

PUTIN USHERS IN A NEW ERA OF GLOBAL GEOPOLITICS

The positioning of Russian aircraft in Syria gives the Kremlin an ability to shape and control U.S. and Western operations in both Syria and Iraq out of all proportion to the size of the Russian force. It can compel the U.S. to accept a de facto combined coalition with Russia, Syria, Iran, and Lebanese Hezbollah, possibly in support of indiscriminate operations against any and all regime opponents, not just ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra. It may portend the establishment of a permanent Russian air and naval base in the Eastern Mediterranean. Russian forces have prepared and trained to conduct close air support and possibly special operations in Syria, and may begin doing so within days.

The deployment of Russian military forces to Syria is a major geostrategic inflection. Its significance goes far beyond the situation in Syria. It may well herald, in fact, a new era in global geopolitics and security. Russian forces are establishing an airbase likely to become capable of conducting operations throughout the Levant and the Eastern Mediterranean. It would be the first time in history that Russia had an outpost on land for projecting force beyond the confines of the Black Sea. The U.S. and NATO must consider and respond to this development recognizing its true stakes.

The Obama Administration remains inexplicably bewildered, however. Secretary of State John Kerry stated on 22 September that the Russian equipment that had arrived in Syria was there to protect Russian forces. “We don’t yet have clarity with respect to the Russian effort,” he noted in a press conference.¹ After Kerry’s meeting with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov on 27 September, the State Department stated: “Again, we’re just at the beginning of trying to understand what the Russians’ intentions are in Syria, in Iraq, and to try to see if there are mutually beneficial ways forward here.”²

Understanding the Kremlin’s intentions at a basic level is not really very hard, though. Russian President Vladimir Putin certainly means to deter the U.S.-led coalition from attacking the forces of Syrian President Bashar al Assad, establishing any sort of no-fly zone, or taking any meaningful action that might harm Assad’s forces. He also means to forge a counter-alliance consisting of Russia, Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Lebanese Hezbollah and demonstrate that his coalition is more effective than the West’s. He intends, finally, to establish a permanent foothold in the Middle East from which he can threaten NATO’s southern flank directly, project power into the Mediterranean and the Arab World, and generally re-create Russia’s aura as a global power. He may have more complicated objectives in mind as well, but the State Department should be able at least to recognize these.

Americans should not fall for Putin’s “active measures,” a phrase he used in his interview with Charlie Rose on 60 Minutes to dismiss as falsehoods descriptions of the Assad regime’s brutality against the Syrian people.³ One must reckon with such an aptitude for falsehood when hearing Putin state, “we do not have any obsession with being a superpower in the international

arena.” And one must hear the threat in statements such as, “Russia will not participate in any troop operations in the territory of Syria or in any other states. Well, at least we don’t plan on it right now....”

IMPACT OF RUSSIAN DEPLOYMENT IN SYRIA

The Russian deployment severely constrains Western options within Syria and may come to challenge America’s ability to continue to operate in Iraq as well. Russian aircraft flying around Syria give Moscow absolute veto power over any attempt to establish any sort of no-fly zone or ISIS-free zone, unless the U.S. and its partners are prepared to risk aerial combat with the Russian Air Force. Russian planes can escort Syrian Air Force (SAF) aircraft on missions, fly combat air patrols (CAP) to protect Syrian helicopters engaged in barrel-bombing, and harass U.S. or NATO aircraft or drones attempting to enforce ISIS-free zones.

