Enemy's Ability to Resist. In *FIIA Report*. Helsinki: Finnish Institute of International Affairs.
- Radchenko, S. (2024). *To Run the World: The Kremlin's Cold War Bid for Global Power*. Cambridge University Press.
- Radin, A., & Reach, C. B. (2017). *Russian Views of the International Order* RAND Corporation. https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR1800/RR1826/RAND_RR1826.pdf
- Radvanyi, J., & Laruelle, M. (2023). *Russia. Great Power, Weakened State (2nd edition)*. Bloomsbury.
- Ragsdale, H. (Ed.). (1993). *The Imperial Russian foreign policy*. Cambridge University Press.
- Rak, J. (2017). Russia, 'Near Abroad', and the West: Struggling with the Research Field of Geopolitical Cultures. *Geopolitics*, 22(4), 984–990. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2017.1321440>
- Ramani, S. (2023). *Russia in Africa: Resurgent Great Power or Bellicose Pretender?* C.Hurst&Co.
- Reach, C., Blanc, A. A., & Geist, E. (2022). *Russian Military Strategy: Organizing Operations for the Initial Period of War*. RAND Corporation. <https://doi.org/10.7249/RR1233-1>
- Reisinger, H., & Gol'c, A. (2014). Hybrid War in Ukraine Russia's Intervention and the Lessons for the NATO. *Osteuropa*, 64(9-10), 119–+. <Go to ISI>://WOS:000348688100009
- Reshetnikov, A. (2018). *The Evolution of Russia's Great Power Discourse: A conceptual History of Velikaya Derzhava* [PhD, Central European University Press]. Budapest. <http://dsps.ceu.edu/sites/pds.ceu.hu/files/attachment/basicpage/478/reshetnikovanatolyir-dissertation2018.pdf>
- Reshetnikov, A. (2024). *Chasing Greatness: On Russia's Discursive Interaction with the West over the Past Millennium*. University of Michigan Press.
- Ribakova, E., & Risinger, L. (2025). The Russian economy in 2025: Between stagnation and militarization. In. Washington D.C.: Atlantic Council.
- Rid, T. (2020). *Active Measures: The Secret History of Disinformation and Political Warfare*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

- Rieber, A. J. (2007). How Persistent Are Persistent Factors? In R. Legvold (Ed.), *Russian Foreign Policy in 21st Century. The Shadow of the Past* (pp. 205–271). Columbia University Press.
- Robinson, L., Helmus, T. C., Cohen, R. S., Nader, A., Radin, A., Magnuson, M., & Migacheva, K. (2019). *Modern Political Warfare. Current Practices and Possible Responses*. Rand Corporation.
https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR1700/RR1772/RAND_RR1772.pdf
- Rogers, J., & Tyushka, A. (2017). 'Hacking' Into The West: Russia's 'Anti-Hegemonic' Drive And The Strategic Narrative Offensive. *Defence Strategic Communications*, 2, 35–60.
<http://www.stratcomcoe.org/download/file/fid/7671>
- Rogov, K. (2016). "Crimean Syndrome". *Russian Politics & Law*, 54(1), 28–54.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10611940.2015.1160710>
- Rosen, S. J., & Rand, C. (1980). *Soviet strengths and vulnerabilities in the Middle East*.
- Roubanis, I. (2025). *The Relevance of the Astana Process in Post-Assad Syria*. Retrieved 25 March 2026 from
<https://www.stimson.org/2025/the-relevance-of-the-astana-process-in-post-assad-syria/>
- Royce, D. P. (2024). The History of Russian Diplomatic Opposition to NATO Expansion into the Baltics, Ukraine, and Georgia. *Russian Politics*, 9(3), 366–401. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.30965/24518921-00903003>
- Rühle, M. (2014). NATO Enlargement and Russia: Discerning Fact from Fiction. *American Foreign Policy Interests*, 36(4), 234–239. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10803920.2014.947879>
- Rumer, E. B. (2007). Chapter Five: The Military Factor. *The Adelphi Papers*, 47(390), 67–76.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/05679320701707243>
- Rywwin, M. (2003). Russia and the Near Abroad Under Putin. *American Foreign Policy Interests: The Journal of the National Committee on American Foreign Policy*, 25(1), 3–12.
