



The Impact of Russia's Ukraine Invasion in the Middle East and North Africa

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Chairman Deutch, Ranking Member Wilson, distinguished members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on the issue of Russia's invasion of Ukraine and its impact on the Middle East and North Africa. I am honored to be included alongside such distinguished scholars as Hanna Notte, Frederic Wehrey, and Caitlin Welsh.¹

Russia is one of the few countries in the world to have a relatively positive diplomatic standing with nearly every country in the Middle East. From Iran to Syria to the Gulf to the Levant, Russia has been able to foster working ties with nearly every major actor across the various regional divides. It has done so through a combination of an active military presence, high-level diplomatic engagement, and a concerted effort to position itself as a viable source of arms should countries seek non-U.S. materiel.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine, however, threatens this standing. The global condemnation of Russia's invasion has already damaged its diplomatic standing in the eyes of many in the international community, and many countries in the region will be forced to weigh a continued relationship with Russia against international diplomatic pushback. More practically, the combined U.S. and multilateral sanctions will also likely dramatically impact Russia's ability to continue to project power in the Middle East.

This testimony will focus on the latter issue, namely, how Russia projects and maintains its power in the region, how arms sales contribute to that effort, how the Ukraine crisis threatens continued Russian power projection, and what the United States might do to take advantage in response.

RUSSIA'S MILITARY PRESENCE IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

Nowhere is Russia's Middle East presence on the ground more pronounced than in Syria. Since intervening on behalf of Bashar al-Assad in 2015, over 60,000 Russian troops have deployed over time to Syria, according to

¹ I wish to acknowledge Margaret Dene for her outstanding contributions to the research for this testimony. Any errors or inaccuracies, however, are mine alone.

the Russian Defense Ministry.² Russia's presence in Syria has typically manifested itself through air and naval support, special operations forces, and the deployment of air defense systems. These forces have been staged throughout large parts of the country, typically at air bases, with the bulk concentrated at Hmeimim Air Base and the Tartus naval facility in the northwest.³ My colleague Anna Borshchevskaya characterizes Russia's intervention into Syria as a "low-cost strategic success."⁴ With a minimal initial investment, Russia has been able to establish a lasting military footprint in the region.

Russia's presence at Hmeimim began in 2015 as an entry node for its air campaign in Syria.⁵ Located in Latakia near Bassel al-Assad Airport, the base's initial resources were minimal. In 2017, Moscow and Damascus agreed to extend Russia's presence at Hmeimim for forty-nine years, with the potential to renew for another twenty-five years.⁶ Since then, Russia has gradually upgraded Hmeimim's capabilities to house advanced bombers and fighter jets, as well as to serve as a medical and logistics hub.⁷ In 2020, the two sides agreed to allow Russia to expand its presence by giving it additional territory surrounding the base.⁸ Russia has used its presence at Hmeimim to not only wage its campaign on behalf of the Assad regime, but to challenge NATO's southern flank by staging advanced platforms in the East Mediterranean. In the weeks before the invasion of Ukraine, Reuters reported that Russia had deployed Tu-22 bombers and MiG-31s equipped with Kinzhal hypersonic missiles to Hmeimim for exercises.⁹

The Russian naval presence in Tartus dates back to the 1970s.¹⁰ It is currently Russia's only overseas naval facility outside the former Soviet Union's borders, located less than forty miles south of the Hmeimim base. The forty-nine-year agreement with Syria likewise included Tartus, and as part of this agreement Russia was allowed to increase its presence to stage up to eleven warships in harbor.¹¹ Tartus serves as Russia's key naval facility in the region, allowing it to replenish its naval forces and project power in the Mediterranean. Prior to the invasion of Ukraine, press reporting indicated that Russia sent additional warships to assemble with the fleet already in Tartus as part of a mass exercise.¹²

² "Russia Says 63,000 Troops Have Seen Combat in Syria," BBC News, August 23, 2018.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-45284121>

