

THE IMPACT OF RUSSIA'S INVASION OF UKRAINE IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON
MIDDLE EAST, NORTH AFRICA, AND GLOBAL
COUNTERTERRORISM

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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THE IMPACT OF RUSSIA'S INVASION OF UKRAINE IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

Wednesday, May 18, 2022

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE MIDDLE EAST, NORTH
AFRICA AND GLOBAL COUNTERTERRORISM,
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
Washington, DC.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 2:08 p.m., in room 2172, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Theodore E. Deutch (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Mr. DEUTCH. The Subcommittee on the Middle East, North Africa and Global Counterterrorism will come to order. Without objection, the chair is authorized to declare a recess of the subcommittee at any point and all members will have 5 days to submit statements, extraneous material, and questions for the record, subject to the length limitations in the rules.

As a reminder, members who are participating virtually, please keep your video function on at all times, even when you are not recognized by the chair. Members are responsible for muting and unmuting themselves consistent with House Resolution 8 and the accompanying regulations. Staff will only mute members and witnesses as appropriate when they are not under recognition, to eliminate background noise.

And pursuant to notice, the subcommittee is meeting today to hear testimony on Russia's invasion of Ukraine in the Middle East and/or its invasion of Ukraine and the impact in the Middle East and North Africa. I see that we have a quorum and I will recognize myself for the purpose of making an opening statement.

I would like to extend a warm welcome to our witnesses, Dr. Hanna Notte who is with us virtually; Dr. Frederic Wehrey—Wehrey, sorry—also with us virtually; Ms. Caitlin Welsh; and Mr. Grant Rumley. I thank you for joining us today for what I know is a timely and important discussion. I also want to take a moment and acknowledge a delegation from the Ukrainian parliament that is here with us today. I want to thank you for coming and I want you as both, please, as a fellow parliamentarian and a proud American, I want you to know that we stand with you and with your country at this difficult time. Of course.

It has been 12 weeks since Russia's illegal and unjust invasion of Ukraine. And in that time, we have seen over six million Ukrainian refugees flee their homes. We have seen the destruction, Russian destruction of hospitals, apartments, Ukrainian culture

sites, as well as horrific war crimes and atrocities committed by Russian forces in Bucha and elsewhere.

From the start, the United States, our European allies, and partners around the world coalesced in opposition to the invasion and in support of the Ukrainian people. And while the eyes of the world are on Ukraine, there is no question that this war has dramatically shifted the international landscape as we know it and has caused major ramifications in just about every country and region around the world. The Middle East is no exception.

Russia and Ukraine, together, provide roughly one-third of the total global wheat exports and the majority of supply to the MENA region. In 2019, Egypt, Lebanon, Libya, the UAE, Israel, Tunisia, and Oman, all imported nearly half of their annual supply of wheat from the two countries. So the Russia invasion not only interrupted the wheat harvest and exports in Ukraine, but also impacted countries' ability and desire to purchase wheat from Russia and impeded the global supply of fertilizers. As a result, wheat prices have risen more than 60 percent this year, and when combined with the COVID pandemic and mounting economic constraints, high dependence on Russian and Ukrainian food exports exacerbate humanitarian crises in parts of the region like Syria and Yemen.

Moreover, high food prices and shortages have the potential to cause social unrest, severe instability, fiscal crises, and waves of migration. I am eager to hear from our witnesses today on the impact of the Russian invasion of Ukraine on food security in the region, and specifically what the U.S. and our international partners can do to help alleviate the needs.

Russia has a significant conventional military and mercenary presence in the Middle East and North Africa but the war in Ukraine has caused Russia to shift resources and attention away from the region. Russia has had a naval installation in Tartus, Syria, since the early 1970's and has been integral to Bashar al-Assad's, in enabling his regime to cling to power. And while the success of Russian forces and the necessity of Russian support in Syria heightened perceptions of Russian influence, its failures in Ukraine have sobered the region's understanding of Russian capabilities and reduced the desire for Russian defense exports.

Russia has had a military presence in Libya since the 2019 civil war when it intervened on behalf of Khalifa Haftar through the deployment of Russian military personnel and mercenaries from Syria and the Kremlin-backed private military force, the Wagner Group. While fighters remain in Libya today on Moscow's behalf, a significant number of them have moved to Ukraine in recent weeks to reinforce Russia's battered army, and I hope to hear more from our witnesses today about Russia's current force posture in the Middle East and North Africa, their operational and strategic goals in the region, and how these have shifted since the invasion of Ukraine in February.

On the diplomatic front, countries in the Middle East and North Africa region are an important asset to the world's response against the Russian invasion of Ukraine. With Russia accounting for approximately 34 percent of the oil and 40 percent of the natural gas to Europe, countries in the region have the opportunity to

support new supply sources and to help solidify European energy independence from Russia.

Russia has attempted to advance diplomatic relations with countries in the Middle East like Iran, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Libya. Over the past few years, in particular, Russia has perceived an opportunity to court regional leaders who seek leverage against the U.S. or to exploit concerns of U.S. partners about the reliability of U.S. support. Russia's behavior on many important regional issues, including Bab al-Hawa border reauthorization in Syria coming up in July, is threatening international stability and security further.

In addition, Russia has long aligned itself with Iran and supported its malign behavior across the region and beyond. Just as the United States and our partners have coalesced in opposition to Russia's invasion of Ukraine and its violation of Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity, so too must we unite against Iran in support of our regional partners including Israel and the Gulf States whose territory and citizens are constantly under threat from Iran and its proxies.

A vast majority of U.S. partners and allies in the region stood together at the United Nations in voting to condemn Russia's invasion of Ukraine; however, when it came suspending Russia's right of membership at the Human Rights Council, a significant number of countries in the region chose to abstain. And I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today about Russia's shifting diplomatic influence in the Middle East, the role that countries in the MENA region can or should play to further isolate Russia, and the impact that these challenges will have on U.S. foreign policy.

Again, I thank our witnesses for being here. I am grateful for our friends from the Ukrainian parliament who are here, and I will now yield to Ranking Member Wilson for his opening remarks.

Mr. WILSON. Thank you, Chairman Ted Deutch. And Chairman Deutch, I want you to know how grateful we are for your leadership, what a difference you have made as you are concluding your service in Congress. You have made such a positive difference and particularly we can see the positive difference that you have made recently with the additional funding for the people of Ukraine to show our affection for the people of Ukraine.

And how fitting to have a delegation of Ukrainian parliament present because they should know that Americans are united to send a message to the people of Ukraine that we appreciate their resolve, their courage, and a message to Putin that indeed he is sacrificing young Russians solely for the benefit of his personal aggrandizement of oil and money and power, and so what a time for all of us to come together.

And I appreciate this hearing in particular about Putin's war in Ukraine and the consequence in the Middle East/North Africa region. Certainly, we see an example of Putin's maniacal destabilization goals exemplified through his involvement in the Middle East and North Africa. The world is at a conflict between democracy with rule of law opposed by authoritarians with rule of gun. There is the sad sequence developing of Putin invading Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia with the Chinese Communist Party invading Taiwan as Iran seeks to vaporize Israel and India is destabilized. We must all stand firm.

The world has witnessed Putin's murderous atrocities in Syria as Putin props up the butcher Bashar al-Assad in his continued war on his own people who desire a democratic and free Syria. The images of bombed-out hospitals and schools in Ukraine are a mirror image of what we have witnessed in Syria at Aleppo. Without Putin, Assad could not have been able to carry out atrocities on the scale that have been witnessed. This unholy alliance is critical for Putin to maintain a footprint in the region.

Utilizing Hmeimim and the naval base at Tartus, Russia's only overseas naval facility outside of the former Soviet borders, Putin stages exercises and protects power in the Mediterranean. In Libya, Russia continues its support of warlord Khalifa Haftar and further destabilizing a country trying to rebuild.

I was grateful to lead the Libya Stabilization Act with Chairman Ted Deutch to hold Russia accountable for its malign actions in Libya. Putin's murderous Wagner Group is deployed across war zones in the Middle East aligned with authoritarian regimes wreaking havoc in committing human rights' violations. It remains to be seen how Putin's war in Ukraine has affected Wagner Group's deployments across the MENA region.

A critical sequence of Putin's war is the effect on the global wheat supply. More than one-fourth of the world's wheat comes from Russia and Ukraine, with Ukraine's harvest season nearing. Incredibly, 80 percent of the wheat imported by Egypt is from Ukraine. Putin's war has shut down ports, displaced farmers, severely jeopardized the forecast for exportable wheat; the effects of this are obvious to the entire region and to the MENA as a top customer as Putin has revealed himself to be the destabilizing actor, that he is creating opportunities for the United States to step in as the more reliable alternative with regards to security assistance.

The United States should continue to leverage sanctions imposed on Russian arms sales and by encouraging MENA countries to enact their sanctions to prevent their countries from becoming a haven for dirty money that fuels Putin's war. Make no mistake, Putin's goals are insidious. He seeks to establish reliance and extort countries to do his bidding. A bizarre beneficiary of the changing energy landscape will undoubtedly be Iran. With the Administration's inclination to lift sanctions on the regime in Tehran in an effort to return to the disastrous JCPOA, we will see other countries follow China's lead in importing Iranian oil to fuel the destruction of Israel.

I thank our witnesses for their time and expertise and I look forward to hearing from you. With that, I yield back.

Mr. DEUTCH. Thank you, Mr. Wilson. Thanks again to our witnesses for being here today. Let me remind the witnesses to please limit your testimony to 5 minutes and, without objection, your written statements will be made a part of the hearing record. I will now introduce our witnesses.

Dr. Hanna Notte is a senior research associate with the Vienna Center for Disarmament and Nonproliferation focusing on arms control and security issues involving Russia, the Middle East, their intersection, and implications for U.S. and European policy. She completed her doctorate at Oxford University in 2018 on the topic of U.S.-Russian cooperation in the Middle East. She is fluent in

Russian and Arabic. She is a German national residing in Berlin and Vienna. Her contributions have appeared in *Foreign Policy*, the *Washington Post*, *War on the Rocks* and *Carnegie*, among others.

Dr. Frederic Wehrey is a senior fellow in the Middle East Program at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace where he focuses on geopolitics, security and governance in Libya, North Africa, and the Gulf. He has testified before the U.S. Senate and House on multiple occasions, served as a consultant to the United Nations and other international organizations, and prior to joining Carnegie, he served for 21 years in the active and reserve components of the U.S. Air Force with tours across the Middle East and Africa. He holds a doctorate from the University of Oxford and a master's degree from Princeton University.

Ms. Caitlin Welsh is the director of Global Food Security Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies where she provides insight and policy solutions to global and U.S. food security challenges. She brings over a decade of U.S. Government experience to this role, serving most recently on the National Security Council and National Economic Council as director of Global Economic Engagement where she coordinated U.S. policy in the G7 and G20. Prior to the White House, Ms. Welsh spent over 7 years in the Department of State's Office of Global Food Security, including as acting director, offering guidance to the Secretary of State on global food security.

And finally, Mr. Grant Rumley is a senior fellow at The Washington Institute for Near East Policy's program on Great Power Competition and the Middle East where he specializes in military and security affairs in the Middle East. From 2018 to 2021, Grant served in both the Trump and Biden Administrations as an advisor for Middle East policy in the Office of Secretary of Defense, Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, and prior to joining OSD, Mr. Rumley was Research Fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies where his research focused on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

As we can see, we have an esteemed group of witnesses today. I thank all of them for being here. I will now recognize the witnesses for 5 minutes each and, without objection, your prepared written statements will be made a part of the record.

Dr. Notte, you are recognized.

STATEMENT OF DR. HANNA NOTTE, SENIOR RESEARCH ASSOCIATE, VIENNA CENTER FOR DISARMAMENT AND NON-PROLIFERATION

Dr. NOTTE. Chairman Deutch, Ranking Member Wilson, members of the subcommittee, members of the Ukrainian parliament, thanks very much for inviting me to participate in today's hearing. My name is Hanna Notte. I am a senior research associate at the Vienna Center for Disarmament and Non-Proliferation and I am here to speak solely on my own behalf.

As Russia settles into a protracted war of aggression against Ukraine, the ripple effects are being felt across the Middle East. High energy and food prices are just one example. So what should we expect regarding Russia's role in the MENA region going forward?

It has been my assessment which was reaffirmed in conversations I had in Moscow just days before the invasion of Ukraine that Russia's approach to the region has settled into a stable modus operandi in recent years. First, Moscow's military presence in Syria has given it a buffer zone on its southern flank to counter perceived threats from within the region, but also to deter NATO outside the European theater. And second, Russia has turned to the region to diversify its economic relations with a focus on arms sales, civilian nuclear exports, and wheat supplies. And in building influence, Russia has largely followed what I would call a low-cost, high-disruption approach, also using hybrid tactics such as private military companies and disinformation.

Now these Russian interests in the region will not fundamentally change with the invasion of Ukraine. Today, Russia's regional diplomacy remains highly active, aimed at offsetting the impact of Western sanctions and demonstrating that Moscow is not isolated internationally. However, I would expect Russia's activities to be accompanied by a certain military risk aversion, for instance, vis-a-vis U.S. forces in Syria, while the bulk of its military remains consumed in Ukraine. It wants to preserve existing gains in Syria.

