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Russia continued to shape conditions on the ground in Syria and elsewhere in the Middle East following the air safety memorandum of understanding signed with the U.S. on October 20, 2015. Russia used its military presence in Syria to set the agenda of the international dialogue over a Syrian political settlement. Russia engaged rivals in four-way talks on a resolution to the Syrian Civil War including the U.S., Saudi Arabia and Turkey. Russia also successfully lobbied to include its regional partner Iran in the next meeting set for October 29. Moscow is likely behind Bashar al-Assad's call for post-war elections to give the appearance of success and popular legitimacy to Russia's intervention, which it continues to back through naval deliveries through the Bosphorus. Meanwhile, Russia strengthened its regional foothold by drawing another U.S. ally, Jordan, into a new partnership with Russia that may block U.S. efforts to support Syrian rebels through Jordan. Russia is also increasingly poised to vie for U.S. influence in Afghanistan where President Ashraf Ghani reportedly requested Russian military hardware, including attack helicopters.

Pro-Western governments in the former Soviet Union remain vulnerable to Russian political destabilization efforts. Pro-Russian parties in Moldova issued a motion of no confidence against the country's pro-EU government, capitalizing on the momentum of two months of large-scale anti-government protests. Ukraine postponed elections in the key southeastern port city of Mariupol over fraud suspicions, likely in response to Ukrainian oligarch and former pro-Russian MP Rinat Akhmetov's control over the ballot printing. Meanwhile, the leader of the Russian-backed breakaway Georgian region of South Ossetia called for a referendum on accession to Russia in advance of 2017 elections, escalating Russian-Georgian relations in tandem with political destabilization in Moldova and Ukraine. Russia is complicit in this destabilization whether or not the Kremlin is actively orchestrating events on the ground because of its long-term campaign to secure a permanent foothold in all the former Soviet republics, by backing pro-Russian parties and separatist movements in West-leaning states and increasing security integration with allied governments.

Russia is projecting aggression toward the U.S. and its allies with its activities on an increasingly global scale. Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu announced that Russia had nearly completed its northernmost base in the Arctic Circle that will bolster its claims over resource-rich territory disputed by NATO allies Canada and Denmark. Shoigu announced plans to build at least three new Russian bases in the far-northeast of Russia that will allow Russia to project its military presence toward Alaska. Shoigu also revealed Russian plans to establish a base in the Kuril Islands, some of which are claimed by another U.S. ally, Japan. Russia may be cultivating political destabilization in the Balkans, where it has been accused of playing a tacit role in organizing anti-government protests against the government of Montenegro, a NATO and EU aspirant. Russia is undertaking overt efforts to deepen its partnership with Serbia, much as it has done in over the past two months with allied former Soviet countries. Russia's global efforts to project military force by bolstering its alliances, weakening pro-Western states and pulling new partners into its orbit demonstrate that its Syrian intervention is not an isolated operation but part of an grand strategic effort to recreate a bipolar world order.

- 1) Syria.** 18-27 OCT: At least six Russian large landing ships were seen passing through the Bosphorus into the Mediterranean Sea alongside civilian transport ships, likely to supply Russia's military operations in Syria.
- 21-27 OCT: Russia continued its air campaign in Syria, claiming airstrikes in Hama, Idlib, Latakia, Damascus, Aleppo, Homs, and Deir ez-Zour provinces.
- 23 OCT: An anonymous Russian defense official confirmed that Russia deployed a small group of Special Forces from eastern Ukraine to Syria during its intervention in Syria. A Russian soldier revealed that generals from Russia's 58th Army were involved in "military operations" in Syria.
- 24 OCT: Russian foreign minister Sergey Lavrov called for presidential and parliamentary elections in Syria.
- 25 OCT: A Russian parliamentary delegation met with Bashar al-Assad in Damascus, where the Syrian president reportedly announced his willingness to hold parliamentary and presidential elections in Syria after a "victory over terrorism."
- 26 OCT: An unnamed source in the Russian military's general staff reported that soldiers from the elite 7th Guards Airborne Assault Division are a component of Russia's military contingent in Syria.
- 27 OCT: The Russian Ministry of Defense announced a Russian military fatality in Syria for the first time during its intervention, claiming the individual committed suicide at Bassel al-Assad International Airport.
- 2) Arctic.** 20 OCT: Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu announced that Russia is nearing completion of its northernmost permanent military base near the resource-rich Lomonosov Ridge.
- 22 OCT: Defense Minister Shoigu stated that Russia is also constructing at least three new Arctic bases in its far northeast and will deploy a military unit to the Arctic by 2018.
- 3) Pacific.** 22 OCT: Defense Minister Shoigu announced Russian plans to establish a military base on the Kuril Islands, some of which are disputed by Japan.
- 4) Moldova.** 22 OCT: Pro-Russian opposition parties formally requested that parliament hold a no-confidence vote against the pro-European coalition government, set for October 29.

- 5) Belarus.** 23 OCT: The Belarusian minister of defense rejected the Kremlin's proposal to establish a Russian air base in Belarus and called for "more effective" means to counter possible NATO expansion in Poland.
- 6) Jordan.** 23 OCT: Russian foreign minister Sergey Lavrov announced an agreement with Jordan to create a joint "working mechanism" in Amman to "coordinate" air operations in Syria.
- 7) Egypt, Iran.** 23 OCT: Russian foreign minister Sergey Lavrov called for the inclusion of Egypt and Iran in diplomatic talks on the Syrian Civil War during a meeting with Secretary of State John Kerry and the Saudi and Turkish foreign ministers in Vienna.
- 27 OCT: The Rosoboronexport general director said that the Russian state arms exporter would "cooperate" if Cairo requested helicopters and equipment for Egypt's new Mistral-class helicopter carriers.
- 27 OCT: The U.S. invited Iran to participate in the next round of diplomatic talks on the Syrian Civil War in Vienna, set for October 29.
- 8) Afghanistan.** 23 OCT: Russia's ambassador to Tajikistan revealed that Moscow would consider reestablishing control over the Tajik-Afghan border if the insurgency in Afghanistan escalated.
- 25 OCT: Afghan President Ashraf Ghani recently asked Moscow to provide Afghanistan with attack helicopters and other military hardware, according to an October 25 report citing unnamed Russian and Afghan officials.
- 9) South Caucasus.** 25 OCT: The leader of the Russian-backed breakaway Georgian region of South Ossetia announced plans to hold a referendum on the territory's accession to Russia "long before" its 2017 presidential campaign.
- 27 OCT: Russia's Ministry of Defense launched readiness inspections at Russian bases in Armenia and the Russian-backed Georgian breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.
- 10) Balkans.** 26 OCT: Prime Minister of Montenegro Milo Djukanovic accused Moscow of organizing large-scale anti-government protests in the capital of Podgorica.
- 27 OCT: Serbian Prime Minister Aleksandar Vučić travelled to Moscow where he is set to discuss arms supplies, possibly including combat helicopters.
- 11) Eastern Ukraine.** 25 OCT: Ukraine postponed local elections in Mariupol amid accusations of impending fraud in the strategic government-held port city, where the pro-Russian party was projected to earn the most support.
- 25-26 OCT: Russian-backed separatists killed one Ukrainian soldier and wounded two in attacks near the separatist-held Donetsk Airport.
- 12) Crimea.** 26 OCT: Russia's Black Sea Fleet launched live-fire naval drills off the coast of Crimea designed to simulate defense against an air attack on the occupied peninsula.