³ Michael Kofman, "Syria and the Russian Armed Forces: An Evaluation of Moscow's Military Strategy and Operational Performance," Foreign Policy Research Institute, 2020. <https://www.fpri.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/syria-and-the-russian-armed-forces-kofman.pdf>; Seth Jones, Joseph Bermudez Jr., "Dangerous Liaisons: Russian Cooperation with Iran in Syria," Center for Strategic and International Studies, July 16, 2019. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/dangerous-liaisons-russian-cooperation-iran-syria>

⁴ Anna Borshchevskaya, "Russia's Strategic Success in Syria and the Future of Moscow's Middle East Policy," *Lawfare*, January 23, 2022. <https://www.lawfareblog.com/russias-strategic-success-syria-and-future-moscows-middle-east-policy>

⁵ Steve Rosenberg, "Syria Conflict: Russia's Build-Up Looks Long-Term," BBC News, January 23, 2016. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-35391241>

⁶ "Russia Signs Deal to Use Syria Air Base for 49 Years," *Business Standard*, July 27, 2017. https://www.business-standard.com/article/international/russia-signs-deal-to-use-syria-air-base-for-49-years-117072701238_1.html

⁷ Mohammed Hardan, "Russia Expands Syrian Air Base to Boost Regional Presence," *Al-Monitor*, June 3, 2021.

<https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/06/russia-expands-syrian-air-base-boost-regional-presence>; "Syria Agrees to Let Russia Expand Hmeimim Air Base," Reuters, August 19, 2020. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-syria-air-base/syria-agrees-to-let-russia-expand-hmeimim-air-base-idUSKCN25F2BP>

⁸ "Russia to Extend Tartus and Hmeimim Military Bases in Syria," *Deutsche Welle*, December 26, 2017.

<https://www.dw.com/en/russia-to-extend-tartus-and-hmeimim-military-bases-in-syria/a-41938949>; "Syria Agrees to Let Russia Expand Hmeimim Air Base," Reuters.

⁹ "Russia Sends Hypersonic-Armed Fighter Jets to Syria for Naval Drills—Report," Reuters, February 16, 2022.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/russia-sends-hypersonic-armed-fighter-jets-syria-naval-drills-report-2022-02-15/>

¹⁰ Borshchevskaya, "Russia's Strategic Success in Syria."

¹¹ "Russian Naval Ships Arrive at Syria's Tartus," *Asharq al-Awsat*, February 5, 2020. <https://english.aawsat.com/home/article/3457086/russian-naval-ships-arrive-syrias-tartus>

¹² H. I. Sutton, "Unusual Russian Navy Concentration Seen in Eastern Mediterranean," *Naval News*, February 24, 2022. <https://www.navalnews.com/naval-news/2022/02/unusual-russian-navy-concentration-seen-in-eastern-mediterranean/>

Together, Hmeimim and Tartus serve as a base for Russia's military presence in the Middle East, and from these two sites it is able to expand its operations regionally. A 2020 Middle East Institute report suggested that Russian MiG-29s had flown to al-Jufrah Air Base in Libya by way of Hmeimim, highlighting the latter's importance in supporting Russian military operations in Africa.¹³ From its stronghold in Syria, Russia has been able to eye expansion elsewhere. Its forces have deployed to Libya on behalf of Khalifa Haftar, and in 2017 it announced a five-year agreement with Egypt to use its air bases and airspace.¹⁴ In 2019, Vladimir Putin and then-Sudanese leader Omar al-Bashir agreed to establish a Russian naval facility on Sudan's coast; in March 2022, Sudan's deputy head of state expressed a willingness to continue with the deal (though Sudanese military officials continue to say it is under review).¹⁵