Now let me turn to the question of Russian cooperation in specific areas. Starting with arms control and non-proliferation, though Moscow seemed intent on spoiling negotiations to restore the JCPOA in early March, it subsequently dropped demands for written guarantees that its cooperation with Tehran would not be hindered by sanctions imposed over Ukraine. But still, I think the geopolitical situation might make Moscow less willing to help finalize a nuclear deal. As in the past, Russia is also unlikely to support any U.S. efforts to curb Iran's use of missiles and proxies in the region because, essentially, Iran's regional strategy pins down U.S. resources while elevating Russia as a regional mediator which serves Russian interests well.

Just a few words on the implications of Russia's nuclear saber-rattling over Ukraine for proliferation trends in the region, I think those will require careful monitoring. Regional countries took note of a nuclear weapons State using veiled nuclear threats to deter the conventional defense of a nonnuclear weapons State and they will reflect what this precedent means for their own security.

Just a few words on Syria, Security Council Resolution 2585 on the provision of humanitarian aid to northwest Syria is up for renewal in July. Now rationally speaking, the Kremlin should cooperate to avoid a worsening of Syria's food crisis especially if an endgame in Ukraine remains out of reach. But considering the current level of tensions between Russia and the West, I think the United States should be prepared for a Russian Security Council veto, regardless.

Alongside continued Russian stalling on the Syrian constitutional committee, Moscow has no serious interest in seeing the committee advance. It will instead try to foster a Gulf Arab counterweight to Iran and Syria through normalization, especially for the contingency that Russia may need to scale back its own presence in Syria due to Ukraine.

Now let me finally turn to some views on the Ukraine war from within the MENA region. First, unfortunately, I think there is a

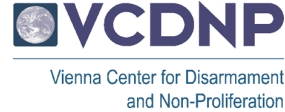
widespread perception that the Ukraine war is not their war. That it is a great power, NATO-Russia war partially fueled by NATO and U.S. actions vis-a-vis Russia. Second, there are accusations of Western double standards. The military support to Kyiv, the reception of Ukrainian refugees, these are rightly or wrongly viewed as proof that the West cares significantly more about conflicts in Europe's neighborhood than those in the Middle East.

Third, regional elites worry about U.S. conventional security guarantees. They fear that the threats posed by Russia and China will accelerate a decline in U.S. power in the Middle East and they also fear that the U.S. will have limited bandwidth to confront Iran's missile and proxy activities. And with those fears, they feel they cannot afford to put all their eggs into the U.S. basket.

And then finally, each regional State has very distinct business and security interests with Russia. As a result—and I will end here—I think U.S. opportunities to get regional States to turn against Russia are circumscribed. Loosening these ties that States have been building with Russia will require a heavy lift, a U.S. regional strategy that is both comprehensive and specific. Comprehensive in addressing those threat perceptions that have led regional countries to seek diversified great power relations in the first place, and specific in mitigating each country's distinct interest in doing business with Russia.

Thank you for your attention.

[The prepared statement of Dr. Notte follows:]



“The Impact of the Ukraine War on Russia’s Role in the Middle East”
 Testimony before the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on the Middle East, North Africa,
 and Global Counterterrorism
 Wednesday, May 18, 2022, 2:00 PM ET

As prepared

Chairman Deutch, Ranking Member Wilson, Members of the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on the Middle East, North Africa, and Global Counterterrorism: Thank you for inviting me to participate in today’s hearing. My name is Hanna Notte, and I am a Senior Research Associate at the Vienna Center for Disarmament and Non-Proliferation, where I conduct research on security and arms control issues involving Russia, the Middle East, and their intersection. I am here to speak solely in a personal capacity and my views do not reflect the institutional views of my center.

Russia’s perspective on the MENA region in the wake of its invasion of Ukraine

Your decision to hold a hearing on the impact of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region could not be timelier. As Russia settles into what will likely be a protracted war of aggression against Ukraine, the ripple effects are progressively being felt across the Middle East—high energy prices, soaring food prices, and increasing concerns over future wheat supplies. There are also fears that the region might turn into an additional arena for Russia’s heightened competition with the West.

How does Moscow look at the MENA region in this new era? In my assessment, which was reaffirmed in conversations with Russian officials and experts in Moscow just days before Russia’s February 24 invasion of Ukraine, that Russia’s approach to the region has settled into a stable *modus operandi* in recent years. Russia is pursuing important security and economic interests in the region. First, Moscow considers its military presence and diplomatic leverage in Syria essential to create a buffer zone on its southern flank, to counter perceived security threats from both *within* the region and *beyond*—i.e., militarily push back against the United States and NATO outside Europe, if it so chooses. That presence has also enabled Moscow to project power beyond Syria into the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East. Second, Russia has turned to the MENA region in a broader effort to diversify its economic relations in the wake of the 2014 annexation of Crimea, albeit with limited success beyond specific areas that include arms sales, civilian nuclear exports, wheat supplies, and tourism. In pursuing these interests, Russia has been implementing a “low cost, high disruption”¹ approach which, aside from the limited military presence in Syria, has entailed highly active diplomacy and hybrid tactics such as the use of private military companies and disinformation. Russia pragmatically leverages the self-interests of regional actors to achieve its goals, with little concern for human rights or the rule of law.

This approach to the MENA region will not fundamentally change following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. Since February 24, Russia’s diplomacy vis-à-vis regional players has

¹ Chen Kane and Miles Pomper, “Implications of Russia’s Activities in the Middle East and North Africa for U.S. Strategy and Interests,” CNS Occasional Paper, No. 54, December 2021, https://nonproliferation.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/op541221_implications_russia.pdf.

remained highly active, aimed at securing existing interests. A key part of this effort has been to offset the consequences of long-term Western sanctions on the Russian economy while also demonstrating that the country is not isolated internationally. To that end, Foreign Minister Lavrov visited Algeria and Oman last week, having hosted the foreign ministers of Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, Qatar, Sudan, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in Moscow in March and April.

Going forward, Russia's efforts at scoping opportunities across the region might be accompanied, however, by military risk aversion. The Russian military will likely seek to avoid acts of brinkmanship vis-à-vis U.S. forces in Syria while the bulk of its active-duty military remains fully committed inside Ukraine. It is unlikely to challenge the existing U.S.-Russian deconfliction mechanisms in Syria. Instead, because of the protracted military manpower issues caused by the war in Ukraine, Russia might well rely even more intensively on hybrid means to maintain influence and build leverage in the MENA region. Those could include disinformation campaigns, covert action to stir animosity among polarized communities, or attempts at electoral meddling.

Russian cooperation with the United States in MENA after the invasion of Ukraine

Amid the anticipated efforts to avoid military risks and preserve gains, Russia's willingness to cooperate with (rather than confront) the United States will likely vary from case to case. In past years, specific Middle East dossiers—arms control and the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), and, to a lesser extent, humanitarian aid and U.N.-led political processes—remained somewhat insulated from the broader downturn in Russian-Western relations. **Going forward, Russia's overall willingness to compartmentalize these issues might be diminished.**

Starting with nuclear arms control and non-proliferation, Russia's principled objective to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon remains unchanged.² Though Moscow appeared willing to spoil the negotiations to restore the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in early March—demanding written U.S. guarantees that Russia's trade, investment, and military-technical cooperation with Tehran would not be hindered by the sanctions imposed against it over Ukraine—it subsequently appeared to drop those demands. Over recent weeks, Russian diplomats have commented less frequently on the talks, as attention has shifted to the question of removing Iran's Quds Force, an arm of its Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), from a U.S. list of foreign terrorist organizations. However, a Russian diplomat recently hinted that the current geopolitical tensions might reduce Moscow's willingness to exert significant political capital to mediate a finalization of the nuclear deal.³

Whether or not the parties decide to restore the JCPOA, going forward, Russia is unlikely to support U.S. efforts to curb other threats, such as Iran's use of missiles and proxies. For years, Russia has insisted on the separation of these issues from the nuclear dossier while

² Russia fears that Iran's weaponization of its nuclear program could precipitate wider escalation and conflict in the Middle East, which could also affect Russia and its neighborhood. In addition, Russia views the possession of nuclear weapons as a distinct privilege that should be reserved to existing nuclear-weapons states, as defined by the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT).

³ Tweet by Russian Ambassador Mikhail Ulyanov on 13 May 2022: "Under different circumstances Russia, probably, could have provided its good offices to the two sides to finalise agreement on #JCPOA. But not now." https://twitter.com/Amb_Ulyanov/status/1525095444178784257.

hoping to benefit from Iran's regional policies. As long as Iran's missile and proxy threats do not precipitate full-blown regional war or threaten Russian interests *directly*, the instability they generate pins down U.S. resources while elevating Russia as a regional mediator. Following the invasion of Ukraine, that Russian calculus regarding Iran's regional activities is unlikely to change. Indeed, Russia might be more willing to sell advanced weapons to Iran, should other regional buyers shun Russian systems due to a heightened threat of U.S. sanctions under the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA), or due to a concern that Western sanctions will decimate Russia's ability to service and maintain systems over the medium and long term. Finally, the implications of Russia's irresponsible nuclear saber-rattling over Ukraine for proliferation trends in the region require careful monitoring. Countries in the region took note of the precedent of a nuclear-weapon state attempting to use veiled nuclear threats for the purpose of deterring other states from conventionally defending a non-nuclear-weapon state, potentially leading them to consider options beyond U.S. conventional declaratory security guarantees.

Turning to the humanitarian situation in Syria, U.N. Security Council Resolution 2585, which details the mandate for the transport of aid through the Bab al-Hawa crossing on the border with Turkey, is up for renewal in July. Russia's veto is widely feared, though such obstruction would not serve Moscow's interests. Rationally speaking, the Kremlin should wish to avert the worsening of Syria's food crisis by shutting down cross-border aid, especially if an endgame in Ukraine remains elusive. Moreover, Russia pocketed gains from supporting Resolution 2585 last summer, including extensive diplomatic attention from Western capitals, an expansion in early recovery assistance to its ally Syria, and Turkey's gratitude. That said, Russia's calculations regarding the upcoming U.N. Security Council vote will likely extend beyond Syria to include the broader geopolitical situation. Having been refused a seat at the recent Syria donor conference in Brussels, and amid heightened animosity between Russia and Western states in the U.N. system generally, Moscow might well choose to block the renewal, casting rational cost-benefit calculations aside. It would therefore be prudent for the U.S. government to anticipate a Russian veto and intensify efforts to support Syrians (and Turkey) through mechanisms that are not hostage to Russia's periodic consent. The U.S. Treasury Department's recent decision to authorize activities in certain economic sectors in non-regime-held areas of Syria is a step in that direction.

Amid heightened Russian-Western tensions in Europe, it is also unlikely that Russia will exert pressure on the Syrian government to substantively engage in the Constitutional Committee, whose "small body" convened for its seventh session in Geneva in late March. We should be under no illusion: Moscow has viewed, and will continue to view, the committee largely as a vehicle for stalling on any meaningful political change in Syria. Russia is eager to keep the committee on "life support," hoping to be able to point to Syria's participation in a U.N.-led process when calling for normalization with the Assad government, but feels no compulsion to see its work advance in a timely fashion. Rather, Moscow will prioritize its ongoing efforts at advancing normalization between Gulf Arab states and the Assad government, hoping that the former can share the burden of sustaining Syria economically. In that regard, President Assad's recent visit to Abu Dhabi was registered favorably in Moscow. Indeed, it is conceivable that Russia will now prioritize the emergence of an Arab counterweight to Iran in Syria with greater urgency, to prepare for the contingency that Russia may need to scale back its own presence in Syria due to Ukraine.

Meanwhile, Russia's leverage over the trajectory of other regional conflicts and developments—including the war in Yemen, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and

normalization between Israel and Arab states building on the “Abraham Accords”—has been limited. This will likely remain the case, as the war in Ukraine and its fallout in Europe will consume significant Russian military and diplomatic bandwidth for a protracted period.

In my assessment, prior to its 2015 intervention in Syria, Moscow periodically entertained the possibility that cooperation on select issues in the Middle East could be leveraged to seek Washington’s goodwill on other bilateral issues. In recent years, the Russian leadership has become increasingly dismissive of that possibility. Coupled with a belief in Moscow that Russia’s own approach to the Middle East is successful and sustainable, this dismissive attitude probably will intensify in the wake of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine war and might further militate against cooperation with the United States.

Opportunities to undermine “fence-sitting” by U.S. regional allies and partners?

Following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, most regional U.S. allies and partners have been reluctant to unequivocally condemn Moscow or assist in generating pressure on the Russian economy. Saudi Arabia has rebuffed U.S. requests to pump more oil to help tame surging crude prices, insisting on adherence to its agreement with OPEC+ partners on production levels. The UAE abstained from a U.N. Security Council resolution condemning the Russian invasion in late February. Saudi and Emirati leaders have reportedly declined phone calls with U.S. President Biden, and all Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries abstained from voting for suspension of Russia from the U.N. Human Rights Council in early April.

Israel’s navigation of the Ukraine war has been more nuanced, with officials offering harsher criticism of Russian killings in Ukraine’s Bucha or signaling that Israel will not enable Russia’s evasion of sanctions. Following a recent row in Russian-Israeli relations, caused by Foreign Minister Lavrov’s anti-Semitic remarks, Israel is reportedly weighing increased provision of nonlethal military equipment to Ukraine.⁴ Still, Israel will likely continue to tread cautiously, shying away from supporting sanctions against Russia, given the perceived role the latter plays in limiting the presence of Iran-backed proxies in southern Syria and the need to deconflict with Russia’s military.

