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RUSSIAN A2/AD IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN

A Growing Risk

Jonathan Altman

Much has been written about the challenges posed by the Chinese adoption of what the U.S. military calls "A2/AD" (antiaccess/area-denial) in the western Pacific. Accordingly, the Pacific remains a key focus area for the U.S. Navy and Air Force, and more recently the Army, with the Navy promising to put 60 percent of its forces in that theater as part of the "Pacific pivot." Yet as focus remains on the Pacific, the rest of the world is not standing still. This is exemplified in the eastern Mediterranean, where the Russians have begun laying the seeds to create an A2/AD zone in the region against the United States and its allies. If fully realized, an A2/AD envelope would put Western access to the Suez Canal, the Black Sea, and the resource-rich eastern Mediterranean at the mercy of an increasingly aggressive Russian regime.

LAYING THE SEEDS

Three interrelated elements make the development of an A2/AD zone in the eastern Mediterranean possible for the Russians. The first of these is the prospect of a credible, present military force, which in this case would most likely be provided by forward deployments from the Russian Black Sea Fleet. Armed with three (six by later this year) new, enhanced Kilo-class diesel-electric submarines, eleven thousand marines, and a surface contingent of forty-two ships as of 2014, the Russian Black Sea Fleet is certainly one of the most capable maritime forces in the region.[1] In contrast, the U.S. Sixth Fleet has a single command ship and four destroyers (DDGs) permanently

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assigned to it as of 2015, and those DDGs are based at the other end of the Mediterranean, in Spain, with only occasional rotational presence from ships passing through its area of regard on the way to or back from the Middle East. Although the United States does have regional allies with credible maritime combat power, the Russians are working to drive wedges into these relationships —which, not coincidentally, is the second pillar of Russia's regional strategy.

The Russian effort to decouple long-standing allies such as Greece, Turkey, and Egypt (and perhaps even Italy) from political and military alignment with the United States has been helped by U.S. policy choices as well as favorable circumstances the Russians can exploit.[2] The case of Greece began with the formation of a coalition government, since reelected, comprised of far-left and right-wing parties that are deeply resentful of the European Union and its American allies.[3] This government is committed to breaking out of the fiscal austerity "straitjacket" imposed as terms for European Union loans, and is ideologically aligned with Russian "Eurasianist" geopolitical theory.[4] This state of affairs has opened new opportunities for extending Russian influence, and the Russians have waded into this fray, supporting the Greek government politically, and publicly entertaining the possibility of assisting Greece with its debt issues.[5] Greco-Russian relations have, not surprisingly, warmed considerably.

In the case of Turkey, Russia has taken advantage of a decadelong trend by the Erdogan government away from democracy toward authoritarianism.[6] As the West has criticized President Recep Tayyip Erdogan for imprisoning journalists, fabricating charges against political opponents, and repressing civil dissent, the Russians have remained supportive, to the point that Erdogan has praised Putin directly.[7] This is not to say that areas of disagreement do not exist between these two nations, especially over policies with respect to Syria. Nevertheless, amid these disputes the Turks continue to promote a narrative of cooperation in other areas.[8]

The other Russian charm offensive in the region has been focused on Egypt. Faced with a virulent insurgency in the Sinai, and a U.S. administration that until recently was withholding military aid as punishment for the suspension of democracy, Egypt's repressive military junta has instead turned toward the Russians for military equipment procurement for the first time since the mid–Cold War.[9] The result of these actions has been increased goodwill for Russia from three countries that control choke-point access to and freedom of maneuver within the eastern Mediterranean, not to mention use of the eastern Mediterranean to access the Black and Red Seas. Neutrality (or even a delay, if the crisis were fast developing) in contributing formal support to the United States by these countries could pose a major challenge to U.S. strategy in the event of a Russian-American crisis or conflict.