Russia's traditional military presence in the region is complemented by its use of private military contractors, most notably the Wagner Group. Russian troops deployed to Syria and Libya have often been accompanied by thousands of Wagner operatives, and Wagner forces operate throughout Africa.¹⁶ A clash in Deir al-Zour, Syria, in 2018 between U.S. forces and Assad-aligned forces likely left scores of Wagner operatives dead.¹⁷ The links between the Wagner Group's leader, Yevgeny Prigozhin, and Putin are well-documented, yet Russia continues with the pretext that Wagner is an independent entity, allowing it to wield the group as a force multiplier throughout the region while denying any official association.¹⁸ In Libya, for instance, AFRICOM estimated in 2020 that approximately 3,000 Wagner operatives and 2,000 Syrian mercenaries were deployed in support of the Russian military presence.¹⁹

Russia's invasion of Ukraine, however, is already beginning to challenge its ability to maintain its current posture in the Middle East. In April, reports emerged Russia was calling up Wagner operatives and other mercenaries to fill manpower gaps in Ukraine.²⁰ The *Financial Times* reported that Russia had withdrawn around 200 Wagner operatives and 1,000 Syrian operatives from Libya to fight in Ukraine, leaving a residual force of approximately 5,000 in the country.²¹ In May, local reports indicated that Russia was repositioning its forces within Syria and consolidating its presence to select air bases throughout the country.²² Another report indicated

¹³ Anton Mardasov, "How Russia Made Hemeimeem Air Base its African Hub," Middle East Institute, May 28, 2020.

<https://www.mei.edu/publications/how-russia-made-hemeimeem-air-base-its-african-hub>

¹⁴ Thomas Arnold, "Exploiting Chaos: Russia in Libya," Center for Strategic and International Studies, September 23, 2020. <https://www.csis.org/blogs/post-soviet-post/exploiting-chaos-russia-libya>; "Russian Military Working on Deal to Use Egyptian Air Bases: Document," Reuters, November 30, 2017. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-egypt-military-air-space-planes/russian-military-working-on-deal-to-use-egyptian-air-bases-document-idUSKBN1DU11D>

¹⁵ "Hemedti Says Sudan Should Be Open to Naval Base Accord with Russia, or Others," Reuters, March 3, 2022. <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/hemedti-says-sudan-should-be-open-naval-base-accord-with-russia-or-others-2022-03-02/>

¹⁶ "Private Military Contractors Bolster Russian Influence in Africa," France 24, April 2, 2022.

<https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/202204-private-military-contractors-bolster-russian-influence-in-africa>

¹⁷ Thomas Gibbons-Neff, "How a 4-Hour Battle Between Russian Mercenaries and U.S. Commandos Unfolded in Syria," *New York Times*, May 24, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/24/world/middleeast/american-commandos-russian-mercenaries-syria.html>

¹⁸ Victoria Kim, "What Is the Wagner Group?" *New York Times*, March 31, 2022. <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/31/world/europe/wagner-group-russia-ukraine.html>

¹⁹ "East Africa Counterterrorism Operation, North and West Africa Counterterrorism Operation: Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress," Office of the Lead Inspector General, April 1, 2020-June 30, 2020. https://www.stateoig.gov/system/files/ea-nwa_q3_june2020_final.pdf#page=5

²⁰ Julian Borger, "Russia Deploys Up to 20,000 Mercenaries in Battle for Ukraine's Donbas Region," *Guardian*, April 19, 2022. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/19/russia-deployed-20000-mercenaries-ukraine-donbas-region>

²¹ Samer al-Atrush, Laura Pitel, "Russia Reduces Number of Syrian and Wagner Troops in Libya," *Financial Times*, April 28, 2022. <https://www.ft.com/content/88ab3d20-8a10-4ae2-a4c5-122acd6a8067>