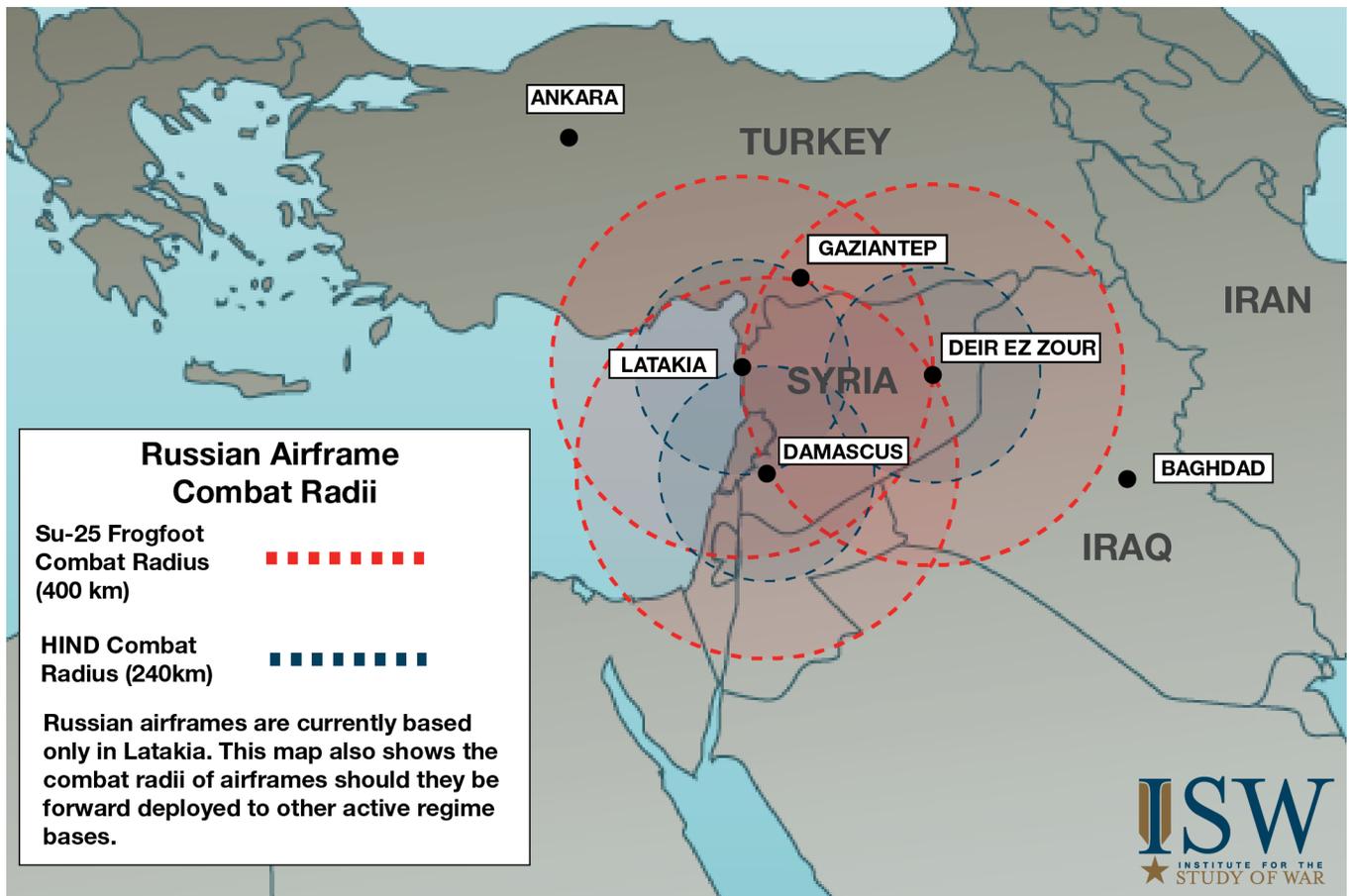
Putin is likely trying to guarantee that the U.S. cannot attack the Assad regime effectively now or in the future. The Russian presence alone helps to deter any strikes against Assad. If the U.S. begins to coordinate its air operations with the Russians (see below), and the Russians remain tightly allied with Assad, it stands to reason that Moscow will pass along to Damascus warning of any potential U.S. attack. Considering the increasing closeness of the Russia-Iran relationship, we can assume that Putin would provide a similar benefit to Iranian and Lebanese Hezbollah forces on the ground in Syria. The Iraqi military has already announced that it will share intelligence with Syria, Russia, and Iran.⁴

RUSSIAN FORCE COMPOSITION IN SYRIA AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

The composition of Russian forces deployed to Syria is absurdly large to be simply protecting