With access for Russia's credible maritime combat power vastly improved, the final aspect of Russian regional strategy is to secure and expand basing agreements. Limited by geography, the Russians have no port on the Mediterranean; any warships they might want to put in the region would likely come via the Black Sea (although assets could be deployed from their other fleets, assuming they could pass through Gibraltar or Suez). Even though Turkey may be more cordial with Russia now than in the past, forward-basing agreements hedge against a risk of change in the political winds in Ankara that could bottle up the Black Sea Fleet. Additionally, forward basing allows a navy to keep more assets in theater without increasing fleet size, multiplying the impact of a smaller force.

The Russians' approach to expanding regional forward basing is simple: start with what already exists, then grow selectively, as permitted by relationships and favorable geography. Today, Russia's only naval base outside the former Soviet Union is in Tartus, Syria, on the shore of the eastern Mediterranean. As the advance of anti-Assad rebels has increasingly pressured the Syrian regime, Russia has doubled down on both political and military support to the regime. Politically, Russia has provided a friendly voice at the United Nations to the otherwise-pariah Assad government, and has worked within the United Nations and other international forums to blunt policies that could harm Assad.[10] Militarily, Russia has since September of 2015 begun to commit regular military forces in support of the Syrian government, including ground-attack fixed- and rotary-wing aircraft, naval vessels, and Russian marine infantry.[11] However the Syrian civil war might turn out, it is clear that Russia is willing to invest to preserve its regional allies (and bases). Lastly, the Cypriots, long prone to Russian sympathies, recently agreed to an expansion of Russian port calls, and even potentially an air base.[12] This could provide the Russians an additional strategic location to use in the region beyond Syria.

BUILDING AN EFFECTIVE ENVELOPE

According to the Defense Intelligence Agency, the presence of Yakhont antiship cruise missiles (ASCMs) in Syria alone has been enough to create a surface naval A2/AD zone in the northeastern corner of the Mediterranean.[13] Furthermore, rolling the three previously discussed aspects of Russian strategy together, it becomes clear how an expanded eastern Mediterranean A2/AD envelope could be established in the very near future. As Mahan famously wrote, the land features of a region can play a large role in determining maritime influence and access.[14] As part of its intervention in support of the Syrian government, Russia has established a new air base in western Syria, giving it a second operating location in Syria beyond its naval station at Tartus.[15] Russia has already deployed tactical aircraft and strategic airlift to its new air base, putting in place a key pillar

for any future establishment of an A2/AD envelope. In such a scenario, tactical aircraft would function as one part of the system, performing air interdiction, land attack, and potentially antiship attack of U.S. or NATO forces attempting to operate within the A2/AD zone. The preexisting deployment of land-based, Russian-supplied Yakhont ASCMs in Syria provides an additional boon to the area-denial aspect of Russia's approach, which could be augmented by further sales or deployments of Russian forces equipped with ASCMs to other friendly countries.[16] Additionally, Russia has deployed a number of unmanned aircraft to provide targeting information to its forces in Syria; many of these systems could be extendable to intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) operations within Syria's periphery.[17] Competent ISR is a major pillar of effective A2/AD operations, as these systems are essential for cueing attacks by other forces such as aircraft, ships, or land-based missile batteries against over-the-horizon (OTH) targets. Information gathered by these systems can be meshed with that from overhead imagery (which does not need a forward operating base) to increase overall targeting effectiveness.

While the Russians have deployed many of the asset types needed for effective A2/AD in the eastern Mediterranean, they have not yet deployed other key A2/AD capabilities. One example is the failure to deploy advanced mobile long-range surface-to-air missiles (SAMs) alongside existing Russian Yakhonts, tactical aircraft, and ISR assets in Syria, or perhaps to deploy such SAMs in notional locations in Cyprus. Much has been written about the capabilities of Russian "triple digit" SAMs, both the in-service S-300s and S-400s as well as the developmental S-500. S-500s will have up to a 600 km antiair range, according to some Russian sources—enough to blanket the region from Crete east, assuming they are based in Cyprus (the same sources cite the S-400's range as 400 km, with newer variants of the earlier S-300 at a more modest 200 km).[18] The Russians may also seek to adapt these systems to enable integration aboard surface ships beyond the existing S-300FM integration in Russian cruisers, further increasing SAM deployment flexibility.[19] Advanced SAMs such as these would significantly improve Russian A2/AD capability in the region by enabling wide-area and highly responsive antiair coverage while simultaneously decreasing the demands on Russian fighters to maintain combat air patrols.