The inclination of U.S. regional allies and partners to “sit out” the Ukraine war, to the extent possible, is rooted in a number of considerations, most of which predate February 24:

There is a perception across MENA states that the Ukraine war is not “their” war. Regional interlocutors tend to view the conflict through a great-power prism, characterizing it as a U.S./NATO-Russia war, fueled at least in part by NATO actions vis-a-vis Russia, rather than as a Russian war of aggression against a sovereign country, Ukraine. As a result, unlike in Western societies, the conflict does not register across the Middle East as a test for a “rules-based international order.”

This perspective is amplified by accusations of Western double standards in responding to the Ukraine war. The significant and immediate diplomatic efforts over Ukraine, military support to Kyiv, and reception of Ukrainian refugees in Western states are—rightly or wrongly—viewed as indicative of a Western inclination to care significantly more about conflicts in Europe’s direct neighborhood than about those in the Middle East.

⁴ Barak Ravid, “Israel weighs expanding military aid to Ukraine after U.S. request,” *Axios*, 4 May 2022, <https://www.axios.com/2022/05/04/israel-weighs-increasing-military-aid-ukraine-russia>.

Such Ukraine-specific perceptions are compounded by worries among regional elites over the durability of U.S. conventional security guarantees. The Ukraine invasion—heightening what the United States calls an “acute threat” from Russia in Europe, while it faces a “long-term pacing challenge” in China—has exacerbated concerns among U.S. allies and partners about an accelerated U.S. withdrawal from the region. In addition, there is a resignation to the likelihood that the United States will use whatever bandwidth it has for the Middle East to prioritize the Iranian nuclear threat, and will pay insufficient attention to Iran’s missile and proxy activities—which many Arab states perceive as a bigger challenge to their security. Regional states calculate that Russia and China might well fill the emerging vacuum in an increasingly volatile region in which the United States is a receding power. In addition, each regional state has its own highly specific economic and security interests with Russia that preclude the adoption of a firmer anti-Russian position over the Ukraine war.⁵

Finally, even though the Russian military failed to meet its original objectives in invading Ukraine, few regional states are prepared to draw firm conclusions on the outcome of the war, and the implications for Russia, at this time. Anecdotal evidence suggests that regional governments are presently preoccupied with addressing imminent challenges related to inflation, food security, and high energy prices and are not prepared to take strategic decisions on their future relationships with Russia.

As a result, U.S. opportunities to get regional allies and partners to turn against Russia are highly circumscribed. A combination of continued poor Russian military performance in Ukraine with clearer signs of the impact of Western sanctions on Russia’s military-industrial complex and economic enterprise certainly could erode the economic attractiveness of Russian weapons and other technologies over the medium term. Should Russian influence in the MENA region decline due to the consequences of the Ukraine war, the United States will need to step in and offer attractive alternatives to prevent other adversaries from exploiting the ensuing vacuum—whether that concerns the prospect of China providing strategic technologies across the region or Iran expanding its influence in Syria.

More fundamentally, loosening the ties that pivotal U.S. allies and partners have been cultivating with Russia will likely require a U.S. regional strategy that is *comprehensive*—in addressing those threat perceptions that have led countries to seek diversified great-power relations—but also *specific* in mitigating actors’ distinct interests in doing business with Russia. Since European states are directly affected by conflict, instability, and migration in their direct MENA neighborhood while also seeking to reduce their hydrocarbon dependencies on Russia by turning to the region, the United States should seek a greater European role in, and responsibility for, such a regional strategy.

The views, assessments, judgments, and conclusions are the sole representations of the author and do not necessarily represent either the official position or policy or bear the endorsement of the Vienna Center for Disarmament and Non-Proliferation, James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies, the Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey, the President and Trustees of Middlebury College, US Government, or any other funder.

⁵ Kane and Pomper, “Implications of Russia’s Activities in the Middle East and North Africa for U.S. Strategy and Interests.”

Mr. DEUTCH. Thank you very much, Dr. Notte.
Next, Dr. Wehrey, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

**STATEMENT OF DR. FREDERIC WEHREY, SENIOR FELLOW,
CARNEGIE ENDOWMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL PEACE**

Dr. WEHREY. Chairman Deutch, Ranking Member Wilson, members of the subcommittee, members of the Ukrainian parliament, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you here today about how Russia's invasion of Ukraine has impacted Russian arms sales and other military activities in the Middle East and North Africa.

I join you remotely from Tripoli, Libya, a city that bore the brunt of a Russian military assault in the form of hundreds of mercenaries from the Wagner Group who were backing a Libyan warlord in a bid to topple the Libyan Government. While this assault failed, it caused thousands of deaths and it left deep political divisions in its wake. Moreover, thousands of Wagner personnel and advanced Russian weaponry remain entrenched across Libya.

In many respects, Russia's Libya campaign epitomizes its renewed activism across the Middle East which has included military intervention, arms sales, grain exports, diplomatic mediation and a willingness to talk to all sides, energy and infrastructure projects, and propaganda in media. This engagement is largely opportunistic and ad hoc. It seizes on instability and power vacuums. It exploits the insecurities of U.S. partners in the region about the reliability of U.S. support and their displeasure with the conditionality that the U.S. sometimes attaches to its arms sales.

Russian arms deliveries, in contrast, are faster and free from restrictions related to human rights, but Russia cannot provide the security guarantees that many Arab States have depended on from the United States. Now in the wake of its invasion of Ukraine, Russia is trying to reap dividends from its investment in the region, call in favors, and capitalize on local ambivalence and hostility to the United States both from States and from Arab publics.

America's Arab security partners have deferred on joining the Western condemnation of Russian aggression and some have refused efforts to isolate Russia economically. Meanwhile, Russia is trying to divert Wagner forces and Syrian militia fighters to Ukraine from both Syria and Libya. But both the scale and military significance of this deployment should not be overstated. The actual number of Syrians who have arrived in Ukraine is unclear and Libyan contacts with firsthand knowledge have told me that thousands of Wagner troops still remain very much present in Libya.

On top of this, these mercenaries and the Syrian fighters will find a vastly more capable foe in Ukraine than the ones they previously fought and, more importantly, Russia's disastrous war in Ukraine is tarnishing its reputation as an arms supplier in the Middle East. Russian weapons have been shown to be flawed in combat and often fatally so. Battlefield expenditures and attrition have whittled away Russia's inventory, especially precision munitions, and sanctions have eroded its defense industrial base especially electronic components.

As a result, Russia won't be able to fulfill its existing commitments and potential buyers will be increasingly dissuaded from

turning to Russia. This shortfall could be modestly exploited by China which possesses large quantities of Russian-made arms and spare parts which it could use to keep existing inventories in the region up and running. China could also intensify its efforts to sell its own advanced weaponry like drones.

Now in response to this new landscape, the U.S. should avoid trying to coax its Arab partners back into the fold with promises of more weapons and more formal security commitments. Neither Russia nor China can really flip any State in this region into its orbit, and for too long Arab regimes, especially Arab autocrats, have cleverly courted assistance from Moscow and Beijing to extract arms deals from Washington and to obtain leniency on human rights.

Instead of taking this bait, the U.S. should amplify the effects of Russia's diminished reputation as an arms provider while also using financial sanctions and especially the more effective and consistent application of the 2017 CAATSA sanctions to constrain Russian arms flows. The U.S. should also try to fill its partners' legitimate defense needs with transfers of its own or through European partners or regional producers like Turkey or Israel.

But the U.S. shouldn't let this charged moment of great power rivalry distract it from focusing on the daunting socioeconomic and political problems that the Middle East and its societies face. These problems include authoritarian governance and corruption; the fallout from the pandemic; and, of course, food insecurity arising from the Ukraine war; climate change; the looming end of the hydrocarbon era; and the lack of opportunities, economic opportunities to name but a few.

These problems present a far more pressing threat to both long-term stability and to U.S. interests than any encroachment by Moscow, or Beijing for that matter. They demand a fresh, holistic approach from the U.S. rather than a return to the overly securitized policies that have defined the American presence in the Middle East for decades.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you here today. I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Dr. Frederic Wehrey follows:]



CARNEGIE
ENDOWMENT FOR
INTERNATIONAL PEACE

Congressional Testimony

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

Dr. Frederic Wehrey

Senior Fellow

Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

Testimony before House Committee on Foreign
Affairs, Subcommittee on the Middle East, North
Africa and Counterterrorism

May 18, 2022

Chairman Deutch, Ranking Member Wilson, and members of the subcommittee, it is a privilege to speak with you here today about the impact of Russia's invasion of Ukraine on the Middle East and North Africa, and specifically how that invasion has affected Russia's military influence and interventionism in the region—and how the United States should respond.

I join you remotely from Tripoli, Libya, a city that was the target of a Russian military assault from 2019 to 2020 in the form of hundreds of mercenaries from the Kremlin-linked "Wagner Group," along with regular Russian military personnel, who were backing Libyan warlord Khalifa Haftar's bid to topple the internationally recognized Libyan government. I observed that battle firsthand from the frontlines, witnessing how Wagner forces, working in conjunction with armed drones piloted by a U.S. security partner, the United Arab Emirates, relentlessly shelled civilian neighborhoods with scant regard for human life. Though the Russian-backed campaign failed, it caused thousands of deaths, and it left deep political divisions in Libya that have yet to mend. It also severely truncated Libya's sovereignty, entrenching thousands of Wagner forces, and hundreds of tons of advanced Russian military hardware at air bases and oil facilities across the country.

Russian Activism in the Middle East

In many respects, Russia's meddling in Libya is emblematic of its renewed activism in the Middle East, especially in its blend of military intervention and arms sales, diplomatic mediation, a quest for energy and infrastructure projects, and the use of soft-power tools like propaganda and media. Rather than constituting a well-planned or principle-driven strategy, its engagement is largely opportunistic and ad-hoc. It seizes on instability and power vacuums in the region, missteps by the United States and its European partners, and local grievances. It exploits the insecurities of Arab autocrats about the durability of long-term U.S. support, especially amid the so-called U.S. "pivot to Asia" and their displeasure with the conditionality that the U.S. sometimes attaches to its arms sales. In contrast, Russian arms deliveries are faster, free from restrictions related to human rights, and unencumbered by concerns about domestic blowback. But Russian assistance is also largely transactional and often short-term, bereft of any ambition to provide security guarantees or sustainable development.

There is no question that Russia's low-cost, commitment-free strategy has paid dividends for the Kremlin. This is most evident in the case of Syria, where Russian military intervention in 2015 during the civil war was decisive in rescuing the regime of President Bashar al-Assad and securing air bases and ports for Russian forces. Similarly, in

Lebanon and Gaza, Russia has gained traction as a mediator between opposing factions, underscoring its ability to engage with groups like Hizballah and HAMAS that are off-limits to the West. Beyond the Levant, Moscow has counted Algeria and Egypt among its top-five arms customers worldwide. Meanwhile, in the Gulf, U.S. security partners Saudi Arabia and U.A.E. have coordinated with Russia on oil, signed arms deals, and have increasingly aligned their foreign policies on a number of files, most notably in Libya. Here, both Riyadh and Abu Dhabi gave cash or promises of cash and military support to Libyan militia commander Khalifa Haftar, who was also backed by Russia. These convergences underscore that Arab regimes' warming to Russia is not simply a matter of hedging against the perceived U.S. "retreat" from the Middle East but rather because they share with the Kremlin a similar ideological vision about regional order—an order that stifles pluralism, quashes political Islam, preserves the status quo, and enshrines autocracy in the form of a strongman or dynastic rule.

Yet despite its splashy advances in the region over the past near-decade, Russia's ability to shape outcomes to its long-term advantage—as opposed to clinching short-term gains and disrupting the policies of the West—is ultimately circumscribed by its limited toolkit. In particular, Russia's footprint in the Middle East is bounded by its meager economic clout, which pales in comparison to that of the United States, the European Union, and China. As a result, Russia is more likely to engage when it senses local states or actors have the financial resources to pay for its assistance or where it can count on the extraction of lucrative natural resources, like oil or metals.

Indeed, this resource-dependency illustrates an important and oft-overlooked facet of Russian relations with Arab states. Many of these states, especially those flush with cash, exert far more agency and discretion in determining the depth and breadth of Russian influence in the region than is often recognized. And many of them, particularly longtime U.S. security partners, have become adept at courting Russian military aid to pressure Washington for greater leniency on domestic governance and wrangle concessions, especially sought-after arms deals.

Despite their threats to shun America, these states ultimately recognize that Russia has neither the will nor the capacity to serve as their primary security patron. At best, Russia will supplement, rather than supplant, the U.S. security role. And even when Middle Eastern states go ahead with Russian purchases, they are often frustrated by the materiel's inferior quality, absence of sustained service and follow-up, and problems of integration and interoperability. Added to this, even Moscow's most reliable arms customers are often fickle about granting longer-term access. Famously non-aligned Algeria, for example, has repeatedly rebuffed Russia's requests to build a naval base at

the Mediterranean port of Oran, and the Egyptian government has often denied Russian military planes overflight rights. These dynamics show that, with few exceptions, Russia has been unable to advance its relations in the Middle East beyond purely commercial or transactional encounters to establish genuine alliances and lasting partnerships.