- Ryzhkov, V. (2024). Putin's Ideological State. *Survival*, 66(5), 49–54.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2024.2403215>
- Saivet, C. R. (2012). The ties that bind? Russia's evolving relations with its neighbors. *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, 45(3-4), 401–412. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.postcomstud.2012.07.010>
- Sakwa, R. (2019). BRICS and Sovereign Internationalism. *Strategic Analysis*, 43(6), 456–468.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09700161.2019.1669899>
- Sarotte, M. E. (2010). Not One Inch Eastward? Bush, Baker, Kohl, Genscher, Gorbachev, and the Origin of Russian Resentment toward NATO Enlargement in February 1990. *Diplomatic History*, 34(1), 119–140.
- Savina, S. (2024). *Srednjaja regionalnaja vyplata za zakljutsjenije kontrakta s Minoborony vyroslo za god bolee tsjem v pjat raza..* Retrieved 26 March 2026 from
<https://istories.media/stories/2024/12/02/srednyaya-regionalnaya-viplata-za-zaklyuchenie-kontrakta-s-minoboroni-viroslo-za-god-bolee-chem-v-5-raz/?tztc=1>
- Sayamov, Y. (2023). 'Inostrannaya pomoshch' kak instrument vneshney politiki'. *Mezhdunarodnaya Zhizn*, 12.
<https://interaffairs.ru/jauthor/material/2923>
- Schmitt, O. (2019). How to challenge an international order: Russian diplomatic practices in multilateral security organisations. *European Journal of International Relations*, 26(3), 922–946.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066119886024>
- Schnaubelt, C. M. (2024). *How to write a strategy*. NATO Defense College.
<https://www.ndc.nato.int/download/how-to-write-a-strategy/>
- Security Council Report. (2024). UN Security Council Working Methods. The Veto. *Security Council Report*(13 September). <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/un-security-council-working-methods/the-veto.php>
- Security Council Report. (2026a). *Arria-Formula Meetings*. Security Council Report. Retrieved 30 April 2026 from https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/working_methods_arria_formula_meetings.pdf
- Security Council Report. (2026b). *UN Documents for Ukraine*. Retrieved 25 March 2026 from <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/un-documents/ukraine/>
- Shagina, M. (2022). Russia's Demise as an Energy Superpower. *Survival*, 64(4), 105–110.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2022.2103261>
- Shakleina, T. (2002). *Rossia i SSha v novom mirovom poryadke. Diskussi v politiki-akademicheskikh soobshchestvakh Rossii i SSha (1991-2002) (Russia and the United States in the New World Order. Debates in Russian and American Political and Academic Communities)*. ISKRAN.
http://www.obraforum.ru/russia_us.htm
- Sherr, J. (2013). *Hard Diplomacy and Soft Coercion: Russia's Influence Abroad*. Chatham House.

- Shleifer, A., & Treisman, D. (2005). A Normal Country: Russia After Communism. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 19(1 Winter), 151–174. <http://www.nber.org/papers/w10057.pdf>
- Simons, G. (2014). Russian public diplomacy in the 21st century: Structure, means and message. *Public Relations Review*, 40(3), 440–449. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2014.03.002>
- Skak, M. (2019). Russia and the BRICS. In (pp. 150–164). <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429507946-9>
- Sladden, J., Wasser, B., Connable, B., & Grand-Clement, S. (2017). *Russian Strategy in the Middle East*. RAND Corporation. <https://doi.org/10.7249/PE236>
- Smirnov, P. (2014). Ssha, NATO i perspektivy "bolshoy Yevropy" v svete krizisa na Ukraine. *Ssha.Kanada. Ekonomika.Politika.Kultura*(12), 3–20.
- Smith, H. (2019). Military might as a basis for Russian Great Power identity. In R. E. Kanet (Ed.), *Routledge Handbook of Russian Security* (pp. 46–57). Routledge.