To increase further the effectiveness of their targeting, the Russians could also consider deploying land-based OTH targeting (OTHT) assets in the region, most likely at one of their Syrian bases for those systems that require a fixed location. Examples of such OTHT systems could include signals intelligence collection sites and OTH surface-wave radars, both of which would increase Russian situational awareness. OTHT would moreover, by definition, increase Russian detection ranges, and could be interlinked with other ISR assets to form an integrated,

highly capable detection system. A Russian deployment of Black Sea–based Kilo-class submarines to the region would insert a further threat into the undersea domain at a time when more advanced but already overtasked U.S. nuclear submarines continue to decline within the force structure.[20] If Russia could rely on Iranian irregular troops or proxies such as Hezbollah to provide material support for the imposition of an A2/AD zone—for instance, by assisting with local ground defense and security in areas where such systems are deployed—the strength of the zone would be amplified. The degree to which U.S. and allied (especially Israeli, given the country's proximity) surface and air access in the eastern Mediterranean would be imperiled by any single one of the potential deployments discussed, and especially by combinations of them, should be clear.

Taking into account the technological and tactical considerations of the previous paragraphs, what else would the Russians need to do to establish formally an effective, militarily relevant A2/AD zone in the eastern Mediterranean? The first and most important action would be to attempt to ensure Turkish noninterference (Greek and Egyptian noninterference would be desirable too, but much less important comparatively). As touched on already, since Turkey controls access from Russian Black Sea ports to the eastern Mediterranean, Turkish noninterference greatly simplifies the imposition of an A2/AD envelope. So long as Turkey allows Russian vessels to pass into the Mediterranean, resupply of forward Russian forces would be uncomplicated; reinforcements could flow in unabated as needed. To support this outcome, Russia might use its newly deployed forces in Syria plus its preexisting forces in the Black Sea and south Caucasus regions, or perhaps the threat of closer Russian political cooperation with Greece, to coerce Turkish passivity in the event of a Russian threat against other NATO allies.

While Russian establishment of an eastern Mediterranean A2/AD zone could still work even if a neutral Turkey closed passages from the Black Sea to the Mediterranean during or surrounding a conflict, an openly hostile Turkey would almost certainly negate Russian plans.[21] In that eventuality, any Russian forces in theater would be subject to a rear-column threat from a capable Turkish navy (along with land-based aircraft), and Russian bases would be threatened by Turkish offensive capabilities. Accordingly, for a Russian eastern Mediterranean A2/AD envelope to be feasible, at the very least Turkey must not actively oppose it with military force.

In the event a neutral Turkey did seal access to the Mediterranean, one workaround could be the use of an air bridge to resupply forward forces by ferrying supplies from Russia through Iran and Iraq into the region. Russia has already pursued this approach to deploy its forces in Syria when American allies did not permit Russian overflight of their territory.[22] However, less matériel can be supplied via air than by sea, and the resultant volume might not be adequate to

maintain sufficient forces in theater over a longer period of tension or conflict. In such a case, Russia could also attempt to move matériel overland along the same route as the air bridge, although it is unclear whether the transportation infrastructure exists to support such logistical volume. Nor is it clear whether Iraq would grant such access.