²² Walid Al Nofal, "Amid War in Ukraine, Russia Withdraws and Iran Expands in Syria," Syria Direct, May 4, 2022. <https://syriadirect.org/amid-war-in-ukraine-russia-withdraws-and-iran-expands-in-syria/>

that some military units had begun to withdraw completely from the country.²³

As Russia continues to incur losses in Ukraine, it will likely continue to reposition forces within the Middle East and North Africa as well as withdraw some forces to support the effort in Ukraine. However, it is highly unlikely that Russia will completely withdraw all of its forces. Putin has had a keen interest in establishing a lasting presence in Africa since his early days in power.²⁴ And it is improbable that Russia will completely abandon Hmeimim—which it has transformed from a minor air base to a major combat and logistics node reportedly capable of supporting some of Russia’s most advanced platforms—or its only overseas naval facility in Tartus.²⁵ Should Russia continue pulling its forward-deployed forces to support its war in Ukraine, it will likely stop short of complete withdrawal, instead maintaining enough of a presence on the ground to continue to protect its interests in the region.

RUSSIA’S ARMS SALES IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

Globally, Russia’s arms exports and associated sales are typically second only to its oil and gas exports.²⁶ Russia has consistently marketed itself as a viable alternative to purchasing from the United States by pitching its arms as a more cost-effective option that arrives sooner with fewer strings attached. For countries wary of long delivery timelines, congressional oversight, and a byzantine acquisition process, Russian arms can be quite appealing. However, despite Moscow being the second-largest arms exporter in the world, its sales have dropped in the past five years as procurement issues for its most advanced and appealing platforms, such as its advanced aircraft, continue to plague the Russian defense industrial base.²⁷

Historically, the bulk of Russian arms sales have gone to countries such as China, India, Vietnam, Egypt, and Algeria. Over half of all Russian defense exports between 2000 and 2010 went to China and India.²⁸ Russian arms sales primarily flow to the Indo-Pacific and the Middle East and North Africa. The most popular platforms are its aircraft and air defense systems. In 2021, the head of Russia’s Federal Service for Military-Technical Cooperation noted that aircraft make up approximately 50 percent of all Russian exports, air defense systems make up 25 percent, and various other platforms constitute the remainder.²⁹

Russian arms sales in the Middle East and North Africa have complicated traditional U.S. defense partnerships. Turkey’s acquisition of the S-400 air defense system triggered the Countering America’s Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA), resulting in the country’s expulsion from the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter program. Egypt’s \$2 billion purchase in 2018 of Su-35 aircraft likewise continues to run the risk of triggering CAATSA

²³ “Russia Said to Pull Troops From Syria to Bolster Forces in Ukraine,” *Times of Israel*, May 8, 2022.

<https://www.timesofisrael.com/russia-said-to-pull-troops-from-syria-to-bolster-forces-in-ukraine/>

²⁴ Samuel Ramani, “Russia Has Big Plans for Africa,” *Foreign Affairs*, February 17, 2022. https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/africa/2022-02-17/russia-has-big-plans-africa?check_logged_in=1

²⁵ Jamie Dettmer, “Russia Expands Military Facilities in Syria,” *Voice of America News*, May 12, 2021.

<https://www.voanews.com/a/middle-east-russia-expands-military-facilities-syria/6205742.html>; “Syria Agrees to Let Russia Expand Hmeimim Air Base,” *Reuters*.

²⁶ Richard Connolly, Cecilie Sendstad, “Russia’s Role as an Arms Exporter,” *Chatham House*, March 20, 2017.

<https://www.chathamhouse.org/2017/03/russias-role-arms-exporter/3-arms-exports-and-russian-economy>

²⁷ Pieter Wezeman, Alexandra Kuimova, Siemon Wezeman, “Trends in International Arms Transfers, 2020,” SIPRI, March 2021. <https://sipri.org/publications/2021/sipri-fact-sheets/trends-international-arms-transfers-2020>; John Parachini, Ryan Bauer, “Sanctions Targeting Russia’s Defense Sector: Will They Influence Its Behavior?” *RAND*, May 20, 2021. <https://www.rand.org/blog/2021/05/sanctions-targeting-russias-defense-sector-will-they.html>

²⁸ “Russian Arms Sales and Defense Industry,” *Congressional Research Service*, October 14, 2021. <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R46937>

²⁹ “Aircraft Made Up 50% of Russia’s Arms Exports Last Year, Says Defense Official,” *TASS*, March 12, 2021.