The Impact of Russia's Ukraine Invasion

Now, in the wake of its invasion of Ukraine, Moscow is trying to harness whatever strategic gains it has made in the Middle East from its multiple interventions and call-in diplomatic favors from the recipients of its assistance. Specifically, it is redeploying thousands of Wagner Group mercenaries from Syria and Libya to eastern Ukraine while reportedly also enlisting pro-Assad Syrian militiamen. These developments are certainly alarming, but their impact and especially their military significance in Ukraine should not be overstated. The Wagner Group's greatest asset for the Kremlin is its deniability and adaptability as a paramilitary force fighting insurgencies, guarding infrastructure, and propping up dictators and warlords on unconventional battlefields in Africa and the Middle East, all while seeking economic gains. In Ukraine's conventional war, not only are these virtues of plunder and secrecy mooted, but the Wagner Group will face a vastly more formidable, better-equipped, a better-trained foe that has already shattered the morale of Russia's regular forces, as well as a battlefield that is marked in many areas less by infantry combat and more by salvos of missiles and artillery and drone strikes. Similarly, Moscow's recruitment of vast numbers of Syrians—whose actual arrival in Ukraine has been overstated and whose fighting competence is similarly poor—will not give Russia any real advantage; they are simply there as cannon fodder. In Libya, meanwhile, Russia has an interest in keeping Wagner forces on the ground as a form of leverage and a potential means to complicate U.S. and European policies.

On the diplomatic front, Middle Eastern states that have engaged with Russia, including America's Arab security partners, have deferred on joining the Western-led condemnation of Russia's aggression and refused to join efforts to isolate Russia economically. In many cases, again, this is more of a form of local signaling, especially by the Gulf monarchies, to convey discontent with America's supposed inattentiveness to their security needs rather than a full-throated embrace of Russia. Exemplifying this dynamic, the United Arab Emirates abstained from voting in favor of a United Nations Security Council (UNSC) draft resolution condemning Russian aggression in Ukraine, partly as a response to what Abu Dhabi saw as Washington's slow and inadequate response to attacks on its territory by Houthi militants in Yemen, but also in return for Moscow's support for a UNSC vote designating the Houthis as a terrorist organization. More disturbingly, Gulf Arab states have allowed Russian oligarchs to launder money

and have spurned Washington's request to pump more oil to bring down global prices and make up for the shortfall in Russian exports to Europe due to sanctions.

For their part, Arab citizens have been muted on the war or supportive of Russia as a way of telegraphing their opposition to America's policies in the Middle East. More specifically, their cheering of Putin is a way of highlighting the hypocrisy in the outpouring of Western resolve on Ukraine and especially Europe's welcoming of Ukrainian refugees – which contrasts sharply with perceived Western inaction on the Syrian civil war and the resulting refugee exodus – as well as Washington's partisanship toward Israel and its neglect of Iran's malign influence in the Middle East.

These developments underscore a deep dysfunctionality in America's outmoded partnerships with Arab autocracies and a growing global trend of multipolarity defined by the primacy of self-interest rather than shared norms and rules. They are also evidence that the Arab public remains deeply suspicious of Washington's intentions and policies in the region – especially its decades of military interventions and double standards on human-rights abuses. However, Arab ambivalence on the Ukraine war does not herald a new security order in the region dominated by Moscow or even Beijing or point to newfound clout by either power in "flipping" Middle Eastern states into their orbit.

U.S. Policy Responses

With this in mind, U.S. strategy should not try and coax Arab states back to the fold with promises of more American weapons to compete with Russian offers or, as Gulf Arab states have requested, provide more formal defense assurances. Instead, U.S. policies should let Moscow's mounting deficiencies speak for themselves, amplifying, where possible, the effects of Russia's disastrous military performance in Ukraine in reducing its attractiveness as an arms provider and using financial tools to constrain its arms flows.

In the past years, the Kremlin has tried to use its military campaign in Syria and successive arms expositions in Moscow to showcase its prowess as an arms provider for Middle Eastern states and as a compelling alternative to the U.S. While some states, as mentioned, have certainly responded favorably to these overtures, they will find that Russia before the Ukraine war is not the same as Russia after the Ukraine war. Russia's much-hyped military systems are being added shown to be flawed in combat— epitomized by the "jack-in-the-box" effect of exploding turrets on its T-72 tanks— which add to deficiencies that were previously on display to the world during its Crimea campaign in 2014. On top of this impending dent in demand for its weapons, Russia's

Ukraine war is causing significant supply side problems. The Russian military itself is facing severe resupply, repair, and logistical problems, which undermines its ability to service customers in the Middle East. Moreover, the prolongation of combat in Ukraine is whittling down its stocks of advanced weaponry, especially precision-guided munitions. These losses due to battlefield expenditures and attrition are compounded by the effect of suffocating Western sanctions and embargoes against Russia related to the Ukraine war, which has degraded its defense industrial base, particularly in sophisticated electronic components like semi-conductors. Adding another layer to these pressures are preexisting U.S. financial penalties: namely, the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA) of 2017, which has raised the cost for Middle Eastern states in obtaining Russian hardware but remains hobbled by inconsistent application by the U.S.

All of this will have enormous and deleterious effects on Russia's ability to keep pace as a competitive arms seller in a crowded Middle East arms market that includes traditional suppliers like the U.S., China, and France, as well as a revitalized German defense industry and capable middle-power producers like Turkey and Israel. Even longtime Russian clients in the Middle East will be inclined to turn elsewhere as Moscow cannot fulfill its requirements. In light of these shortfalls, China may attempt to grab a greater share of the market, especially since it possesses large quantities of Russian weapons and spare parts that it can sell to these states to keep their Russian inventories running. It may also sense an opportunity to market more of its own indigenously produced systems, especially drones, missiles, armor, and ships. Here again, like Russia, China is an attractive patron for many, especially when compared to the U.S.: its weapons are cheaper, delivered more quickly, and devoid of restrictions, though they are often of inferior quality.

In response to this new landscape, the U.S. needs to adopt a firm but judicious approach. It should leverage Ukraine-related financial sanctions and more effectively and uniformly apply CAATSA penalties to dissuade current and potential Russian clients from purchasing arms from Moscow. At the same time, it should identify how it can support its Middle East partners who have counted on Russia in the past and now have gaps in their defense capability. The U.S. can either fill those gaps itself or encourage a responsible diversification to European suppliers like France, Italy, or Germany, or regional exporters, like Turkey or Israel if it wants to deny China access.

A more durable and appropriate strategy, however, would be to question why Arab security partners have embarked on massive shopping sprees for conventional arms in the first place since these weapons do not often address the threats these states face.

Moreover, these arms are often purchased for reasons of prestige and have been used for domestic repression or to launch destabilizing wars that have inflicted civilian casualties.

Given these glaring shortcomings in the entire security assistance enterprise, the U.S. should avoid the rush to ply Arab security partners with greater military support simply because they threaten to turn to Russia or China. An often-overlooked facet of Arab states' longstanding reliance on American arms transfers is that they are not just obtaining defense capabilities but purchasing an insurance policy against abandonment in the face of both domestic and foreign threats. As noted, neither Moscow nor Beijing has the interest or ability to fulfill this role. But more importantly, as I have [written about](#), for many of these states, especially in the Gulf, regime insecurity is chronic and deeply rooted—a function partly of their geostrategic location facing Iran but also their autocratic nature—and no amount of U.S. or other outside support will ever fully assuage them. Moreover, the U.S. has already provided substantive and responsive defensive support against Iranian or Iranian-backed missile attacks in the Gulf, and it maintains a far more robust military presence in the region than common Gulf narratives suggest, belying the notion of a real "retreat."

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee, in closing, it is clear that Russia's multi-faceted and opportunistic activism in the Middle East is concerning and runs counter to U.S. values and long-term interests. And as I've outlined above, Russian actions require a sustained but nuanced pushback that accounts for the region's built-in obstacles to Russian penetration, recognizes the agency of local actors in determining the extent of Russian influence, and, especially, exploits Russia's diminished capacity as an arms provider in the wake of the Ukraine war. Most importantly, they necessitate a degree of U.S. flexibility and some acceptance of the coming multipolarity and security diversification in a region that is already declining in importance for American interests. To put it differently, an overreaction by the U.S. could be worse than the actual challenge posed by Moscow, creating unanticipated second-and third-order instability, and siphoning American energy away from addressing other priorities, at home and in Asia, and from tackling global threats like climate change.

More specifically, Washington should not let this new frame of "great power rivalry," which Middle East autocracies have heartily welcomed and exploited, distract it from scrutinizing the behavior of these regimes at home and from helping the region's citizens and societies address the socio-economic and political problems they face now and in the coming decades. These afflictions, which include the fallout from the pandemic, food insecurity from the Ukraine war, climate change, the looming end of the oil era, and growing frustration with the absence of economic opportunity, to name but a few, have

the potential to cause very real unrest. None of them can be addressed by a return to the overly securitized policies that have defined the American approach to the region for decades.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you here today.

Mr. DEUTCH. Thank you very much, Dr. Wehrey.
Ms. Welsh, you are recognized.

**STATEMENT OF MS. CAITLIN WELSH, DIRECTOR, GLOBAL
FOOD SECURITY PROGRAM, CENTER FOR STRATEGIC AND
INTERNATIONAL STUDIES**

Ms. WELSH. Chairman Deutch, Ranking Member Wilson, distinguished members of the subcommittee, thank for the opportunity to testify today, and welcome to members of the Ukrainian parliament. Following is a summary of my written testimony which I have submitted to the committee.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine leaves few agricultural markets untouched and threatens food security for millions in and outside the Black Sea. The war has reduced supplies and increased prices of foods exported from Ukraine and Russia, namely wheat, maize, and sunflower oil; driven up demand for substitute products; and reduced fertilizer exports from the Black Sea. Today's high cost of energy puts further pressure on food and fertilizer prices.

Most vulnerable to the impact of these price spikes are countries for whom wheat is a major source of calories, that rely on imports to meet their food security needs, and that source a significant proportion of their imports from Ukraine and Russia. This characterizes many countries in the Middle East and North Africa. Levels of food insecurity caused by this war and appropriate policy responses differ depending on context. For example, Egypt is the world's largest importer of wheat, sourcing over 70 percent of its wheat from the Black Sea which presents problems for its budget. Egypt spends about \$3 billion annually for wheat imports, and over \$3.2 billion on its bread subsidy program. Experts recommend that Egypt diversify its sources of wheat imports, reduce per capita consumption of bread, more efficiently target its food subsidy program, and adapt its agricultural sector to water shortages and climate related threats.

The Russia-Ukraine war is raising the cost of food at a time of extreme food insecurity amid the civil war in Yemen where over the half the population are food insecure, including over 30,000 in famine-like conditions. Yemen relies on imports to meet its food needs. The total value of food imports exceeds the value of all exports from Yemen. Emergency aid is critical to addressing levels of food insecurity there, and it is particularly important to maintain the value of cash transfers in the face of high inflation.

The Russia-Ukraine war is limiting access to wheat for Lebanon, already in one of the worst economic crises in the world. Lebanon has not recorded economic growth since 2017 and food price inflation reached 400 percent in December 2021. Lebanon procures approximately 75 percent of its wheat from Russia and Ukraine, and experts recommend Lebanon shore up wheat supplies for the near term and ensure equitable distribution of bread through social safety net programs and rebuild its grain silos to insulate itself and perhaps other countries in the region from supply and price shocks.

And although Gulf countries import up to 90 percent of their food, including from the Black Sea, they have thus far weathered the agriculture market impacts of Russia's war on Ukraine. A range of efforts have bolstered food security in the GCC whose

countries are also benefiting from high oil prices. Still, analysts recommend GCC countries encourage domestic agricultural production, invest in agricultural companies, and build in and maintain food reserves to buffer the effects of future crises.

Some policy prescriptions differ country to country based on context while others are recommended broadly: Refrain from imposing export bans; avoid hoarding and panic buying; continue to exempt food and fertilizer from sanctions; and provide humanitarian assistance through the U.N. World Food Programme.

The U.S. and global responses to the food security impacts of Russia's war are still unfolding. Today and tomorrow, Secretary Blinken will host two meetings on this exact topic at the U.N. in New York. G7 Development, Health, and Finance ministers are meeting in Germany this week and discussing solutions to food insecurity caused by this war. And 2 days ago, Secretary Yellen announced actions from international financial institutions to address this crisis.

In the 2015 intelligence community assessment on global food security, the IC warned that—and this is a quote: Large exportable supplies of key components of food production come from States where conflict and government actions could cause supply chain disruptions that lead to price spikes. In years to come, conflict, climate change, and other factors will continue to affect food security particularly in the MENA region.

In their responses to today's global food crises, policymakers would be wise to consider investing in mechanisms that help food importing countries weather today's and future supply and price shocks. Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Welsh follows:]



**Statement before the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee
on Middle East, North Africa and Global Counterterrorism**

***“The Impact of Russia’s Invasion of Ukraine
in the Middle East and North Africa.”***

A Testimony by:

Caitlin Welsh

Director, Global Food Security Program, CSIS

May 18, 2022

2172 Rayburn House Office Building

Chairman Deutsch, Ranking Member Wilson, distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, I am honored to share my views with you on this important topic. CSIS does not take policy positions, so the views represented in this testimony are my own and not those of my employer.

Overview

Russia's invasion of Ukraine leaves few agricultural markets untouched and threatens food security for millions in and outside the Black Sea region. The war has curtailed food exports from Ukraine and Russia, particularly wheat, maize, and sunflower oil, increasing the prices of these commodities; driven up demand for substitute products, including alternative cooking oils; and reduced exports of fertilizer from the Black Sea, shifting the quantity and nature of crops producers plan to grow worldwide. The high cost of energy adds upward pressure to food and fertilizer prices. Additionally, at the time of writing, twenty countries have imposed food-export bans in attempt to limit the impact of high food prices on domestic populations, while further reducing supplies on global markets¹.