Beyond securing Turkish nonhostility, the next action needed to increase the chance of success in this endeavor is the prepositioning of forces and supplies in the region—which the Russians seem to be doing in Syria today, and may consider in the future elsewhere, such as in Cyprus. There are many ways this could be accomplished in countries such as Cyprus, where the Russians lack a permanent base, whether through announced "rotational" basing agreements or simply secretly stockpiling hardware with tacit Cypriot acceptance (perhaps in exchange for a favor, such as a generous loan or a discount on Russian oil). However it is accomplished, having sufficient combat power and supplies in theater when a conflict starts would confer significant advantage on Russian forces by both eliminating the time needed to concentrate combat power and providing forward forces with several days, if not weeks, of warfighting supplies, regardless of other operational considerations (for instance, if Turkey closed the straits to nations involved in the dispute while remaining neutral). The Russians could augment combat power further, assuming they knew when the conflict would start (not an unreasonable suspicion, given recent events in Ukraine), by staging a training exercise to concentrate additional forces in the area before the conflict began, as they did against Georgia in 2008.[23] Using an approach like this, the Russians may be able to present the establishment of an effective A2/AD zone as a fait accompli by the time a recognized conflict has emerged.

If the Russians wanted to delay further a potential response in a crisis scenario, they could couple their establishment of an A2/AD zone with limited strikes on select hostile forces in theater (perhaps after some nominal period during which any forces would be allowed to flee—ideally designed to be too short to allow all hostile assets to leave) to solidify their credibility and force any opponents to fight their way into the A2/AD zone with forces brought in from other theaters. While this approach would be very likely to ensure a response from the nations whose assets were attacked, and would necessitate openly admitting their involvement (in contrast to their recent Ukraine interventions), the Russians may be willing to gamble that the delays and confusion caused by these strikes (especially if combined with their recent diplomatic charm offensive in the region) would ultimately undermine the political will of some NATO, or other potentially NATO-allied, nations to respond. The goal of such an attack would be to raise the level of commitment needed to respond and to dissuade other nations, especially those whose forces were not attacked (and who therefore might not yet be militarily involved),

from joining the effort. The more this line of thinking permeates among potential responding nations, the less potent a response the Russians would likely receive. Nevertheless, limited opening strikes like these are more of a consideration than an outright requirement for success.

PUTTING THE SCHEME TO WORK

Assuming the Russians have at least some capability to establish an A2/AD zone in the eastern Mediterranean, it provides numerous geopolitical advantages. From a peacetime perspective, once local actors believe the Russians have a capability to establish an A2/AD zone at will, Russian influence in the region will increase further. While not all nations in the eastern Mediterranean are ideologically aligned with the Russian worldview, they will need to acknowledge that such a Russian ability—to deny other nations' forces entry into and freedom of maneuver within the region—makes cordial relations with Russia essential. Accordingly, analysts should expect neutral countries or even nominal opponents of Russian interests (such as Jordan, Israel, and Bulgaria) to refrain from criticizing Russian actions on the whole, and to take a more deferential approach to bilateral relations as this reality materializes. Nations already leaning toward the Russian orbit may not only highlight their ties with Russia more openly but seek to deepen them. Over time, this will turn Russian power in the region into a norm—at the expense of U.S. and Western European influence, much in the same way that U.S. commitment of resources and combat power kept parts of Europe (Italy and Greece are prime examples) from succumbing to Soviet influence following the Second World War.

To take this argument further and expand its time horizon, the combination of eastern Mediterranean pressure and aggressive Russian political messaging and military posturing both in Central Europe and in the Baltics could play into a larger effort to erode NATO.[24] Assuming that southern Europe remains NATO's "weak flank," a long-term campaign to keep southern European nations from supporting diplomatic or other efforts to counter Russia's goals out of fear of Russian power or desire for Russian friendship would erode NATO's credibility, if not also its combat effectiveness. This could feasibly be part of a longer-term plan to break the alliance, as the more NATO seems unable to maintain the internal cohesion necessary to confront challenges, the less credible it becomes. This incremental approach fits with recent Russian actions in Crimea and eastern Ukraine, whereby Russia slowly ratcheted up its aggression (combined with extensive misinformation) to achieve a fait accompli before it could be effectively challenged.