<https://tass.com/defense/1265359>

sanctions.³⁰ The United Arab Emirates and Russia announced an agreement in 2017 to co-develop a fifth-generation aircraft, potentially the Su-75, though to date nothing significant has materialized.³¹ Russian arms deliveries to Iraq tripled between 2010-2014 and 2015-2019, and in 2020 the Iraqi parliament urged the government to purchase the S-400 system.³² Additionally, King Salman of Saudi Arabia also reportedly agreed to purchase the S-400 during a 2017 trip to Moscow. Neither of these S-400 deals has to come to fruition, though.³³ Russian materiel has also bolstered Iran's capabilities: in 2016, Iran took possession of S-300s, and in the past has also purchased tanks, Kilo-class submarines, and other arms.³⁴

Ukraine will complicate Russia's ability to continue exporting arms in the Middle East, North Africa, and beyond. The most pressing issue will be procurement: sanctions will further complicate Russia's already strained defense industrial base. Since incurring international sanctions over its invasion of Crimea in 2014, Russia has struggled to acquire the components to build engines and frames for its advanced aircraft.³⁵ Another issue will concern prioritization: analysis featured in the *Wall Street Journal* on April 25 assessed that Russia had lost more than 3,000 pieces of large equipment in battle, including approximately 20 jet fighters and 30 helicopters.³⁶ The Russian Defense Ministry will likely have to prioritize reconstituting its own forces over arms exports. Another hurdle is whether Russia will be able to provide maintenance and sustainment to the platforms it sells, as its defense industrial supply chain struggles against sanctions. Yet another issue is payments: already Russian banks have complained about an inability to process payments totaling approximately \$1 billion in arms transactions from customers, including Egypt and India, due to international sanctions.³⁷ And finally, potential customers of Russian arms will now have to weigh the additional risk that a purchase might run afoul of U.S. and multilateral sanctions.

Ultimately, so long as Russia is able to produce and export its arms, there will likely always be customers willing to buy. Though potential customers may have doubts about the ways Russia has used its platforms and forces in Ukraine, they may differentiate the quality of the platforms from Russia's military doctrine and tactics. They will, however, have to weigh the benefits of buying and fielding Russian arms against the long and growing list of costs associated with deepening defense ties with Moscow.

³⁰ Ali Dizboni, Karim el-Baz, "Understanding the Egyptian Military's Perspective on the Su-35 Deal," Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Fikra Forum, July 15, 2021. <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/understanding-egyptian-militarys-perspective-su-35-deal>

³¹ Agnes Helou, "Rostec Looks to UAE to Co-Produce Su-75 Checkmate Subsystems," *Defense News*, November 15, 2021. <https://www.defensenews.com/digital-show-dailies/dubai-air-show/2021/11/15/rostec-looks-to-uae-to-co-produce-su-785-checkmate-subsystems/>

³² "Arms Sales in the Middle East: Trends and Analytical Perspectives for U.S. Policy," Congressional Research Service, November 23, 2020. <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/mideast/R44984.pdf>

³³ Ibid.; Ben Kesling, Brett Forrest, "Iraq Considers Purchase of Russian Air-Defense Missile System," *Wall Street Journal*, January 10, 2020. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/iraq-considers-purchase-of-russian-air-defense-missile-system-11578688124>; "Saudi Arabia Agrees to Buy Russian S-400 Air Defense System: Arabiya TV," Reuters, October 5, 2017. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-saudi-russia-missiles/saudi-arabia-agrees-to-buy-russian-s-400-air-defense-system-arabiya-tv-idUSKBN1CA1OD>