Before the war, Russia and Ukraine accounted for more than one quarter of global wheat exports. Most vulnerable to the impacts of the war-induced price increases are countries for whom wheat is a major source of calories, that rely on imports to meet their food-security needs, and that source a significant proportion of their imports from Ukraine and Russia. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO), fifty countries rely on Russia and Ukraine for at least thirty percent of their wheat imports. In the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), these countries include Lebanon, Egypt, Libya, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Tunisia, Iran, Jordan, and Morocco².

Food prices influence politics everywhere, particularly in the MENA region. The FAO Food Price Index reached a fifty-year high in 2011³, coinciding with protests and regime changes that characterized the Arab Spring. The FAO Food Price Index reached a new high in March 2022⁴, following two years of steady increases due to the Covid-19 pandemic and, recently, Russia's invasion of Ukraine. As countries in the MENA region remain exposed to global food price increases, the degree of risk of food insecurity, the ability of their governments to respond, and the prudence of international responses, including from the United States, depend on multiple factors and vary country to country.

¹ David Laborde, "Food & Fertilizer Export Restrictions Tracker," Tableau Public. May 16, 2022.

<https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/laborde6680/viz/ExportRestrictionsTracker/FoodExportRestrictionsTracker>.

² "The importance of Ukraine and the Russian Federation for global agricultural markets and the risks associated with the current conflict," Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), March, 2022, <https://www.fao.org/3/cb9013en/cb9013en.pdf>.

³ "FAO Food Price Index ends year with sharp decline," FAO, January 12, 2012, <https://www.fao.org/news/story/en/item/119775/icode/>.

⁴ FAO, "FAO Food Price Index," FAO, March 4, 2022, <https://www.fao.org/worldfoodsituation/foodpricesindex/en/>.

Country-level impacts

Importing up to 13 million tons of wheat annually, **Egypt** is the world's largest importer of wheat. Bread and other wheat products account for up to 40 percent of caloric intake per person, and imports account for over 60 percent of wheat use across the country⁵. Egypt's wheat farmers are already achieving relatively high yields, so to meet Egypt's growing demand, imports have steadily increased over the past decade, at a rate higher than domestic production⁶. Despite efforts to diversify imports, Egypt sources over 70 percent of its wheat from the Black Sea⁷, presenting problems for Egypt's budget: Egypt spends approximately US \$3 billion annually for wheat imports, and over \$3.2 billion on the *Tamween* program to subsidize the cost of bread for more than 60 million Egyptians annually⁸.

To lessen the impacts of Russia's war on food prices in Egypt, analysts at the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) recommend that Egypt diversify its sources of wheat imports, reduce per capita consumption of bread (as Egyptians' bread consumption is double the global average), more efficiently target its food subsidy program (nonpoor households currently receive about two-thirds of the value of food subsidies) and apply cost savings to other food security interventions, and adapt its agriculture sector to imminent water shortages and climate-related threats⁹.

The Russia-Ukraine war is raising the cost of staple foods at a time of extreme food insecurity in **Yemen**, where more than 17 million people, or over half of Yemen's population, are food insecure, 5.6 million people are experiencing emergency levels of food insecurity, and 31,000 are experiencing famine-like conditions¹⁰ due to the ongoing civil war. Yemen relies heavily on food imports and international aid to meet its food needs. The total value of food imports exceeds the value of all exports from Yemen¹¹, and the UN World Food Programme (WFP) is reaching 11 million people with emergency food assistance.

⁵ Kibrom Abay, Lina Abdelfattah, Clemens Breisinger, Joseph Glauber and David Laborde, "The Russia-Ukraine crisis poses a serious food security threat for Egypt," International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), March 14, 2022, <https://www.ifpri.org/blog/russia-ukraine-crisis-poses-serious-food-security-threat-egypt>.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ "The importance of Ukraine and the Russian Federation for global agricultural markets and the risks associated with the current conflict," FAO, March 2022, <https://www.fao.org/3/cb9013en/cb9013en.pdf>.

⁸ Nadine Awadalla, "Egypt shrinks subsidized bread loaf by 20 grams, revises cost of flour," Reuters, August 17, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/egypt-commodities-bread-idAFL8N2FJ50N>.

⁹ Kibrom Abay, et al., "The Russia-Ukraine crisis poses a serious food security threat for Egypt," IFPRI, March 14, 2022, <https://www.ifpri.org/blog/russia-ukraine-crisis-poses-serious-food-security-threat-egypt>.

¹⁰ "WFP Yemen Situation Report #2," WFP, February 2022, <https://api.godocs.wfp.org/api/documents/79a16e048acc497eb62f7f9df96c4588/download/>.

¹¹ Sikandra Kurdi, et al., "The Russian invasion of Ukraine threatens to further exacerbate the food insecurity emergency in Yemen," IFPRI, March 23, 2022, <https://www.ifpri.org/blog/russian-invasion-ukraine-threatens-further-exacerbate-food-insecurity-emergency-yemen>.

Yemen is doubly affected by Black Sea export blockages due to Russia's invasion of Ukraine: Yemen procures nearly 45 percent of its wheat imports from Russia and Ukraine¹² and another 12 percent from other MENA countries. Furthermore, the war has raised the cost of WFP's emergency food assistance by around \$23 billion per month¹³, potentially limiting the reach of WFP's life-saving assistance in Yemen. Yemen's agricultural infrastructure is not oriented toward grain production, and the high cost of fuel increases production costs for Yemeni farmers.

Emergency assistance—through food distributions, commodity vouchers, and cash assistance—is essential to addressing crisis levels of food insecurity in Yemen. IFPRI analysts point to the particular importance of maintaining the value of cash transfers in the face of high inflation¹⁴. Experts also emphasize the importance of “conflict-resilient” agriculture in Yemen, including expansion of drip irrigation and solar powered pumping systems (vice fuel-powered pumping systems, made more costly by high fuel prices) as nearly three-quarters of Yemen's farmers report difficulty accessing irrigation¹⁵, and cultivation of crops for domestic consumption rather than export¹⁶.

The Russia-Ukraine war is limiting access to wheat for import-dependent **Lebanon**, already amid one of the worst economic crises in the world since the mid-nineteenth century¹⁷. While Lebanon has not recorded economic growth since 2017¹⁸, an influx of Syrian refugees has caused Lebanon's population to surge 30 percent in 10 years, reducing GDP per capita by 25 percent between 2017 and 2020. According to the UN, over eighty percent of Lebanon's population lived in multidimensional poverty in 2021¹⁹. As the value of Lebanese currency has fallen, food-price inflation reached 400 percent in December 2021 compared to 2019²⁰. Wheat accounts for 38 percent of total calorie consumption in Lebanon, and the Lebanese government relies on domestic

¹² “The importance of Ukraine and the Russian Federation for global agricultural markets and the risks associated with the current conflict,” FAO, March 2022, <https://www.fao.org/3/cb9013en/cb9013en.pdf>.

¹³ “Food security implications of the Ukraine conflict,” United Nations World Food Programme (WFP), March 2022, https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000137707/download/?_ga=2.130496077.377062501.1652725275-1869819206.1652456665.

¹⁴ Sikandra Kurdi, et al., “The Russian invasion of Ukraine threatens to further exacerbate the food insecurity emergency in Yemen,” IFPRI, March 23, 2022, <https://www.ifpri.org/blog/russian-invasion-ukraine-threatens-further-exacerbate-food-insecurity-emergency-yemen>.

¹⁵ “Yemen: Data in Emergencies Monitoring (DIEM-Monitoring) brief,” FAO, January 2022, <http://www.fao.org/3/cb8312en/cb8312en.pdf>.

¹⁶ Sikandra Kurdi, et al., “The Russian invasion of Ukraine threatens to further exacerbate the food insecurity emergency in Yemen,” IFPRI, March 23, 2022, <https://www.ifpri.org/blog/russian-invasion-ukraine-threatens-further-exacerbate-food-insecurity-emergency-yemen>.

¹⁷ “The World Bank in Lebanon,” The World Bank, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/lebanon/overview#1>.

¹⁸ “GFSP Growth (Annual %) – Lebanon,” The World Bank, 1989 –

2020, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG?locations=LB>.

¹⁹ “Lebanon: Almost three-quarters of the population living in poverty,” United Nations News, September 2, 2022, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/09/1099102>.

²⁰ Dana Khraiche and Ainhoa Goyeneche, “Lebanese Inflation Hits Record High as Food Prices Soar 400%,” Bloomberg, February 11, 2022, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-02-11/lebanese-inflation-hits-record-high-as-food-prices-soar-400?sref=D59jibWFx>.

and foreign debt to subsidize up to 90 percent of the cost of wheat imports. Lebanon procures approximately 75 percent of its wheat imports from Russia and Ukraine²¹. WFP reached over 1.8 million people in Lebanon with cash transfers and nearly 310,000 with actual food transfers in 2021²².

“To prevent food insecurity from reaching intolerable levels and triggering significant social unrest,” IFPRI warns, “Lebanon does not have the resources to address the crisis systematically, or by itself; it must rely on regional and global support and ad-hoc solutions²³.” IFPRI recommends near-term measures like shoring up wheat supply for the next several months and ensuring equitable distribution of bread through social safety net programs. Since explosions at the port of Beirut destroyed grain siloes in 2020, Lebanon has relied on just-in-time wheat procurement. With rebuilt siloes, Lebanon could insulate itself, and perhaps other countries in the region, from supply- and price shocks²⁴.

Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries import up to 90 percent of food, including from the Black Sea, but have thus far weathered the agriculture-market impacts of Russia’s war in Ukraine. A range of efforts—diversifying import sources, investing in technology to enable food production in arid climates, and engaging in the controversial practice of purchasing agricultural land in foreign countries—have bolstered food security in the GCC²⁵. High oil prices have further enabled GCC governments to absorb food-price increases and insulate populations from food insecurity²⁶. Notwithstanding their relative food security in the present crisis, analysts recommend GCC countries encourage domestic agricultural production, invest in agricultural companies, and build and maintain their food reserves to buffer the effects of future crises²⁷.

Policy responses

Responses that experts recommend may differ country-to-country, based on location-specific contexts, while others are recommended broadly. Based on lessons-learned from past crises, IFPRI experts advise that all countries refrain from imposing export bans; avoid hoarding and panic buying, suspend biofuel mandates in order to retain supplies on global markets and quell prices

²¹ “The Importance of Ukraine and the Russian Federation for Global Agricultural Markets and the Risks Associated with the Current Conflict,” FAO, 2022, <https://www.fao.org/3/cb9013en/cb9013en.pdf>.

²² “Lebanon Annual Country Report Highlight 2021,” WFP, https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000138572/download/?_ga=2.237901122.377062501.1652725275-1869819206.1652456665.

²³ Clemmens Breisinger, et al., “One of the world’s worst economic collapses, now compounded by the Ukraine crisis: What’s next for Lebanon?” IFPRI, May 6, 2022, <https://www.ifpri.org/blog/one-worlds-worst-economic-collapses-now-compounded-ukraine-crisis-whats-next-lebanon>.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Nadeen Ebrahim, “Why the food crisis sparked by Russia’s war hasn’t hit Gulf states yet,” CNN, 2022, <https://www.cnn.com/2022/05/02/business/gcc-food-security-mime-intl/index.html>.

²⁶ Md Manzer Hussain, “High oil prices to power Gulf economies amid inflation risks,” Reuters, April 26, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/high-oil-prices-power-gulf-economies-amid-inflation-risks-2022-04-26/>.

²⁷ Shira Efron, et al., “Food Security in the Gulf Cooperation Council,” Rand Corporation, December 2018, https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/external_publications/EP60000/EP67748/RAND_EP67748.pdf.

spikes, and continue to exempt Russia from food and fertilizer from sanctions, to limit impacts on food-insecure countries²⁸. To blunt the impact of price hikes on the poor, IFPRI recommends that countries direct food subsidies to the most vulnerable and provide humanitarian assistance through the WFP, and in the long term, avoid imposing market-distorting subsidies, cautiously consider decisions regarding land conservation programs, and avoid the allure of calls for food self-sufficiency²⁹.

On May 5, the U.S. Department of State announced a five-part response to the impacts of the war on global food security. These steps include mobilizing resources to meet urgent humanitarian needs, mitigating the global fertilizer shortage by increasing fertilizer production, increasing agricultural capacity and resilience, cushioning the impacts of rising food prices via social safety nets and cash transfers, and coordinating responses bilaterally and in international fora³⁰. The global response is unfolding: on May 18 in New York, Secretary of State Blinken will host a ministerial-level meeting among countries whose food security is affected by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and on May 19, Secretary Blinken will chair an open debate in the UN Security Council on the same topic³¹. Also on May 18 and 19, G7 Development Ministers will meet in Berlin, carrying forward G7 leaders' commitment to "address the consequences of the global crisis on food security through a joint G7 effort"³² and building on G7 Agriculture Ministers' May 14 commitments to stabilize food and fertilizer markets, avoid export restrictions, and promote sustainable and resilient agriculture systems³³. The FAO has proposed a Food Import Financing Facility (FIFF) to help poorer countries deal with surging food and fertilizer prices; FIFF and similar proposals will likely be topics of discussion at upcoming diplomatic engagements.