If some sort of confrontation were to occur, the ability to establish, or even to threaten plausibly to establish, an eastern Mediterranean A2/AD zone could confer distinct warfighting advantages as well. Consider if the Russian aim in a

campaign were to reclaim some part of the Baltics. To slow NATO's ability to respond to such a provocation, the Russians could use their SAM capabilities to declare a no-fly zone in the eastern Mediterranean, and declare military aircraft of any NATO or NATO-supporting nations to be legitimate targets. The most likely reaction to this threat by those nations close by would be to seek support immediately from NATO, which would distract from a response elsewhere. The mere confusion caused by such a move could delay NATO action long enough to allow the Russians to create a fait accompli in the Baltics. Once they are entrenched, the prospect of forcibly evicting Russian forces from the Baltics becomes much more daunting, and many NATO nations would likely not have the domestic political support necessary for a potentially large campaign.

Of course, the "second front" approach described here could also be used in ways less focused on warfighting, such as to break the resolve of regional NATO nations to continue resisting Russian policies. As an example, Russia could establish an air-defense identification or maritime exclusion zone in the region and claim that such an action was needed to "prevent the delivery of weapons to terrorists threatening the Syrian people." In the case of an air-defense identification zone, any aircraft could be denied this airspace if its leadership were working against Russian aims (by supporting sanctions, opposing the Assad government, etc.), and diverting aircraft around it consistently could be expensive and time-consuming. The Russians could similarly take this campaign to the seas by insisting that any vessel with a NATO flag passing through the area be subject to additional searches. These searches could be imposed concurrently with the "preventative" no-fly zone described above for added effect. For those NATO nations that seemingly are removed from the threat of Russian confrontation except with respect to a NATO Article 5 breach, it could become tempting to relieve themselves of these headaches by acceding to Russian influence.

COUNTERING RUSSIAN PLANS

Fortunately, there are options available to mitigate the risks of such an outcome. Starting at the geopolitical level, the most straightforward counter to the Russian establishment of an eastern Mediterranean A2/AD zone would be to break the nascent bond between Russia and Turkey.[25] For reasons already described, an openly hostile Turkey would prove a fatal bar to Russian aspirations. Practically speaking, there are a number of pressure points that could be leveraged by American policy makers seeking to fracture the Russian-Turkish relationship. Perhaps most immediately, the conflict in Syria provides an opening. While the Russians continue to support the Assad government against all rebel forces, including through active aerial bombardment, Turkey remains fundamentally opposed to Assad's continued presence and provides support to some of those same forces

seeking to overthrow him.[26] This discord could be highlighted to increase domestic pressure on President Erdogan to back off from supporting Russia. American officials could also consider more robustly supporting some Turkish-backed Syrian rebel groups to gain a more favorable perception from Erdogan. There are additional avenues that could be pursued to undermine Russian-Turkish bilateral relations as well, such as publicizing past historical enmity or Russia's harsh treatment of Muslims in its Caucasus region.

Another nonmilitary option for countering Russian plans can be found in defense policy. Specifically, NATO nations could individually, in groups, or preferably as one voice issue a strong statement of maritime declaratory policy with respect to Russian expansionism in the eastern Mediterranean. Such a statement would aim to show the Russians that the alliance is united in opposition to the Russian threat and that Russian moves are not going unnoticed. Of course, to be effective—to avoid being seen as hollow—this statement would need to be supported by military demonstrations. One such example could be the announcement and visible media coverage of a NATO-wide war game in the Mediterranean in which the alliance would practice its abilities to cooperatively respond to regional A2/AD challenges. The effect of this war game would be amplified if NATO forces were seen to be often practicing, as part of their normal routines, the planning and joint naval exercises needed to operate in an A2/AD environment.