³⁴ April Brady, "Russia Completes S-300 Delivery to Iran," Arms Control Association, December 2016. <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2016-11/news-briefs/russia-completes-s-300-delivery-iran>; Robert Czulda, "Is Iran Going on an Arms Shopping Spree in Moscow?" Atlantic Council, November 10, 2021. <https://www.atlantic-council.org/blogs/iransource/is-iran-going-on-an-arms-shopping-spreed-in-moscow/>

³⁵ Parachini, Bauer, "Sanctions Targeting Russia's Defense Sector"

³⁵ "Russian Arms Sales and Defense Industry," Congressional Research Service, October 14, 2021.

³⁶ Daniel Michaels, Matthew Luxmoore, "Russian Military's Next Front Line: Replacing Battlefield Equipment Destroyed in Ukraine," *Wall Street Journal*, April 25, 2022. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/russian-militarys-next-front-line-replacing-battlefield-equipment-destroyed-in-ukraine-11650879002>

³⁷ Ibid.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Clarify U.S. policy regarding implementation of CAATSA. The biggest question facing customers deciding between U.S. and Russian arms is whether a potential purchase will trigger CAATSA sanctions. Uneven U.S. application of CAATSA sanctions has only exacerbated this dilemma. Turkey purchased Russian S-400 air defense systems and was sanctioned under CAATSA; India purchased the same systems and, so far, has not. In the 2019 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), Congress granted the president the ability to issue a waiver for CAATSA sanctions for reasons related to national security and the broader national interest. Often, the debate in the United States has been whether to issue a waiver or simply delay a determination that a country has engaged in a significant transaction with Russia. Yet this can leave partners guessing about U.S. intentions and negatively impact U.S. defense relationships. At a time when owners and potential future customers of Russian arms will have ample reason to look elsewhere, Congress should encourage the administration to proactively and publicly clarify its interpretation of CAATSA and the waiver authority in order to cultivate potential security partnerships and strengthen existing ones.

Maintain the U.S. presence in northeast Syria. Per the June 2021 White House letter to Congress regarding the War Powers Report, a “small presence” of U.S. forces remains in “strategically significant locations in Syria” to continue addressing terrorist threats emanating from Syria.³⁸ Per the Trump administration’s special envoy for Syria, the U.S. presence served the additional purpose of “denying terrain and resources to the Assad government and its allies.”³⁹ A key Russian demand in negotiating Syria’s future has been the removal of U.S. forces.⁴⁰ Now, the future of Russia’s presence in Syria is in flux due to Ukraine. Russia may relocate its forces within the country, potentially handing over control of facilities and territory to the Assad regime and its Iranian backers. The U.S. presence in Syria is as necessary as ever to serve as a bulwark against instability that may give terrorist groups an opportunity to reemerge. Additionally, as Ukraine continues to bog down Russia militarily, U.S. leverage regarding Syria’s future may gradually increase as a result of the American presence on the ground.

Proactively shape partner requests in order to expedite delivery and potentially explore enhanced production possibilities. A common complaint from U.S. arms customers is that the timetable from negotiations to purchase to delivery is too long. This delay is, in part, a byproduct of an arms export process designed to balance advancing U.S. interests with protecting U.S. capabilities and technologies. At times, this prioritization comes at the expense of maintaining America’s competitiveness on the international arms market. U.S. partners will turn to competitors for a host of reasons—a potentially quicker delivery timeline being one of the most common.

To mitigate long delivery times, the United States must accelerate production of these platforms. Doing so can be done by proactively working with partners to shape their requests, rather than simply reacting to them, in order to allow industry to plan around future orders. Blending what the United States sees as the shared destination for maintaining interoperability with their forces will allow partners to feel prioritized in the relationship, while proactively shepherding them through a complicated acquisition process may shave time off a delivery schedule. The United States does this already through multiyear training plans with some select partners, and should expand those to include others.