Russian civilian and military positions already there. It is, rather, consistent with the mission of providing air support to Assad regime ground forces fighting against the rebels. Su-25 (Frogfoot) ground-attack aircraft comprise the majority of the fixed-wing airframes visible on the ground at Bassel al Assad airfield near Latakia on the Syrian coast.⁵ These planes are similar to U.S. Air Force A-10s in that they were designed to fly low and slow to provide close-air support (CAS) to ground forces engaged with enemy units. The Mi-24 Hind helicopter is a large attack platform that performs a role similar to that of the U.S. Apache, except that the Hind is much larger and, unlike the Apache, can carry troops and supplies as well as conduct ground-attack missions. These are among the premier Russian airframes for supporting troops in contact. They have limited combat radii (400 kilometers or less) and so would not be ideal for operations beyond the line from roughly Qusayr in the south to Idlib in the north from their current position. They could be moved to other Syrian regime airbases, particularly Damascus and Der ez Zour to support operations in southern or eastern Syria. They pose a very limited threat to U.S., forces, Turkey, Jordan, or Israel from Latakia.

Moscow has also positioned a smaller number of Su-24 Fencer and Su-30 Flanker multirole fighters at Latakia, however. The Fencer is an old airframe used mainly for longer-range ground-attack missions. Its combat radius is sufficient to cover much of Syria from the base at Latakia and to range into the Eastern Mediterranean as well. It can conduct long-range strike missions against specific targets or aerial reconnaissance. It is not a serious threat to the ability of U.S., NATO, or Israeli air forces to operate freely throughout the region, however, nor is it particularly survivable against advanced surface-to-air missiles. The Flanker is another story entirely. Its radius of action is several thousand kilometers, and it is very well-designed for aerial maneuvering, making it much more able to avoid SAMs and theoretically more capable of contesting airspace



against limited numbers of less-proficient Western aircraft. It can be used for strike operations anywhere throughout the Levant and can also perform reconnaissance missions over a wide area.

The Fencers and Flankers are a sensible part of an air posture aimed exclusively at supporting the Assad regime, despite their advanced capabilities and long ranges that might appear to transcend local requirements. Long ranges also translate into the ability to stay airborne for a long time waiting for targets to appear—or to conduct reconnaissance over a given area. The more advanced technical capabilities, particularly of the Flankers, could well allow the Russians to provide much more timely and accurate support to ground forces than the Frogfoots could do, particularly at short notice far from their base. The air package visible on the ground so far, therefore, remains entirely consistent with an exclusively local mission. U.S. forces

undertaking a similar mission would likely bring to bear a mix of aircraft with similar capabilities, ranging from A-10s to advanced and long-range F-15s and F/A-18s.

The U.S. would similarly undertake to expand the ground support facilities at an airbase it intended to use for a protracted support mission, as the Russians are doing. Satellite imagery shows fuel and weapons storage facilities, radomes, logistics areas, and a relatively small complement of (probably) T-90 tanks, advanced BTR-80 armored personnel carriers, and artillery—all consistent with the requirements to keep combat aircraft flying and to secure the airfield against possible terrorist or even insurgent attacks.⁶

Such U.S. activities nevertheless distress regional competitors even when they are aimed entirely at narrowly-constrained local operations. The Iranian military felt itself surrounded when American aircraft were operating out of bases in both Afghanistan and

Iran, and even built out additional airfields of its own along the Afghan border to defend against the possibility that U.S. planes would one day fly west rather than east.

REGIONAL IMPLICATIONS

The U.S. and its NATO and non-NATO partners should take a similar view of the development of the Bassel al Assad airfield into a major Russian airbase. Moscow may well intend at this point nothing more than helping keep Assad in power, but the airfield, particularly if advanced, long-range, multi-role fighters like the Flanker stay there, gives Vladimir Putin dramatic new capabilities against Turkey, Israel, and the U.S. Sixth Fleet.

The location and orientation of the airfield is particularly problematic in this regard, should Putin choose to use it as a way of increasing tensions with the West outside of Ukraine. The airbase is less than 50 kilometers from the Turkish border and the runways point north-south. A supersonic fighter, such as the Flanker, taking off to the north could be in Turkish airspace within minutes. Worse still, it could be almost impossible to tell if such a fighter intended to cross into Turkey or turn east to operate against rebels until the very last moment. Turkish Air Force aircraft and the U.S. and European NATO planes deployed in Turkey would have very little time to decide whether to intercept the Russian planes or allow them to fly into Turkey.