Beyond geopolitical and defense-policy solutions, there are three broad, Navy-focused options that could be pursued. The first but least desirable of these would be transferring forces from other theaters to increase U.S. Navy (and by consequence NATO) capability in the eastern Mediterranean. The issues in the eastern Mediterranean are fundamentally a symptom of a U.S. Navy that is undersized for the global tasks assigned to it and a NATO maritime force that no longer provides sufficient deterrent effect. To redeploy existing U.S. forces to the Mediterranean would merely exacerbate these symptoms in another part of the world. A second option—which from a navalist's perspective is the most desirable, but simultaneously the most politically challenging—is to grow the size of the U.S. Navy. During the Cold War, carrier and amphibious group deployments to the eastern Mediterranean were routine, assuring U.S. allies of our commitment to their defense while deterring potential Soviet aggression. By contrast, the Navy's current supply of day-to-day deterrence through credible combat power and presence is far outstripped by worldwide demand.

Acknowledging this issue, and taking the current fiscal-policy conflict between Congress and the administration into account, expanding the credibility and relevance of regional NATO forces may be the quickest and most feasible way to push back against the Russian A2/AD threat. There are two reinforcing actions that could be taken in this area, starting with reinvigorating Standing

NATO Maritime Groups. Currently NATO operates two Standing Maritime Groups, although between them both only seven ships are combatants (and three of those are recent augmentations above normal force structure).[27] Given that no allied submarines and only a handful of helicopters are included within the groups combined, this force is highly vulnerable to Russian submarine attack or coercion. This could be addressed by augmenting the standing group assigned to the Mediterranean with allied undersea forces. Furthermore, the allocation of dedicated land-based airpower and additional surface combatants to NATO maritime forces would increase their credibility in the region. To be maximally effective, these reinvigorated standing groups should ensure their proficiency in key training and warfare areas critical to defeating A2/AD networks. This should include fielding advanced electronic warfare (EW) capabilities and training personnel to employ countersurveillance techniques that can together defeat any OTHT systems supporting Syria-based Yakhonts or potentially other ASCM threats. Other areas of emphasis could include increased focus on antisubmarine warfare (ASW) techniques and amphibious raid support (to deal with potential inland Russian SAM threats). Additionally, standing groups have the deterrent benefit of tying nations together, as an attack on the group would affect at least a half-dozen different countries. To add further effect, NATO leadership should work to ensure Greek and Turkish participation (although perhaps not concurrently, for historical reasons) in a Mediterranean Standing Maritime Group and cycle it through the eastern Mediterranean regularly, if not base it there.

The second action that would help to increase the credibility and relevance of regional NATO forces is to focus future acquisitions on capabilities that either fill current operational gaps or enable deployment of systems most likely to deter Russian aggression.[28] Given previous coverage of Russian strengths in the region, one obvious area for technological improvement is ASW. Besides new Italian-variant European multipurpose frigates, or FREMMs, no other regional navy deploys ASW missiles or rockets (and even the FREMMs only have four per ship).[29] This oversight should be rectified in future surface-ship acquisitions, and an evaluation of the ability to backfit this capability onto current platforms should be undertaken. Similarly, a renewed commitment to ASW would be reinforced by consistently designing NATO and NATO allies' surface ships intended to perform an ASW mission with a double hangar for ASW helicopters, which greatly increases their effectiveness over those with a single one.[30] This is all the more critical given that, due to the aforementioned general lack of ASW missiles or rockets, most NATO navies can only attack enemy submarines organically through the use of a helicopter.