Food security impacts of Russia's war in Ukraine are likely to persist at least through 2022. In its latest World Agriculture Supply and Demand Estimates report, USDA offered its first prediction for the impact of the war on Ukraine's next (2022-2023) wheat harvest, reducing expected exports

²⁸ Joseph Glauber and David Laborde, "Do No Harm: Measured policy responses are key to addressing food security impacts of the Ukraine crisis," IFPRI, April 12, 2022, <https://www.ifpri.org/blog/do-no-harm-measured-policy-responses-are-key-addressing-food-security-impacts-ukraine-crisis>.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ "Remarks: Under Secretary of State for Economic Growth, Energy, and the Environment Jose W. Fernandez At the 2022 World Food Prize Laureate Announcement Ceremony," U.S. Department of State, May 5, 2022, <https://www.state.gov/under-secretary-of-state-for-economic-growth-energy-and-the-environment-jose-w-fernandez-at-the-2022-world-food-prize-laureate-announcement-ceremony/>.

³¹ "Global Food Security Ministerial," U.S. Department of State, May 18, 2022, <https://www.state.gov/global-food-security-ministerial/>.

³² "G7 Leaders Statement," G7 Germany, April 7, 2022, <https://www.g7germany.de/resource/blob/997532/2024356/f5d27e428c7f4d0f4086bd6bbafc6da0/2022-04-07-g7-leaders-eng-data.pdf?download=1>.

³³ "Pathway Towards Sustainable Food Systems in Times of Crises," G7 Germany, May 14, 2022, <https://www.g7germany.de/resource/blob/997532/2040144/8bd6097641a2c66114d95a2615c4d01d/2022-05-16-g7-agrarminister-eng-data.pdf?download=1>.

by 11.5 million metric tons, 35 percent less than 2021-2022³⁴. Regardless the length of the war, the crisis will already affect health and wellbeing of future generations. When food prices rise, consumption shifts from more expensive foods high in nutrients to less expensive foods of lower nutritional value, increasing incidence of malnutrition. Children's nutritional needs are high relative to their body size, and women's are high when pregnant or lactating. Absent targeted nutrition assistance, malnutrition will increase among children and women, with lifelong effects on human and economic growth³⁵.

The war-induced food crisis falls on the heels of the food crisis brought on by Covid-19, which caused food-insecurity levels to rise to their highest levels in at least 15 years. In the 2015 Intelligence Community Assessment on Global Food Security, the U.S. intelligence community noted that "large exportable supplies of key components of food production—such as phosphates, potash, and fuel oil—come from states where conflict or government actions could cause supply chain disruptions that lead to price spikes." In the years to come, conflict, climate change, and other factors will continue to suppress agricultural production, with continual effects on food-importing countries, including in the MENA region³⁶. In their responses to today's global food crisis, policymakers would be wise to consider establishing mechanisms that help food-importing countries weather today's—and future—supply and price shocks.

³⁴ "World Agricultural Supply and Demand Estimates," *Office of the Chief Economist, U.S. Department of Agriculture* 624, (2022): <https://www.usda.gov/oce/commodity/wasde/wasde0522.pdf>

³⁵ Saskia Osendarp, et. al., "Act now before Ukraine war plunges millions into malnutrition," *Nature* 604, (2022): <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-022-01076-5#:~:text=Governments%2C%20donors%20and%20others%20must,to%20prevent%20acute%20food%20insecurity>

³⁶ "Global Food Security Intelligence Community Assessment," Office of the Director of National Intelligence, October 14, 2015, <https://www.dni.gov/index.php/newsroom/reports-publications/reports-publications-2015/item/1265-global-food-security-intelligence-community-assessment>.

Mr. DEUTCH. Thank you very much, Ms. Welsh.
And Mr. Rumley, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

**STATEMENT OF MR. GRANT RUMLEY, SENIOR FELLOW, THE
WASHINGTON INSTITUTE FOR NEAR EAST POLICY**

Mr. RUMLEY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Chairman Deutch, Ranking Member Wilson, members of the subcommittee, members of the Ukrainian parliament, thank you for the opportunity to testify today 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.

Russia is one of the few countries in the world to maintain a relatively positive diplomatic standing with nearly every country in the Middle East. It does 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 military presence in the region is well-documented. By Russia MoD statements, Russia has deployed over 60,000 troops to Syria since intervening in 2015. From its two bases in Syria, Hmeimim and Tartus, Russia is able to project power into the eastern Mediterranean, influence the course of the Syrian civil war, and intervene in countries like Libya. Russia complements this military posture with an active and often effective arms sales pitch across the region, often seeking to exploit gaps left by the U.S. Turkey's acquisition of the S-400 and Egypt's purchase of the Sukhoi 35 are well-known, but others in the region continue to be interested in Russian materiel.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine, however, threatens Russia's standing in the region. Already, reports indicate Russia has begun withdrawing some troops and mercenaries from the region to support its invasion of Ukraine. While we can expect these reports to continue, if the war continues to go poorly for Russia, I am skeptical of a full Russian withdrawal and instead expect Russia to continue to consolidate its forces until it is left with a skeleton presence at Hmeimim and Tartus, its most strategic assets in the region.

On arms sales, the Russian defense industry, which has struggled to produce key platforms following sanctions initially placed after its 2014 invasion of Ukraine, will likely have to prioritize replenishing the Russian military over exporting. Further, customers of Russian arms may struggle with the resources to maintain and sustain the materiel in their inventory. Still, so long as Russia is able to make platforms, there will likely always be potential customers of Russian arms.

Given all this, I recommend the U.S. consider the following steps: First, clarify the U.S. policy regarding the implementation of CAATSA. I know the CAATSA debate in the U.S. usually pits delaying a determination against issuing a waiver, but delaying a determination only leaves partners more confused. Issuing a waiver sends a clear message to countries around the world as to what the U.S. sees as acceptable regarding a future relationship with Russia.

Second, maintain the U.S. presence in northeast Syria. A diminished Russian presence may create a vacuum for ISIS. Addition-

ally, a key Russian demand in negotiations over Syria's future has been that all U.S. forces leave the country. As Russia's presence wanes on the ground, ours may grant us more leverage in negotiating over Syria's future.

Third, proactively shape partner requests in order to explore enhanced production possibilities. Many of our partners in the Middle East and North Africa seek not only U.S. arms but help in planning for a post-petroleum future. They seek technological sharing, co-production, and support for their own defense industrial base. By shaping multiyear acquisition strategies with partners individually, the U.S. can prioritize partner needs while also potentially opening the possibility for enhanced production capabilities.

Provide off-ramps to countries in the middle of major arms transactions with Russia or who have recently purchased Russian systems. Turkey and Egypt are two examples of traditional U.S. partners with significant Russian arms in their inventories. There may now be a window to begin to wean them off Russian arms. Elsewhere in the world, the U.S. may also want to consider expanding the availability of foreign military financing to traditional Russian customers in order to lure them away from Russia.

Prepare select platforms for simultaneous export in order to better compete with great power competitors. As drones increasingly populate the Middle East, a common complaint from partners is the lack of an exportable, effective U.S. counter-UAV platform especially when Russia and China market one. To better compete with great power competitors, the U.S. must compete in this space as well.

And finally, continue targeting Russian sanctions evasion efforts to ensure lasting impact to the Russian defense industry. In particular, this effort should focus on Chinese companies and the potential for China to supply Russia with dual-use components that may support its defense acquisitions. I thank you again for your time and look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Rumley follows:]

Testimony to the House Foreign Affairs Committee
Subcommittee on the Middle East, North Africa, and Global Counterterrorism
Grant Rumley
Senior Fellow, Glazer Program on Great Power Competition and the Middle East
The Washington Institute for Near East Policy
18 May 2022

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 Russia's 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 U.S. 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 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 the Hmeimim air base and Tartus naval facility in the northwest.³ My colleague Anna

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.

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>

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 the 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 49 years, with the potential to renew for another 25 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 in Syria by giving Russia 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 eastern Mediterranean. In the weeks before the invasion of Ukraine, *Reuters* reported 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 40 miles south of the Hmeimim base, Russia's 49-year agreement with Syria likewise included Tartus, and as part of this agreement Russia was allowed to increase its presence to stage up to 11 warships in harbor.¹¹ Tartus serves as Russia's key naval facility in the region, allowing Russia to replenish its naval forces and project power in the Mediterranean. Prior to the invasion of Ukraine, press reporting indicated Russia sent additional warships to assemble with the Russian fleet already in Tartus as part of a mass exercise.¹²

Together, Hmeimim and Tartus serve as a base for Russia's military presence in the Middle East, and from these two sites Russia is able to expand its operations regionally. A 2020 Middle East Institute

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>

⁸ "Syria Agrees to Let Russia Expand Hmeimim Air Base," *Reuters*, August 19, 2020. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-syria-airbase/syria-agrees-to-let-russia-expand-hmeimim-air-base-idUSKCN25F2BP>

⁹ "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*.

¹⁰ "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/>

¹¹ Borshchevskaya, "Russia's Strategic Success in Syria and the Future of Moscow's Middle East Policy."

¹² "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/>

report suggested Russian MiG-29s had flown to the al-Jufra air base in Libya by way of Humeimim, highlighting Humeimim's importance in supporting Russian military operations in Africa.¹³ From its stronghold in Syria, Russia has been able to eye expansion elsewhere. Russian forces have deployed to Libya on behalf of Khalifa Haftar, and in 2017 Russia announced a 5-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 of 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 ez-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 Moscow to wield the group as a force multiplier throughout the region while denying any official association.¹⁸ In Libya, for instance, USAFRICOM 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

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/20220404-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," *The 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?," *The 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/ca-mwa_q3_june2020_final.pdf#page=5

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

residual force of approximately 5,000 in the country.²¹ In May, local reports indicated Russia was repositioning its forces within Syria and consolidating its presence to select airbases throughout the country.²² Another report indicated 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

Russian arms exports and associated sales, globally, are typically second only to its oil and gas exports.²⁶ Russia has consistently marketed itself as a viable alternative to purchasing from the U.S. by pitching its arms as a cost-effective alternative 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 being the second largest arms exporter in the world, Russian arms sales have dropped in the past five years as procurement issues for Russia’s 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 like 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. Russia’s

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/>

²³ “Russia Said to Pull Troops From Syria to Bolster Forces in Ukraine,” *The 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, Cecile 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>

most popular platforms are its aircraft and air defense systems. In 2021, the head of Russia's Federal Service for Military and 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) and 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 sanctions.³⁰ The UAE 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, though neither S-400 deal has yet to come to fruition.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 from Russia.³⁴

Ukraine will complicate Russia's ability to continue to export arms in the Middle East and North Africa and beyond. The most pressing issue will be one of 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 Ministry of Defense will likely have to

²⁹ "Aircraft Made Up 50% of Russia's Arms Exports Last Year, Says Defense Official," *TASS*, March 12, 2021. <https://tass.com/defense/1265359>

³⁰ Ali Dizboni, Karim el-Baz, "Understanding the Egyptian Military's Perspective on the Su-35 Deal," *The 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," *The 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.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/iransource/isis-iran-going-on-an-arms-shopping-sprees-in-moscow/>

³⁵ Parachini, Bauer, "Sanctions Targeting Russia's Defense Sector: Will They Influence Its Behavior?"

³⁶ "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," *The Wall Street Journal*, April 25, 2022. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/russian-militarys->

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 one of 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 potential 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.

Recommendations

- **Clarify U.S. policy regarding the implementation of the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA).** The biggest question facing customers deciding between U.S. and Russian arms is whether a potential purchase will trigger CAATSA sanctions. The U.S.' uneven application of CAATSA sanctions has only exacerbated this dilemma. Turkey purchased Russian S-400 air defense systems and was sanctioned under CAATSA; India purchased Russian S-400 air defense systems and, so far, has not. In the 2019 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 U.S. has been whether to choose between issuing a waiver or simply delaying 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 remain 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

[next-front-line-replacing-battlefield-equipment-destroyed-in-ukraine-11650879002?st=co0f0kkrvvgj6al5&reflink=share_mobilewebshare](https://www.wsj.com/articles/russian-military-s-next-front-line-replacing-battlefield-equipment-destroyed-in-ukraine-11650879002?st=co0f0kkrvvgj6al5&reflink=share_mobilewebshare)

³⁷ Daniel Michaels, Matthew Luxmoore, "Russian Military's Next Front Line: Replacing Battlefield Equipment Destroyed in Ukraine," *The Wall Street Journal*, April 25, 2022. https://www.wsj.com/articles/russian-military-s-next-front-line-replacing-battlefield-equipment-destroyed-in-ukraine-11650879002?st=co0f0kkrvvgj6al5&reflink=share_mobilewebshare

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/>

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 re-emerge. 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 the U.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 U.S. 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 U.S. 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 U.S. does this already through multi-year training plans with some select partners, and should expand those to include others.