³⁸ “Letter to the Speaker of the House and President Pro Tempore of the Senate Regarding the War Powers Report,” The White House, June 8, 2021. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/06/08/letter-to-the-speaker-of-the-house-and-president-pro-tempore-of-the-senate-regarding-the-war-powers-report/>

³⁹ James Jeffrey, “The Trump Administration Got the Region Right,” *Foreign Affairs*, January 15, 2021. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/middle-east/2021-01-15/biden-doesnt-need-new-middle-east-policy>

⁴⁰ “Russia Demands All U.S. Troops Leave Syria, Slams Trump’s Occupying Force,” *Haaretz*, October 24, 2019. <https://www.haaretz.com/middle-east-news/syria/russia-demands-all-u-s-troops-leave-syria-slams-trump-s-occupying-force-1.8023612>

This may also create opportunities for co-production of select platforms. Israel currently produces components for F-16s, while the United States and Egypt have co-produced tanks in the past.⁴¹ Other countries in the region seek co-production opportunities, and when the United States is not an option, they will turn to U.S. competitors. Saudi Arabia and China, for instance, have recently agreed to jointly manufacture unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs).⁴² Working to jointly forecast partner needs may reveal opportunities for both accelerating delivery as well as boxing out U.S. competitors.

Provide off-ramps to countries in the middle of major arms transactions with Russia, or who have recently purchased Russian systems. Sanctions against the Russian defense industry will likely cause Moscow to struggle to replenish its own forces with advanced systems, as well as maintain and sustain systems it has sold globally. This will depreciate the value of Russian arms and likely give pause to many customers and potential customers, many of whom have also purchased arms from the United States. These include Turkey, which has submitted a request for new and upgraded F-16s to address the gap created by its expulsion from the F-35 program over the S-400 purchase, and Egypt, which is reportedly unhappy with the Su-35s it purchased from Russia.⁴³ The United States should use the uncertainty over the Russian defense industry to encourage traditional partners to shed Russian materiel by offering upgrades to existing platforms and potential access to more advanced U.S. platforms. Washington should also consider expanding the availability of Foreign Military Financing (FMF) to longstanding customers of Russian arms as a way of luring them closer to the United States.

Prepare select platforms for simultaneous export in order to better compete with great power competitors. One of the most common requests from Middle East partners is UAVs and counter-UAV platforms. As the deployment of UAVs increasingly becomes a prominent feature of modern conflict, particularly in the Middle East, the need for affordable and effective counter-UAV air defense systems increases. The United States, however, has not actively exported mobile, cost-effective counter-UAV systems to the region, nor does it regularly sell advanced UAVs like the MQ-9. U.S. competitors, on the other hand, do have systems they market internationally: Russia has the Pantsir, and China has the Silent Hunter.⁴⁴ And multiple U.S. partners have bought Chinese armed drones, including Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and the UAE.⁴⁵ While the quality of these Russian and Chinese platforms is debatable, the fact that the United States does not compete in this space allows its competitors to gain an advantage in the region. The U.S. Army is testing the M-SHORAD, a newer system mounted to Stryker vehicles designed to more effectively engage UAVs than previous systems, but it is still likely a ways away from deployment, let alone export.⁴⁶ Meanwhile, Israel recently field-tested a

⁴¹ "IAI Delivers First F-16 Wing & Vertical Fin to Lockheed Martin for New Block 70/72 Aircraft," *European Defence Review*, February 23, 2022. <https://www.edrmagazine.eu/iai-delivers-first-f-16-wing-vertical-fin-to-lockheed-martin-for-new-f-16-block-70-72-aircraft>; "Egypt and U.S. Resume Co-Production of M1A1 Abrams Tanks," U.S. State Department, October 25, 2015. <https://eg.usembassy.gov/egypt-u-s-resume-co-production-m1a1-abrams-tanks>