Another area where smarter procurements could fill an operational gap is EW. If NATO maritime forces are to operate credibly against the described

Russian A2/AD envelope, they will need to overcome potential threats from both land- and sea-based ASCMs. Having more sophisticated EW suites on board (preferably at or near the level of U.S. Navy capability) will make regional NATO maritime forces more survivable, and complicate holding them at risk. Prioritizing investments in unmanned systems (air, surface, and subsea) is another area to consider. Unmanned aerial systems, for instance, could help with a number of issues that current NATO maritime forces face, from improving communications resiliency in a denied environment (through line-of-sight linkages using unmanned aerial vehicles to pass data between platforms), to OTH targeting and sensing.[31] Improved sensing would also be augmented by incorporating more unmanned undersea systems, which could help detect enemy submarines or perform reconnaissance of surface-denied areas.

As a final consideration, doing more to integrate U.S. and NATO naval tactical data networks could pay large dividends from a warfighting perspective. This might include expanded testing efforts to ensure that developmental datalink management and naval combat system baselines across the alliance are interoperable and that defects are identified and corrected early. This might also include instituting more-efficient approaches to electronically "sanitizing" situational information originating from allies' respective higher-classification resources to help facilitate a common force-level "picture." This would allow ships of different navies to pass tactical information back and forth easily, greatly improving each individual platform's operating picture, and consequently the whole force's as well. Closer integration of allies' respective tactical data networks would also enable a more robust sensor picture that could be used for distributed fire control (i.e., one platform fires weapons using sensor data provided by another platform) and more-efficient air defense (assuming a common set of rules of engagement could be agreed on and the requisite cooperative technical efforts were pursued). However, given the information-assurance issues that could come with linking U.S. networks to those of another nation, the potential risks of such an approach and possible technical approaches to mitigating them should be well understood before pursuing this course.

Whatever course of action the United States and NATO ultimately pursue, it is important for policy makers and strategists alike to recognize the serious strategic implications of a Russian A2/AD envelope in the eastern Mediterranean. Such an envelope would present grave challenges to U.S. influence in the region and would imperil the free flow of commerce that is essential to U.S. and global prosperity. It would be wise to take steps now to prepare for this threat rather than attempting to address it after it becomes realized.

NOTES

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1. Matthew Bodner, "Russia's Black Sea Fleet Will Get 80 New Warships to Repel NATO," *Moscow Times,* 23 September 2014; International Institute for Strategic Studies, "Russia and Eurasia," chap. 5 in *The Military Balance 2014* (London: Routledge, 2014).

   It must be noted that not all of these ships may be self-deployable. Counting only principal combatants and amphibious ships, the Black Sea Fleet has fourteen self-deployable ships, although it should be assumed that any deployment of these would be accompanied by some number of smaller combatants (missile boats or patrol craft), of which that fleet has nineteen, which may themselves be self-deployable in groups.

   Turkey may also be able to compete for this title on the basis of force size, so long as the Turkish navy is compared solely against the Russian Black Sea Fleet without augmentation from any other Russian naval forces. In the case of escalating tensions or if preparing for a conflict they intend to start, the Russians could flow forces in from other theaters, most of which are more heavily resourced than the Black Sea Fleet.

2. Emanuele Scimia, "Italy Caught in Ukrainian Dilemma," *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 12, no. 88 (11 May 2015), www.jamestown.org/.

3. "Syriza and Other Radicals," *The Economist,* 31 May 2014.

4. Robert Coalson, "New Greek Government Has Deep, Long-Standing Ties with Russian 'Fascist' Dugin," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty,* 28 January 2015.

5. Giorgos Christides, "Could Europe Lose Greece to Russia?," *BBC News,* 10 May 2015.

6. Daniel Dombey, "Turkey's Erdogan Lurches toward Authoritarianism," *Financial Times,* 6 May 2014.

7. Christian Caryl, "New Model Dictator: Why Vladimir Putin Is the Leader Other Autocrats Wish They Could Be," *Foreign Policy,* 13 February 2015.

8. Tim Arango, "Russian Military's Actions in Syria Cause Rift with Turkey," *New York Times,* 6 October 2015.

9. "U.S. Ends Freeze on Military Aid to Egypt," *Morning Edition,* National Public Radio, broadcast 3 April 2015; Gabriela Baczynska, "Russia, Egypt Seal Preliminary Arms Deal Worth $3.5 Billion: Agency," Reuters, 17 September 2014.