Such considerations are far from theoretical, considering the aggressiveness with which Russian military aircraft have been regularly overflying the Baltic countries, Sweden, and Finland. The Bassel al-Assad airbase allows Putin to extend this pattern to Turkey, Israel, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia if he chose. It also would allow his aircraft to shadow the U.S. Sixth Fleet around the Eastern Mediterranean. He could force Turkey and its NATO allies to establish standing combat air patrols along the southern Turkish border. If he kept the tension very high, the risk of mistakes and accidental weapons releases would also increase.

The Russian invasion of Crimea and crypto-invasion

of Ukraine has forced the U.S. and Europeans to think about potential territorial violations in northern or eastern Europe that might invoke the Article V collective defense provisions requiring all allies to come to the defense of a threatened member. They have prepared for such contingencies through the pre-deployment of units and armor in order to deter or respond. Turkey is also a NATO ally, and Russia's presence on the Turkish border gives Putin the ability to test whether NATO will indeed invoke and support Article V in a very different context for which the alliance is much less prepared.

IMPACT ON IRAQ

The presence of the Flankers in Latakia could also allow Putin to expand his interference into Iraq. Flankers or even Fencers could pursue ISIS fighters across the border, which they cross freely, to short distances at first, but ultimately deeper into Anbar, Ninewah, and Salah-ad-Din Provinces as well—even over Baghdad International Airport. He might work with his Iranian allies to cause the Iraqi government to invite or, at least, consent to Russian air operations against ISIS in Iraq. Iraq, after all, has no ability of its own to contest such operations even though it retains full legal authority over its own airspace. If U.S. aircraft wanted to intercept Russian planes flying into Iraq, they would require the permission of the Iraqi government to do so. It is highly unlikely that any Iraqi government would put itself so clearly on the side of the U.S. and against the Russians and Iranians under the current circumstances. The U.S. might well find itself obliged to contend with competing Russian air operations over both Iraq and Syria.

That will not be easy to do. Coordinating the activities of many high-performance aircraft in a confined space is an intricate and difficult job under the best of circumstances. Differences in approach between the U.S. Marine Corps and the U.S. Air Force and Navy, in fact, were sufficient to make it desirable to designate Marine-only airspace in Iraq and Afghanistan. How will American and Russian aircraft deconflict their operations? The easiest and most tempting way will be to designate, at least informally, areas in which

Russian aircraft but not Western aircraft fly, and vice-versa. But Putin can force continued renegotiation of such delineations at any time simply by ordering his planes to fly beyond their allotted zone. If he causes them to operate broadly across Syria or into Iraq he can attempt to compel the U.S. to establish de facto a more integrated approach to air operations—one that might effectively require U.S. aircraft to tell the Russians of planned operations in advance. Putin may be positioning himself, therefore, to compel the U.S. to merge its coalition with his simply in order to mitigate the risks caused by having a lot of combat aircraft flying around.

Putin can thus try to take effective control of U.S. air operations in Iraq and Syria without ever having to issue an order. Such an idea is not theoretical either. It would be an implementation of the doctrine of “reflexive control” that is well and prominently established in current Russian military thinking and is in active use in Russian operations against Ukraine.⁷ The idea behind reflexive control is to shape the environment in such a way that the enemy chooses Russia’s preferred course of action voluntarily, because it is easiest and all the others appear much more difficult and risky, if not impossible. Reflexive control allows a much weaker force to constrain and even control the activities of a much stronger force. It has worked magnificently in Ukraine, and Putin may well be trying to expand it to the Levant and Iraq.

The U.S. already seems to be falling into this trap. A senior State Department official offering a read-out of the September 27 discussion between Secretary Kerry and Foreign Minister Lavrov said, “if the Russians are going to be more engaged in this theater, we have to de-conflict militarily.”⁸ De-confliction is a form of military cooperation that gives the less-responsible party leverage over the more-responsible party. Western air forces are not likely to be willing to take risks that Russian aircraft might. Thus Moscow will control what “de-confliction” actually means in the skies over Syria...or Iraq. This is part of reflexive control at work.

WHAT ARE THE RUSSIANS LIKELY TO DO IN SYRIA?

The Russian military has just completed a major annual exercise, Center-2015, which it claims involved 95,000 troops.⁹ The kinds of training it reportedly executed offer some useful clues about the types of activities its forces might be prepared to undertake in Syria, although the fact that it claims its forces conducted certain types of training does not mean they did, and the fact that they trained does not mean that they could execute in combat. The breadth and specificity of the claims are nevertheless interesting in what they reveal about possible Russian intentions or, at least, capabilities, for operations in Syria.