⁴² Agnes Helou, "Chinese and Saudi Firms Create Joint Venture to Make Military Drones in the Kingdom," *Defense News*, March 9, 2022. <https://www.defensenews.com/unmanned/2022/03/09/chinese-and-saudi-firms-create-joint-venture-to-make-military-drones-in-the-kingdom/>

⁴³ Paul Iddon, "CAATSA or PESA: Why Have These Countries Decided Against Acquiring Russia's Su-35 Fighter?" *Forbes*, January 11, 2022. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/pauliddon/2022/01/11/caatsa-or-pesa-why-have-these-countries-decided-against-acquiring-russias-su-35-fighter/?sh=48e580756204>

⁴⁴ Joe Saballa, "Russia's Upgraded Pantsyr to 'Counter Any Type of Drone,'" *Defense Post*, December 1, 2021. <https://www.thedefensepost.com/2021/12/01/russia-pantsyr-counter-drones/>; Jeffrey Lin, P. W. Singer, "Drones, Lasers, and Tanks: China Shows Off Its Latest Weapons," *Popular Science*, February 27, 2017. <https://www.popsci.com/china-new-weapons-lasers-drones-tanks/>

⁴⁵ Bradley Bowman, Jared Thompson, Ryan Brobst, "China's Surprising Drone Sales in the Middle East," *Defense News*, April 23, 2021. <https://www.defensenews.com/opinion/2021/04/23/chinas-surprising-drone-sales-in-the-middle-east/>

⁴⁶ Jordan Allen, "M-SHORAD System Bolsters Army's Air Defense Capabilities," U.S. Army, April 23, 2021. https://www.army.mil/article/245530/m_shorad_system_bolsters_armys_air_defense_capabilities

laser-based, directed-energy counter-UAV system.⁴⁷ The United States should accelerate the development of its own counter-UAV systems while simultaneously preparing for exports to areas like the Middle East, and also consider encouraging greater security coordination among Abraham Accords partners to share technology and address this issue.

Continue targeting Russian sanctions evasion efforts to ensure lasting impact on the country's defense industry. Despite the Ukraine war, there will still be potential customers in the global arms market for Russian materiel. The allure of combat arms with minimal conditions and oversight will always find some appeal. To ensure that the Russian defense industry continues to struggle to source components for its most advanced platforms, the United States should continue countering its efforts to evade sanctions. On March 31, for instance, the Treasury Department noted that its designation of the Moscow-based entity OOO Serniya Engineering was aimed at halting the “center of a procurement network” designed to “illicitly procure dual-use equipment and technology for Russia’s defense sector.”⁴⁸

Additionally, as the war drags on and sanctions take their toll on the Russian economy, Moscow’s dependence on China will grow. Already, reports indicate Russia has asked Beijing for military support.⁴⁹ Chinese firms may also try to assist Russia in evading sanctions.⁵⁰ The United States should continue targeting these efforts to both stymie Russia-China cooperation as well as hinder Moscow’s ability to export arms globally.

⁴⁷ Arie Egozi, “Beyond Killing Drones, Israeli Laser Knocks Mortars Out of the Sky: Military,” *Breaking Defense*, April 14, 2022. <https://breakingdefense.com/2022/04/beyond-killing-drones-israeli-laser-knocks-mortars-out-of-the-sky-military/>

⁴⁸ “Treasury Targets Sanctions Evasion Networks and Russian Technology Companies Enabling Putin’s War,” U.S. Department of the Treasury, March 31, 2022. <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy0692>

⁴⁹ Kathrin Hille, “China Reverses Roles in Arms Trade with Russia,” *Financial Times*, March 29, 2022. <https://www.ft.com/content/dc4bc03c-3d9d-43bd-91db-1ede084e0798>

⁵⁰ Jenny Leonard, “U.S.’s Raimondo Warns Chinese Firms on Evading Russia Sanctions,” Bloomberg, March 9, 2022. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-03-10/raimondo-warns-chinese-firms-on-end-runs-around-russia-sanctions>