- Smith, M. A. (2013). Russia and multipolarity since the end of the Cold War. *East European Politics*, 29(1), 36–51. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21599165.2013.764481>
- Smith, M. A. (2025). NATO, Russia and the failure of “partnership” before 2022. *Defence Studies*, 25(4), 779–799. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14702436.2025.2562980>
- Snetkov, A., Giles, K., Galeotti, M., & Pynnöniemi, K. (2015). Russia and Regime Security. In *Russian Analytical Digest: Zürich Center for Security Studies ETH-Zürich*.
- Sokolov, B., Inglehart, R. F., Ponarin, E., Vartanova, I., & Zimmerman, W. (2018). Disillusionment and Anti-Americanism in Russia: From Pro-American to Anti-American Attitudes, 1993–2009. *International Studies Quarterly*, 62(3), 534–547. <https://doi.org/10.1093/isq/sqy013>
- Spearin, C. (2025). Russia’s Wagner Group and the sustainment of authoritarianism in Africa: Implications for China at home and abroad. *Contemporary Security Policy*, 46(3), 497–521. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13523260.2025.2474763>
- Starr, S. F., Cornell, S. E., Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, & Silk Road Studies, P. (Eds.). (2014). *Putin's grand strategy : the Eurasian Union and its discontents*. Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program. <http://www.isdp.eu/images/stories/isdp-main-pdf/2014-starr-cornell-putins-grand-strategy-the-eurasian-union-and-its-discontents.pdf>.
- Stent, A. (2018). What Drives Russian Foreign Policy? In J. R. Deni (Ed.), *Current Russia Military Affairs: Assessing and Countering Russian Strategy, Operational Planning, and Modernization* (pp. 6–9). U.S. Army War College. <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/GOVPUB-D101-PURL-gpo125367/pdf/GOVPUB-D101-PURL-gpo125367.pdf>
- Stent, A. (2025). The CRINK: Inside the new bloc supporting Russia’s war against Ukraine. In. Washington D.C.: Atlantic Council.
- Stronski, P. (2019). Late to the Party: Russia’s Return to Africa. In *Carnegie Working Paper*. Brussels: Carnegie Europe.
- Stronski, P., & Sokolsky, R. (2020). Multipolarity in Practice: Understanding Russia’s Engagement With Regional Institutions. In: Carnegie Endowment.
- Suslov, M. (2020). *Geopolitical Imagination. Ideology and Utopia in Post-Soviet Russia*. Ibidem Press.
- Suslov, M. (2024). *Putinism – Post-Soviet Russian Regime Ideology*. Routledge.
- Sutela, P. (2012). *The Political Economy of Putin’s Russia*. Routledge <http://www.ewidgetsonline.net/dxreader/Reader.aspx?token=210623b1f99d41da9ac741251d9c80af&rand=1984615133&buyNowLink=&page=&chapter=>
- Sutyagin, I., & Bronk, J. (2017). I. Military Force as a Tool of Russian Foreign Policy. *Whitehall Papers*, 89(1), 10–42. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02681307.2017.1338465>
- Szostek, J. (2014). Hard Diplomacy and Soft Coercion. Russia's Influence Abroad. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 66(7), 1205–1206. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2014.934146>
- Szostek, J. (2018). The Mass Media and Russia’s “Sphere of Interests”: Mechanisms of Regional Hegemony in Belarus and Ukraine. *Geopolitics*, 23(2), 307–329. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2017.1402298>
- Taagepera, R. (1988). An Overview of the Growth of the Russian Empire. In M. Rywkin (Ed.), *Russian Colonial Expansion to 1917* (pp. 1–7). Mansel.
- Taagepera, R. (1997). Expansion and Contraction Patterns of Large Polities: Context for Russia. *International Studies Quarterly*, 41(3), 475–504.
- Tilly, C. (1993). *Coercion, Capital, and European States, AD 990-1992*. Blackwell.
- Tilly, C. (2008). *Contentious Performances*. Cambridge University Press.