Russia exercised its Hind attack helicopters extensively, for example. They practiced conducting rocket and bombing runs against ground targets and providing air cover to ground forces flying very-low-altitude nap-of-the-earth missions. They fired their unguided rockets and cannons against targets mimicking columns of military equipment.¹⁰ They practiced flying with one engine off (simulating its failure in flight) at 200 meters.¹¹ These are the kinds of skills that would be required if the Russians intended to provide close air support to Syrian, Iranian, or Lebanese Hezbollah troops in contact with rebel forces.

Russian special forces units, known as Spetsnaz, have also been honing their skills. A group from the Russian military base in Abkhazia (which Russia seized from Georgia in the 2008 war) practiced ambushing and seizing a source, attacking another facility based on his information, and then returning to base to conduct document exploitation of the captured material.¹² A combined force of Spetsnaz and military police practiced fighting “illegal armed formations” in an urban setting. The exercise included freeing ten hostages and destroying the bad guys, while the military police worked to re-establish order and control road movements.¹³ Russian reconnaissance units are also practicing operations in mountainous terrain both in North Ossetia (in the Caucasus) and in Tajikistan (where a Russian military force

is permanently based).¹⁴ Russian airborne forces practiced air-dropping into enemy areas to conduct reconnaissance and the destruction of illegal armed groups. They exercised in different drop zones each time, from low altitudes, and into areas unknown to the troops.¹⁵ All of these advanced skills would be valuable should the Russians deploy Spetsnaz or other elite formations into Syria to conduct missions similar to those executed by U.S. Special Forces against high-value targets.

The Russians have also been practicing air operations of many varieties. Their fighters have exercised escort missions for long-range bombers (which would also be applicable to escorting any other kind of aircraft facing potential air threats, such as Assad's air force should the West declare a no-fly zone).¹⁶ The Russian Ministry of Defense reported on September 21, seemingly apropos of nothing, that forces of the Southern Military District had conducted more than 20 exercises "of various scales" with the "newest ground-attack aircraft Su-25SM", which the Russians call "Grach" or "Rook," and NATO calls Frogfoot. These exercises included attacking enemy aircraft on the ground, "bases of illegal armed formations," and weapons depots.¹⁷ Frogfoot crews in particular practiced destroying concealed insurgent bases in forested and mountainous regions, as well as emergency actions in the case of equipment failure, and concealed movement to avoid the attacks of hostile fighters. They conducted these training exercises at low altitude and with an eye to defending themselves against anti-aircraft weapons that the enemy might have.¹⁸ The crews of Su-24 Fencer aircraft practiced aerial refueling, a skill that could be very important indeed if the Russians intend to keep those aircraft flying over Syria for extended periods of time.¹⁹

All of these exercises support operations in which Russian forces are already engaged in Ukraine, of course. They are also good preparation for counter-terrorism operations against the ISIS affiliate in the Caucasus. The heavy emphasis on exercises against "illegal armed groups" that seem to have relatively little armor and advanced equipment—unlike the forces facing Russian-backed separatists in Ukraine—is suggestive of plans to operate further afield than the

Donbas, however.

One thing is clear: if the Kremlin had set out to design a 2015 exercise season to hone the most important skills its troops would need to conduct air support of Syrian troops with a very limited high-impact ground footprint, they could hardly have done better. It is reasonable to expect, therefore, that the coming days will see Russian Su-25 Frogfoots, Hind helicopters, Su-24 Fencers, and Su-30 Flankers beginning to conduct air operations against rebel targets on behalf of the Syrian regime. It would not be surprising if small groups of Spetsnaz or airborne troops began conducting targeted raids against high-value rebel targets as well. The Russians appear to have prepared their forces for these kinds of missions.

WHY WOULD RUSSIAN OPERATIONS AGAINST ISIS BE A PROBLEM?

It is easy to argue that Putin is only preparing to help the U.S. accomplish something we have been too timid to do—defeat ISIS. Russian aircraft and helicopters will presumably not face the same extreme restrictions on dropping weapons when they might cause civilian casualties or when they are not certain of the target that hamper American crews. And Russia's alliance with Assad virtually ensures much more effective coordination of ground and air operations against whatever rebels the Syrian regime chooses to fight. Might Russia's intervention not work out for the U.S. after all?