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

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/russian-demands-all-u-s-troops-leave-syria-slams-trump-s-occupying-force-1.8023612>

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/#:~:text=For%20nearly%20three%20decades%2C%20Egypt.with%20jobs%20and%20security%20capability,%E2%80%9D](https://eg.usembassy.gov/egypt-u-s-resume-co-production-m1a1-abrams-tanks/#:~:text=For%20nearly%20three%20decades%2C%20Egypt.with%20jobs%20and%20security%20capability,%E2%80%9D)

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/>

- **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 Russia to not only struggle to replenish its own forces with advanced systems, but to also 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 of Russian arms, many of whom have also purchased arms from the U.S. 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 U.S. 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. The U.S. should also consider expanding the availability of Foreign Military Financing (FMF) to long-standing customers of Russian arms as a way of luring traditional Russian partners closer to the U.S.
- **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 concerns 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 U.S., 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 U.S. 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 laser-based, directed-energy counter-UAV system.⁴⁷ The U.S. should accelerate the development of its own counter-UAV systems while simultaneously preparing for exports to areas like the Middle East,

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 Pantsir to 'Counter Any Type of Drone'," *The Defense Post*, December 1, 2021. <https://www.thedefensepost.com/2021/12/01/russia-pantsir-counter-drones/>; Jeffrey Lin, P.W. Singer, "Drones, Lasers, and Tanks: China Shows Off Its Latest Weapons," *Popular Science*, February 27, 2017. <https://www.popsi.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

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/>

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 to the Russian defense industry.** Despite Ukraine, 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 U.S. should continue to counter Russian efforts to evade sanctions. For instance, the Treasury Department on March 31 noted its designation of the Moscow-based OOO Serniya Engineering (Serniya) 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 its toll on the Russian economy, Russia’s dependence on China will grow. Already, reports indicate Russia has asked China for military support.⁴⁹ Chinese firms may also try to assist Russia in evading sanctions.⁵⁰ The U.S. should continue to target these efforts to both stymie Russia-China cooperation as well as hinder Russia’s ability to export arms globally.

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>

Mr. DEUTCH. Thank you very much, Mr. Rumley, and thanks to all of the witnesses. I will now recognize members for 5 minutes each. Pursuant to House rules, all time yielded is for the purpose of questioning our witnesses. Because of the hybrid format at this hearing, I will recognize members by committee seniority, alternating between Democrats and Republicans. If you miss your turn, please let our staff know so that we can come back to you. If you seek recognition, you must unmute your microphone and address the chair verbally. I will defer my time until the end, and with that recognize Mr. Cicilline for the purpose of questioning the witnesses.

Mr. CICILLINE. Thank you, Chairman Deutch. And thank you to you and to Ranking Member Wilson for holding today's hearing on this very important issue. And I too want to welcome our colleagues, the members of the Ukrainian parliament, and say that the Congress of the United States and the American people stand very firmly with the Ukrainian people in your fight for democracy not only for your future but for the future of democracy in the world, so it is an honor to have you with us. And thank you to our witnesses for your very compelling testimony.

I want to begin with you, Ms. Welsh. I was in the region recently with the chairman and then with Senator Coons and met with David Beasley of the World Food Programme and he provided a similar, kind of very daunting and terrifying future in terms of food insecurity and particularly with what was happening at the Port of Odessa where food is just apparently going to rot because the Russians won't let it be offloaded.

So I am wondering what—and then you also spoke about the fertilizer shortage, so it is not only the immediate food insecurity, but it is also the ability to plant for the next season. What should we be doing in addition to, obviously, providing additional resources to programs like the World Food Programme? What else can Congress do to mitigate the impact both in the short term and the long term of this really devastating impact on food security in the region?

Ms. WELSH. Thank you for that question, for an excellent question. I will note that the worst impacts, I think, are still to come. The restrictions that we have seen in exports are exports from the last season's harvest. The current season is still in the ground ready for harvest in the coming months. The USDA has put out its first estimate of the proportion of that harvest that will not be able to be exported and they estimate a reduction of over 11 million metric tons of wheat from Ukraine that won't be able to make it out of Ukraine. So I think that effects will continue at least in the medium term.

In addition to providing robust financing for WFP, which I sense Congress is willing to do, I think it is, well, it is incredibly important to continue to do that not only for those who are immediately impacted in Ukraine and by this crisis, but for those who are experiencing acute food insecurity absent this crisis in the Horn of Africa, in the Sahel region, et cetera.

Also note that the World Food Programme has estimated that because of this war the cost of production for—the cost of operation for WFP have risen up to \$23 billion per month. So I think it is incredibly important to continue robust financing for WFP and in

addition to that, you know, as I mentioned, we are in the midst of formulation of U.S. and global responses.

In the long term, of course, it is very important to continue to invest in resilient agriculture, especially in the face of climate change. The way that I view this situation though is that apart from emergency assistance on the one hand and long-term assistance, which is agricultural development, on the other hand we need a financing facility to help food-importing countries, perhaps those that are not experiencing the worst of this crisis, to afford the cost of imports.

And I am sensing that that is what Secretary Yellen was announcing with financing from the IFIs on Monday, and that that is also what we could expect to hear out of the G7 in June.

Mr. CICILLINE. Thank you.

Dr. Notte, earlier this year, I joined Chairman Meeks and Chairman Deutch, along with others, urging the Biden Administration to continue its efforts to restore human rights as a vital pillar in our bilateral relationships with Egypt. And I am wondering if you could comment on how you see Russia's invasion of Ukraine affecting U.S.-Egyptian bilateral relations and, you know, what opportunities does the Administration have to deepen these ties and how do we do so while also honoring our commitment to human rights?

And also how does Egypt perceive Russia in terms of its strategic partnership and has that changed since their brutal, barbaric invasion of Ukraine?

Dr. NOTTE. Thank you very much for the question, Congressman. I think the first thing you have to say is that while Egyptian-Russian relations go way back by decades, the Soviet Union had a stake in Egypt, and important relations one really shouldn't overstate the depth and the importance of the Egyptian-Russian relationship.

There are some trade relations. There are the wheat supplies, that is true. Russia intends to build a nuclear power plant at El Dabaa in Egypt, so that is certainly sort of a strategic area where the Russians want to position themselves. And then there are the occasional arms sales to Egypt in an Egyptian effort to diversify its arms procurement. But, you know, the relationship hasn't really evolved much beyond that.

One should also say, I think, that Egypt has looked favorably somewhat upon Russia's role in Libya as seeing Russia and its partnership with General Haftar sort of as a, as a sort of guarantee that the Egyptian-Libyan border remains somewhat stable and the Egyptians have looked toward the Russians to ensure that.

Now when it comes to sort of undermining Russian commercial opportunities in Egypt, with the El Dabaa power plant, I think countries in the region might well doubt that Rosatom, which is the company that is building those power plants, can be an attractive provider in the future. Rosatom hasn't been sanctioned yet, but the companies that usually, the banks that provide loans for those power plants like Sberbank, when it comes to the Turkish power plant Akkuyu, have been sanctioned. And also a nuclear power plant is a decades-long investment and there might well be doubts about Russia's ability to service and maintain strategic tech-

nologies, whether its arms or whether its nuclear power plants, in the future.

So I would actually expect a certain hesitancy by countries like Egypt to procure these strategic technologies from Russia going forward. And I think the United States should make clear those limitations of the Russians in their own bilateral consultations with the Egyptians.

Mr. CICILLINE. Thank you so much. My time has expired. I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. DEUTCH. And thank you, Mr. Cicilline. Mr. Wilson is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. WILSON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And indeed, as we have our visiting parliamentarians from Ukraine, what an extraordinary time in history, you should be aware. I appreciate the leadership of Chairman Ted Deutch assisting in the 40 billion-dollar aid package. That is the largest package that truly has ever occurred so quickly because it is done heartfelt.

And then I am really grateful that as our parliamentarians if you have a chance to travel across the United States, you are going to find out something and that is that on virtually every street there is a flag of Ukraine in front of one, two or three homes. And then I am really grateful that I was able to provide a flag of Ukraine. When you visit the Statehouse in South Carolina and you visit with the Governor Henry McMaster, who is a strong friend of Ukraine, the first thing you are going to see when you get to the office is the flag of Ukraine.

So you are thought of, your courage. From our perspective, it is Don't Tread On Me/Live Free or Die, the American Revolution. With that, a question for Mr. Rumley. What factors do you think would assist in deterring U.S. partners from purchasing Russian military equipment? What can we do to prevent China from back-filling the defense procurement space that may be vacated by Russia in the Middle East?

Mr. RUMLEY. Thank you for that question, Congressman. I definitely think customers of Russian arms are going to have several hurdles going forward not only with simply maintaining and sustaining what they have already purchased, but in some of the basic logistics, even the payment process. A Russian bank complained last month that it wasn't able to process close to a billion dollars in payments from India and Egypt over arms sales. I think countries that purchase Russian arms will also now have to consider the potential that they may incur secondary sanctions in addition to running afoul of CAATSA.

I think from our standpoint, there are many ways that we can amend our security cooperation approach. The Middle East, I think, is a key theater for the future of great power competition. Not only have we been competing with Russia in terms of arms sales there, but China increasingly has sold armed drones to the region. They have sold it to traditional partners—Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and the UAE. And what they are doing is oftentimes what we are not willing to do.

Our partners in the region seek coproduction, they seek technology sharing; China and Russia are willing to work together to build these advanced platforms. Russia and the UAE inked an

agreement several years ago to produce a fifth-generation fighter. Nothing has come of that yet. China and Saudi Arabia, however, signed an agreement a couple months ago to jointly produce armed drones in Saudi Arabia.

And so I think the U.S. may want to think creatively in terms of both what we sell, how we sell it, and what we are doing to make this more of a relationship and something beyond a strict transaction.

Mr. WILSON. Putin uses the base in Syria to challenge NATO's southern flank, a direct threat to Turkey, to Greece, to Bulgaria, to Albania, to Italy. Can you provide more information on how Russia uses this base to challenge NATO? You detailed how Russia's military presence in Syria supports Russia's power protection. Is there anything the United States can do to limit the Russian presence in Syria and therefore their projection in the region?

Mr. RUMLEY. Yes. Thank you, Congressman. Their presence in Syria has evolved from a modest airstrip in 2015 to a base at Hmeimim that by open source reporting can serve as a logistics hub, a medical hub. It has the runways to host Russia's most advanced bombers. There were reports before Ukraine that Russia was deploying Tu-22 bombers there and hypersonic missiles. Their facility at Tartus, likewise, has—their ability to stage naval assets there has expanded. They can now stage up to 11 ships there. So it has grown from a rather modest beginning to something much more, I think, challenging from a U.S. standpoint.

In terms of what we can do, I think we can continue to support Ukraine and the defense of Ukraine and the longer that Russia is bogged down in Ukraine, the harder it will be for Russia's military to extend and maintain its presence in the Middle East.

Mr. WILSON. I was disappointed to hear that Russia has a 5-year agreement with Egypt to use its airbases and air space. How utilized is this agreement by the Russian Federation in the last 5 years and what factors will influence Egypt's decision of whether to renew the agreement?

Mr. RUMLEY. Thank you, Congressman. I think Dr. Wehrey might be able to provide some details as well here. I think from Egypt's standpoint, the basing agreement fits into both their shared objectives with Russia in terms of intervening in the Libya conflict. I think it also fits into their diversifications since President Sisi came to power of seeking to diversify both who they buy from, but also where they—who they jointly cooperate with on a military front.

I think it is, I cannot say for certain whether they will renew it. I know there is the option to automatically renew the agreement. But again, the effects of Ukraine may make it difficult for Russia to maintain much of a presence there.

Mr. WILSON [continuing]. Input in the future, Egypt should be such an important part of stability in the Middle East and a strong ally of the United States so any way we can back them up to not be reliant on anything that relates to Putin. I yield back.

Mr. DEUTCH. I thank the ranking member and yield 5 minutes to Mr. Malinowski.

Mr. MALINOWSKI. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. So obviously, for a lot of countries in the Middle East and North Africa, the war in

Ukraine has brought significant economic challenges, food and security, for example, countries like Egypt and Libya, Yemen, Tunisia. But for other countries, particularly from some of the oil-rich countries in the Persian Gulf, the war from everything I can see has brought nothing but economic benefits that they have taken advantage of.

Right now, there is a shortage of about 1.5 million barrels a day of oil on the global markets, if you count the Russian oil that has been lost due to sanctions and then throw in what we have generated additionally from our strategic reserves. And all of the experts I have spoken to tell me there are only two countries in the world that have the capacity to make up that shortfall in a short period of time and that is Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. And yet they seem to have made a deliberate choice for several months not to use that power to stabilize these global energy markets and they have made a lot of money at it.

The Saudi Arabia's Aramco, for example, the State-owned oil company, in the first quarter of 2022 made a profit of \$40 billion in comparison to \$22 billion in the first quarter of the previous year. That is 124 percent increase, an 18 billion-dollar windfall from basically the increased oil prices from the Ukraine war. By refusing to play their role, they have enabled Russia to make a lot more money because the price of oil is higher on their remaining oil exports and they have seriously hurt the United States and our western European allies. All of our constituents are feeling this right now. They have made it extremely hard for us, harder than it otherwise would have been to impose the types of sanctions on Russian energy that are needed to bring this war to an end.

So I wanted to ask you, Mr. Wehrey, I mean, first of all, can you think of any countries in the world that are doing more to undermine our sanctions on Russia than Saudi Arabia and the UAE? And two, why are they doing this? What are the concessions that they are trying to extract from us as part of this process?

Dr. WEHREY. Thank you for the question, Congressman. I think you raise a very important point about the nature of our partnership with these two States. And the idea that because of the Ukraine war we should redouble our efforts to solidify those partnerships and especially in terms of security and arms, I think we need to question what that partnership has gotten us in the region to begin with.

We have sold these countries arms. They have used arms in ways that have been destabilizing in the region that have killed civilians. In many cases, these arms are bought purely for prestige or used for domestic repression. Simply selling arms to these countries often doesn't give the U.S. leverage. So the entire range of security outcomes from our giving arms to them, you know, really hasn't gotten us anything.