- Tkachenko, S. L. (2019). Coercive diplomacy in Russian security strategy. In R. E. Kanet (Ed.), *Routledge Handbook of Russian Security* (pp. 133–143). Routledge.

- Toal, G. (2017). *Near Abroad. Putin, the West and the Contest over Ukraine and the Caucasus*. Oxford University Press.
- Trenin, D. (2004). Russia and global security norms. *The Washington Quarterly*, 27(2), 61–77. <https://doi.org/10.1162/016366004773097713>
- Trenin, D. (2009). Russia's Spheres of Interest, not Influence. *The Washington Quarterly*, 32(4), 3–22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01636600903231089>
- Trenin, D. (2017a). Here's a Breakdown of Russia's Foreign Policy Goals. *Russia in Global Affairs*. <https://eng.globalaffairs.ru/articles/heres-a-breakdown-of-russias-foreign-policy-goals/>
- Trenin, D. (2017b). *What Is Russia Up To in the Middle East?* Polity.
- Trenin, D. (2018). Russia and Ukraine: From Brothers to Neighbors. *Russia in Global Affairs*. <https://eng.globalaffairs.ru/articles/russia-and-ukraine-from-brothers-to-neighbors/>
- Trenin, D. (2022). How Russia Must Reinvent Itself to Defeat the West's 'Hybrid War'. Russia's Very Existence Is Under Threat. The Country Has to Take Serious Measures to Ensure It Survives. *Russia in Global Affairs*. <https://eng.globalaffairs.ru/articles/russia-must-reinvent-itself/>
- Trenin, D. (2024). It's Time for Russia to Give the West a Nuclear Reminder. *Russia in Global Affairs*. <https://eng.globalaffairs.ru/articles/nuclear-reminder/>
- Treyger, E., Rhoades, A. L., Vest, N., Beauchamp-Mustafaga, N., Cohen, R. S., & Clark, A. (2023). *Assessing the Prospects for Great Power Cooperation in Europe and the Middle East*. RAND Corporation. <https://doi.org/10.7249/RR-A597-3>
- Tsygankov, A. (2009). *Russophobia. Anti-Russian Lobby and American Foreign Policy*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Tsygankov, A. (2019). *Russia and America. The Asymmetric Rivalry* Polity.
- Tsygankov, A. P. (2004). *Whose World Order? Russia's Perception of American Ideas after the Cold War*. University of Notre Dame Press.
- Tsygankov, A. P. (2014). The frustrating partnership: Honor, status, and emotions in Russia's discourses of the West. *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, 47(3), 345–354. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.postcomstud.2014.09.004>
- Tsygankov, A. P. (2018). The sources of Russia's fear of NATO. *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, 51(2), 101–111. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.postcomstud.2018.04.002>
- Tsygankov, A. P., & Parker-Bulgakova, E. M. (2024). Coercive Diplomacy Gone Wrong: Interactive Leader Psychology and Russia's Invasion of Ukraine. *Russian Politics*, 9(3), 342–365. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.30965/24518921-00903002>
- Tyushka, A. (2022). Weaponizing narrative: Russia contesting EUrope's liberal identity, power and hegemony. *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, 30(1), 115–135. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14782804.2021.1883561>
- Valeriano, B., & Maness, R. C. (2015). *Russia's coercive diplomacy : energy, cyber, and maritime policy as new sources of power*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Vasara, A. (2020). *Theory of Reflexive Control. Origins, Evolution and Application in the Framework of Contemporary Russian Military Strategy* (Finnish Defence Studies, Issue 22). National Defence University at https://www.doria.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/176978/Vasara_FDS22_Theory%20of%20Reflexive%20Control%20%28web%29-1.pdf
- Velikaya, A. A., & Simons, G. (2020). *Russia's public diplomacy : evolution and practice*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Ven Bruusgaard, K. (2016). Russian Strategic Deterrence. *Survival*, 58(4), 7–26. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2016.1207945>
- Vendil Pallin, C. (2015). Russia challenges the West in Ukraine. *Journal on Baltic Security*, 1(1), 14–25. <http://www.baltdefcol.org/files/files/JOB5/JOB5.01.1.pdf>
- Voskressenski, A. D. (2016). The Role of the West in Evolving World Order, and Russian Politics. *Russian Politics & Law*, 54(5-6), 421–460. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10611940.2016.1296303>
- Weilandt, R. (2025). Anti-Western sentiments, disinformation and the reactions to Russia's war on Ukraine in the Global South. *Defence Studies*, 25(4), 909–926. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14702436.2025.2588578>
- Weisser, U. (2011). Partner or Threat? Russia and NATO. *Internationale Politik*, 66(6), 107–111. <Go to ISI>://WOS:000297774600018
- Werth, P. W. (2025). *How Russia Got Big. A Territorial History*. Bloomsbury.