The answer is absolutely not. Putin is not simply intervening to attack ISIS. His stated goal and posture is to support the Assad regime and Bashar al Assad in particular.²⁰ The deployment of Russian forces into Syria therefore effectively guarantees that Assad can remain in power for as long as Putin chooses to back him, thus obviating the need for Assad to make any meaningful concessions to the opposition. Assad's forces had been reeling from the advances of multiple rebel groups and running out of reinforcements. His regime might have faced collapse, he might have been pushed aside, or he might have felt compelled to negotiate seriously with his Syrian opponents. Now

he is likely to become extremely intransigent.

The only path to ending the war thus offered by this Russian adventure is the crushing of the majority Sunni Arab population in Syria by the combined forces of Assad, Iran, Lebanese Hezbollah, and the Kremlin. It is hard to see that approach being successful. The Russians, after all, tried something like it in Afghanistan in the 1980s. The conditions in Syria today are not more propitious than they were then—and Russia is nothing like as strong militarily as was the Soviet Union at the height of its power. No, the advent of Russian reinforcements is likely only to cement a brutal stalemate that has driven millions of people from their homes, radicalized the region, caused a humanitarian apocalypse, and turned Syria into a magnet for global jihadists.

Any serious plan for bringing peace, ultimately, to Syria requires separating supporters of ISIS and al Qaeda affiliate Jabhat al Nusra from the bulk of the Syrian Sunni Arab population now working with them for lack of any better alternatives. That approach requires differentiating among the various groups fighting against Assad, identifying which ones might be lured away, and determining what would be required to lure them. Putin, it seems clear, has no interest whatsoever in such an approach. He told U.S. networks that “provision of military support to illegal structures runs counter to the principles of modern international law and the United Nations Charter,” and made it clear that he regards the only “legitimate government entities” in Syria to be the organs of Assad’s government.²¹

It is likely, therefore, that Russian support for Assad will take the form of an indiscriminate attack against Assad’s opponents, regardless of the degree of their affiliation with ISIS or JN. Such an effort will tend to unify the Syrian opposition with the jihadists against the Russians and Assad. If the U.S. appears to support Russia—a position the Obama Administration seems to be steadily drifting toward—it will solidify the idea that all of the Western powers are united with Iran behind Assad and that only al Qaeda and ISIS offer international support for the struggle against the ‘Alawite government. A blank-check support for the

Assad regime of the sort Putin is ready to provide, in other words, is very likely to backfire, further radicalizing the conflict and permitting the continued commitment of war crimes by the Assad regime.

CONCLUSION

The Russian deployment to Syria is a serious blow to the U.S., its allies, and its prospects for developing and executing any plausible strategy to defeat ISIS and al Qaeda in the Levant and Iraq. It is likely the thin edge of the wedge, moreover, that will offer Putin greater opportunities to disrupt American operations in the Middle East and the Mediterranean. The path of least resistance for the U.S. will be gradually coming to terms with the new reality and making a virtue of necessity by cooperating, reluctantly at first and then more enthusiastically, with the Russian-Iranian-Syrian axis that is now forming. It will, in other words, continue the trend of realigning the American geostrategic position the Middle East fundamentally. More remarkably, it may represent the opening of a new Russian flank against NATO and against America’s ability to operate in the region. If so, it will be much easier to resist or deflect this Russian adventure now, at its beginning and when it is very limited, than to reverse it some years hence after it has taken firm root.

Frederick W. Kagan is the Christopher DeMuth Chair and Director of the Critical Threats Project at the American Enterprise Institute

Kimberly Kagan is the founder and president of the Institute for the Study of War

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NOTES

¹ Remarks of Secretary of State John Kerry at Joint Press Conference with Commerce Secretary Penny Pritzker, Indian External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj, and Indian Minister of State for Commerce and Industry Nirmala Sitharaman, September 24, 2015, at <http://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2015/09/247167.htm>

² Background Briefing on Secretary Kerry's Meeting With Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, September 27, 2015, at <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2015/09/247376.htm>.

³ Charlie Rose, interview with Vladimir Putin, 60 Minutes, September 27, 2015, available at: <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/vladimir-putin-russian-president-60-minutes-charlie-rose/>.