10. Andrew Tilghman and Oriana Pawlyk, "U.S. vs. Russia: What a War Would Look like between the World's Most Fearsome Militaries," *Military Times,* 5 October 2015, available at www.militarytimes.com/.

11. Ibid.

12. "Cyprus Signs Deal to Allow Russian Navy to Use Ports," *BBC News,* 26 February 2015.

13. *Worldwide Threat Assessment, Before the Armed Services Committee,* 114th Cong., 1st sess. (3 February 2015) (statement of Vincent R. Stewart, Director, Defense Intelligence Agency).

14. James R. Holmes, "Strategic Features of the South China Sea: A Tough Neighborhood for Hegemons," *Naval War College Review* 67, no. 2 (Spring 2014), pp. 30–51.

15. Roger McDermott, "Russia Initiates 'Out-of-Area Operation' in Syria," *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 12, no. 180 (6 October 2015), www.jamestown.org/.

16. Jonathan Marcus, "Syria's Options in Case of a US Strike," *BBC News,* 28 August 2013.

17. Ibid.

18. "S-500 Samoderzhet," and "S-300 Series Tactical and Technical Performance," GlobalSecurity.org.

19. "Russian Naval Specialists Designing New Destroyer," *Siberian Insider,* 2 February 2015.

20. Randy Forbes and Joe Courtney, "Save Our Subs: Prioritizing the Attack Submarine," *Breaking Defense,* 9 April 2013.

21. For instance, if a neutral but not hostile

Turkey closed the straits A2/AD assets in theater could use prepositioned stores or rely on friendly local nations such as Syria for some level of resupply, though probably not indefinitely. This may be acceptable if the Russian A2/AD zone is being prepared as a delaying tactic against a NATO response.

22. Eric Schmitt and Michael R. Gordon, "Russian Moves in Syria Widen Role in Mideast," *New York Times,* 14 September 2015.

23. Brian Whitmore, "Did Russia Plan Its War in Georgia?," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty,* 15 August 2008.

24. Matthew Armstrong, "Russia's War on Information," *War on the Rocks,* 15 December 2014, and "RT as a Foreign Agent: Political Propaganda in a Globalized World," *War on the Rocks,* 4 May 2015, both at www.warontherocks.com/.

25. While breaking the growing Greco-Russian bond may seem to be as attractive as breaking that between Turkey and Russia, from a geopolitical perspective it is a much poorer option. Simply put, Greece does not have the strategic position of Turkey that makes it essential to Russian success. When this is combined with a government that is anti–Western Europe and anti–United States, systemic debt issues, and fewer clear points of discord with Russia, the motivation to pursue a break in Greco-Russian bilateral relations is further diminished.

26. Agence France-Presse, "Syria Regime Advances with Russian Air Support," *Yahoo News,* 11 October 2015, www.yahoo.com/advances-syrias-aleppo-despite-russia-air-war-103750100.html; Desmond Butler, "Turkey Officials Confirm Pact with Saudi Arabia to Help Rebels Fighting Syria's Assad," *Huffington Post,* 7 May 2015.

27. "NATO Standing Maritime Groups," *Maritme Command: MARCOM,* www.mc.nato.int/org/smg/Pages/default.aspx.

28. Some acquisitions could, of course, meet both of these wickets.

29. "FREMM European Multimission Frigate, France/Italy," Naval-Technology.com.

30. Having two helicopters instead of one offers more-continuous coverage of ASW threats as well as insurance against a single mechanical issue eliminating a ship's ability to engage contacts.

31. Megan Eckstein, "COMSUBFOR Connor: Submarine Force Could Become the New A2/AD Threat," *USNI News,* 14 May 2015, news.usni.org/.