- Wesslau, F., & Wilson, A. (2016). Russia 2030: A Story of Great Power Dreams and Small Victorious Wars. In *ECFR Policy Brief*. London: ECFR.
- Westerlund, F. (2021). *The role of the military in Putin's foreign policy: An overview of current research* (FOI Report, Issue. <https://www.foi.se/rest-api/report/FOI-R--5070--SE>

- Wezeman, P. D., Djokic, K., George, M., Hussain, Z., & Wezeman, S. T. (2024). Trends in International Arms Transfers, 2023. In: SIPRI.
- Whelan, J. G. (1979). *Soviet Diplomacy and Negotiating Behavior: Emerging New Context for U.S. Diplomacy* (Vol. 1). Committee on Foreign Affairs of the U.S. Congress.
- Whelan, J. G. (1988). *Soviet diplomacy and negotiating behavior, 1979-88: new tests for U.S. diplomacy*
- Wierzbowska-Miazga, A., & Menkiszak, M. (2014). *Russia to Ukraine: Subversion and diplomacy* (Analizy OSW) at <http://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2014-05-08/russia-to-ukraine-subversion-and-diplomacy>
- Wilhelmsen, J. (2019). Putin's Power Revisited: How Identity Positions and Great Power Interaction Condition Strategic Cooperation on Syria. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 71(7), 1091–1121.
- Wilhelmsen, J., & Hjermann, A. R. (2023). Misplaced Certainty: NATO Hostility as Collective Common Sense Within Russia's Leadership. <https://www.e-ir.info/pdf/102878>
- Wiśniewska, I., & Rudnik, F. (2025). *A Game of Cat and Mouse. How Russia Is Circumventing Sanctions?* (OSW Report April). Centre for Eastern Studies at <https://www.osw.waw.pl/sites/default/files/OSW%20REPORT%20-%20A%20game%20of%20cat%20and%20mouse%20-%20how%20Russia%20is%20circumventing%20sanctions-www.pdf>
- Wolff, A. T. (2015). The future of NATO enlargement after the Ukraine crisis. *International Affairs*, 91(5), 1103–1121. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2346.12400>
- Yennie Lindgren, W. (2021). *Japanese Foreign Policy Repertoires. Contests, Promotions and Practices of Legitimation*. Stockholm University. <https://su.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1592053/FULLTEXT01.pdf>
- Zakem, V., Saunders, P., Antoun, D., Gorenburg, D., & Markowitz, M. (2015). Mobilizing Compatriots: Russia's Strategy, Tactics, and Influence in the Former Soviet Union. In (pp. 74). Washington DC: Center for Naval Analyses.
- Zaslavskiy, I. (2025). Sanctioned kleptocracy: How Putin's kremligarchs have survived the war—and even prospered. In. Washington D.C.: Atlantic Council.
- Zysk, K. (2019). Russia's strategic underbelly : military strategy, capabilities, and operations in the Arctic. In S. Blank (Ed.), *The Russian military in contemporary perspective* (pp. 687–724). Strategic Studies Institute and U.S. Army War College Press.

Norwegian Institute of International Affairs

Rosenkrantz' gate 22
0160 Oslo, Norway

post@nupi.no

nupi.no