⁴ Qassim Abdul-Zahra, "Iraq to share intelligence on IS with Syria, Russia, and Iran," Associated Press, September 27, 2015, <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/2015/0927/Iraq-to-share-intelligence-on-IS-with-Syria-Russia-and-Iran>.

⁵ The Russian Ministry of Defense provides specifications for its major weapons systems at structure.mil.ru/structure/forces. Pages for relevant weapons systems mentioned in this paper were last accessed 26 September 2015.

⁶ "Russian Deployment to Syria: Putin's Middle East Game-Changer," by Hugo Spaulding, Christopher Kozak, et. al., <http://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-deployment-syria-putin%E2%80%99s-middle-east-game-changer>; Al Assad Airport Latakia, <http://understandingwar.org/map/al-assad-airport-latakia-20-sept-2015> ; New Russian Activity in Syria: Istamo Weapon Storage Facility SE of Latakia September 24, 2015 at <http://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/new-russian-activity-syria-istamo-weapon-storage-facility-se-latakia-september-24-2015>; Russian Deployments at Al-Assad Airport in Syria - September 24, 2015 - See more at: <http://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-deployments-al-assad-airport-syria-september-24-2015>

⁷ Maria Snegovaya, Putin's Information Warfare in Ukraine: Soviet Origins of Russia's Hybrid Warfare, September 2015, <http://understandingwar.org/report/putins-information-warfare-ukraine-soviet-origins-russias-hybrid-warfare>.

⁸ Background Briefing on Secretary Kerry's Meeting With Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, U.S. Department of State, September 27, 2015, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2015/09/247376.htm>.

⁹ В стратегическом командно-штабном учении «Центр-2015» было задействовано 95 тысяч военнослужащих, 19 September 2015. Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD), function.mil.ru. Accessed 26 September 2015.

¹⁰ Экипажи ударных вертолетов Ми-24 в ходе учения «Центр-2015» отработали прикрытие наземной группировки войск с воздуха. 17 September 2015, Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD), function.mil.ru. Accessed 26 September 2015.

¹¹ Летчики армейской авиации Западного военного округа отработывают с одним выключенным двигателем. 18 September 2015. Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD), function.mil.ru. Accessed 26 September 2015.

¹² Разведчики российской военной базы в Абхазии захватили лагерь условных незаконных вооруженных формирований. 17 September 2015. Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD), function.mil.ru. Accessed 26 September 2015.

¹³ Со спецназом и военной полицией ЮВО проведут совместное антитеррористическое учение. 23 September 2015, Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD), function.mil.ru. Accessed 26 September 2015.

¹⁴ Разведчики Южного военного округа учатся действовать в горах Кавказа, 25 September 2015; С военнослужащими российской военной базы в Таджикистане проводятся контрольные занятия на горных полигонах, 22 September 2015, Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD), function.mil.ru. Accessed 26 September 2015.

¹⁵ Разведку и поиск условных НВФ в ходе СКШУ «Центр-2015» ведут мобильные десантно-штурмовые взвода. 18 September 2015. Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD), function.mil.ru. Accessed 26 September 2015.

¹⁶ Летчики-истребители ЦВО в рамках учения «Центр-2015» отработали сопровождение стратегических ракетноцев. 18 September 2015. Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD), function.mil.ru. Accessed 26 September 2015.

¹⁷ В Южном военном округе проведено свыше 20 учений с привлечением штурмовой авиации. 21 September 2015. Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD), function.mil.ru. Accessed 26 September 2015.

¹⁸ Новейшие штурмовики ЮВО уничтожили базу условных незаконных вооруженных формирований в горах. 24 September 2015. Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD), function.mil.ru. Accessed 26 September 2015.

¹⁹ Экипажи фронтовых бомбардировщиков Су-24М Южного военного округа отработают дозаправку в воздухе. 23 September 2015, function.mil.ru. Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD), function.mil.ru. Accessed 26 September 2015.

²⁰ Charlie Rose, interview with Vladimir Putin, 60 Minutes, September 27, 2015, available at: <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/vladimir-putin-russian-president-60-minutes-charlie-rose/>.

²¹ “Putin: U.S. Support for Syrian Rebels is Illegal,” Reuters, September 27, 2015, accessible at <http://www.newsweek.com/putin-criticizes-us-support-syria-rebels-377192>.