And now, of course, you raise the issue of oil. They are not coming on board with us here. There is a whole list of, you know, logic. They have relationships with China. They are trying to extract more guarantees from us. I mean the United Arab Emirates have demanded a formal security pact from the United States. And so that goes to my earlier point in my statement that these States have seized upon this moment, this very charged moment of great

power rivalry and they are trying to manipulate it. They are trying to extract as much as they can from us. And I do think we need to, frankly speaking, call them on their bluff. You know, Russia and China are not going to step in and defend these countries from Iranian missiles. They are not going to play the role. I think the U.S. has to be comfortable with a degree of security diversification in the region, a degree of multipolarity.

Mr. MALINOWSKI. I just have a few seconds left, but I mean doesn't this raise the question of who is the superpower in this relationship, right, are we leveraging them or are they able to leverage us? I mean I recall President Trump actually got the Saudis to pump less oil in 2020 by threatening to pull our troops out of the kingdom. And it took basically a few days to get that concession once he was willing to play that card.

I mean what, and it has taken us months this year, so far unsuccessfully, to get a similar result by different means. So what lesson do you draw from that?

Dr. WEHREY. Well, I think you are right, Congressman. We have, still, enormous cards we can play in terms of the defense that we are providing them in terms of the systems that we put on their soil. There is a naval patrol that we just agreed to with the Saudis, so I mean we are already doing so much. We do have enormous cards and we are the superpower. We need to start acting like it and we need to be confident in doing so, I think. And we still have seniority in the relationship, to answer your question.

Mr. MALINOWSKI. Thank you. I yield back.

Mr. DEUTCH. Thank you, Mr. Malinowski. Mr. Steube is recognized.

Mr. STEUBE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. My questions are for Mr. Rumley. Israel has publicly condemned Russia's invasion of Ukraine through announcements and votes in international settings. Israel also sought to provide political support and humanitarian relief for the Ukrainians, including allowing over 15,000 Jewish and non-Jewish refugees to enter Israel, without alienating Russia. In some instances, Israel officials served as communicators between their Russian and Ukrainian counterparts.

Since 2015, Russia's military presence and air defense capabilities in Syria have given it influence over Israel's ability to conduct air strikes there. Israel has depended on access to Syrian air space to target Iranian personnel and equipment especially those related to the transport of munitions or precision weapons technology to Hezbollah and Lebanon.

How has Russia repositioned its forces in the Middle East since the start of the Ukrainian conflict?

Mr. RUMLEY. Thank you for the question, Congressman. We have seen reports that Russia has repositioned its forces in the region, mostly consolidated into airbases, pulling out from sort of different parts of the country, I think, further in the east. It is hard to verify these reports as they all are open source, but I think your question is an important one because it gets at Israel's equities in Syria and its relationship with Russia.

And I think we cannot underscore enough just how much the IL-20 shootdown in 2018 impacted both the Israeli military, but also the Israeli security leadership today. Israel's priority is freedom of

action in Syria and maintaining freedom of action in Syria in order to destabilize Iran's activities there, Iran's ability to support its proxies in Lebanon and Hezbollah.

And so I think Israel has to navigate that fine balance with Russia as Russia has deployed S-300's in support of Bashar al-Assad and S-400's in support of its own premium assets, so it is certainly a fine line and I think we have seen Israeli policy from the start of Ukraine reflect that.

Mr. STEUBE. Currently, five countries operate in or maintain military forces in Syria—Russia, Turkey, Iran, Israel, and the United States. The Assad government backed by Russia and Iran and aligned military forces controls about two-thirds of Syria's territory including most of the major cities. Russia's military influence also extends to North Africa. The Syrian regime also helps funnel money back to Russian oligarchs.

How have Russian partners like Iran and Assad responded to re-deployments in the region?

Mr. RUMLEY. Thank you, Congressman. Yes, I think what we are very likely to see is where Russia repositions and withdraws Iran and its proxies will look to fill that vacuum. I think that is, going back to my remarks, what makes our presence in northeastern Syria all the more important both to ensure that any withdrawal doesn't create a vacuum that ISIS and its elements can exploit, but also that we can be there to monitor and potentially disrupt Iranian activities to fill that vacuum.

And so I think given the strain placed on the Russian forces, it is likely we are going to see a more active Iranian activity in the region.

Mr. STEUBE. Former Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had a close working relationship with Vladimir Putin and the two leaders maintained a hotline which allowed the Israel military to alert Russian forces of incoming strikes in Syria. However, it is clear that even before Russia's war with Ukraine, Putin and Israel's new Prime Minister Bennett do not share the same relationship. Russia's assistance to Syrian force in intercepting Israeli missiles in July 2021 demonstrates this. So how do the security dynamics in Syria impact Israel's approach to Ukraine with respect to Russia?

Mr. RUMLEY. Yes. That is a great question. Thank you, Congressman. I think it is clear that so long as Russia has its air defense systems in Syria in support of Bashar al-Assad, it will maintain some form of leverage over Israel's ability to conduct operations in Syria and strike back at that Iranian infrastructure.

I think that I cannot speak to the Bennett/Putin relationship, but I do think it is a combination both of navigating that dynamic in Syria but also him being relatively new. The Putin/Netanyahu relationship had many years to develop and so I think it was both probably not great timing for Bennett to inherit this crisis, but I think we are going to continue to see Israel navigate a fine line in its relationship with Russia.

Mr. STEUBE. I have a couple of seconds left, real quick. What are the risks to Israel's security by supporting Ukraine against the Russian invasion?

Mr. RUMLEY. Yes, Congressman. There is always the risk that is ever present on Israel's mind that Russia may turn on its air defense systems and begin to attempt to deny Israel freedom of action in Syria.

Mr. STEUBE. Thanks for your time here today. I yield back.

Mr. DEUTCH. Thank you, Mr. Steube. I will yield myself time, first, for questioning. Let me start with Dr. Notte. I wanted to followup, Dr. Notte, on your reference to Russia's veiled nuclear threats and ask what that—what is it that you believe, how is it that you believe that will impact the Middle East in particular, and can you speak to those nuclear threats and the possibility of nuclear, tactical nuclear strikes by Russia and the impact on proliferation in the Middle East region?

Dr. NOTTE. Thank you for the question, Chairman. I think at this point, one can only speak anecdotally and somewhat speculatively to the impact that this nuclear saber-rattling over Ukraine has for the region. I can certainly share that regional interlocutors have taken note of this threat and are really asking, is this is a safe world to live in where some countries have nuclear weapons and those that do not have them can be coerced, can be blackmailed, and can be the victim of a conventional aggression without someone coming to their aid.

And I think it is the combination of those threats and how they are perceived in the region, plus the worry about a growing Iranian nuclear threat, which many in the region believe will not be mitigated even if we have a restoration of the JCPOA. Many believe that Iran might end up with a threshold nuclear capability anyway and then it is just one step away from weaponization.

So it is really the combination of those two factors and they worry that the United States might have insufficient bandwidth to give those, you know, assurances to those countries to mitigate that threat that I think sort of gets them thinking. I am not prepared to say today that on that basis countries have concluded to, you know, pursue a nuclear program or a nuclear option hedging, but I do believe that it is something that capitals will consider.

Mr. DEUTCH. And you referenced the bandwidth issue of the United States and questions about the perception of what that bandwidth might be and whether it is great enough. I want to followup with, specifically, with a question about Russia and the comment that—actually, I think Dr. Wehrey and Mr. Rumley, you both spoke to this—the failure of the Russian invasion to roll through Ukraine.

The challenges that the Russian military has had, show the limit of Russia's capability. And for countries in the MENA region, that may have looked—well, they previously looked to Russia as a potential security partner, one who is less demanding, as I think a couple of you said, than the U.S. may be.

How is their failure in Ukraine being perceived and how can the United States capitalize on the failures of Russia and Ukraine to show that the United States including our values remain a dedicated ally to Middle Eastern countries? And Mr. Rumley. We will certainly even go to Dr. Wehrey.

Mr. RUMLEY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I think that is absolutely right. I think for potential customers and current customers

of Russian arms in the Middle East, right now, assuming you are able to maintain and sustain what you have bought, you are assuming Russia's going to be able to build and even export future materiel. And assuming you will be able to pay for it, I think there will still be some appetite in the region for Russian arms.

I think Middle East partners and partners globally will distinguish between the way Russia has used its forces and the stand-alone capabilities of some of these platforms. I think also the prices for these may drop dramatically in the future and so there are likely always going to be customers out there looking for cheap arms that come with less perceived strings attached to it.

I think the U.S. has several partners in the middle of major Russian arms purchases that we can, like Turkey and the S-400 that has requested the F-16 or Egypt and Sukhoi 35 that has requested the F-15, I am not saying we have to sort of make a deal right now for that, but I think it is clear that these countries are going to have gaps, gaps in their capabilities where they had planned on having Russian platforms to complement. And we can work with our partners and work with our own defense industry and see if there is ways in which we can provide off-ramps for them to gradually disinvest these Russian platforms.

Mr. DEUTCH. I thank you.

Dr. Wehrey, you had said earlier that Russia cannot really offer security guarantees in that their weapons aren't good. Do you want to speak to that?

Dr. WEHREY. Right. Thank you for the question. You know, it is perceived, really, a sort of transactional, commercial approach, you know, it hasn't—and I think States in the region have responded. They haven't moved, you know, their relationships with Russia to the sorts of relationships that really define alliances and partnerships. They haven't opened up access to bases a lot of times, you know, and so I think it is a mutual understanding.

When countries in the region buy U.S. arms, they believe they are buying much more than the capability, the hardware; that they are purchasing an insurance policy, right. And I think especially for, you know, States in the Gulf, there is a fundamental sense of insecurity. These are States that face Iran, but they are also autocrats. I mean they are insecure because of their political systems. They face dissent from within. We saw that with, you know, Egypt.

And so they are purchasing a whole stream of, you know, U.S. assurances—they believe they are—and Russia is not going to come in and replace that. It is not going to, you know, and even the U.S. isn't. So again, I think, you know, in light of its disastrous performance in Ukraine, and to be clear, there have been other instances in Crimea where Russian hardware was also shown to be defective, but I think this is of a qualitatively different level. You know, the U.S. needs to let this speak for itself.

And as my co-panelist mentioned, I do think there is an opportunity to help wean partners off of Russian systems through co-production, through alternative, you know, suppliers. We need to provide that opening for them. But, you know, we shouldn't get back into the arms race game, you know, I think we need to keep our eye on the long-term problems in the region which, as I mentioned, are enormous and relate to governance and economy.

Mr. DEUTCH. Thank you, Dr. Wehrey.

I have a number of questions on food security issues for Ms. Welsh, but I am going to yield to Mr. Perry next and we will come back, Ms. Welsh, on the next go-around.

Mr. Perry, you are recognized.

Mr. PERRY. I thank the chairman. Sorry to be late. Other things going on. To the witnesses, good to see you. I think my question is probably for Mr. Rumley, and instead of reading all this I know you talked about off-ramps, or at least I suspect you did even though I wasn't here, you know, we just passed \$40 billion in a Ukraine assistance package and I think that we are depleting our own supply of javelins and stingers. There are not being produced as far as I know, or if they are in not much capacity, so we are reducing our own stockpile at this very moment.

In that context, what do you think is the scope of your proposed expansion to the Foreign Military Financing program and how would you square your off-ramps for these additional countries with our shortages? So you are talking about adding additional countries; meanwhile, we are depleting what we have based on the one country that is obviously being attacked and invaded right now militarily, but this puts the United States in a perilous position. We have to protect ourselves, right. I mean you put your oxygen mask on first on the airplane before you put it on each other. There is a reason for that and it is a similar situation here.

Mr. RUMLEY. Thank you, Congressman. The issue of co-production is one means, I think, to address a common complaint which is buying from America takes too long; that it is too complicated; that if we get in line to buy something from the U.S. we are going to have to wait years to get it. A good example is the F-16. There are over 20 countries in the world that fly the F-16. We currently, Lockheed Martin builds it out of one facility. That facility if you get in line today, you are probably not getting the F-16 for 5 years from when you sign on the dotted line for it. In the 1970's and the 1980's, we co-produced the F-16 with three other European countries and we were able to get them off the line faster. The initial order at those facilities was for a thousand F-16s. The initial order for the F-16 plant in South Carolina was for 90 F-16s for Taiwan and Morocco.

And so from an industry standpoint, it is a question of scale, and so they are not able to, I think, ramp up the production because while the demand gets closer to a thousand over time—it is at 128 last I checked—it is not there yet. And so I think we can use Foreign Military Financing, longer security cooperation planning, working with our partners on sort of multiyear acquisition timetables to then also communicate and send a message, send a signal to the defense industry that these orders for upgrades, for new kits that are going to come down the road, you can start to plan around that and potentially address some of these production lags.

Mr. PERRY. So just being the devil's advocate in the conversation here and being the guy that kind of sees that government creates something, there is a problem that government probably created, and then has the solution for it which usually is a bigger problem in the end, in my opinion, but why are we at this point with foreign military sales or financing? Like how did we get there that that is

the solution? Like when you say that your initial order was for a thousand, and there is no doubt in my mind that we were able to complete that, what has changed between then and now that puts us in a position where we have to go to other countries for production and potentially compromise national security and intellectual property, et cetera, and quite honestly, just the work to be done in America? What has changed that has put us in this position?

Mr. RUMLEY. Absolutely, Congressman, I think the initial order for the F-16 was because it was a new platform that was coming off the line. Right now, the F-16 is used by a lot of countries but it is not the most premier platform in our own arsenal and so as we have developed more platforms. We have poured more resources into developing the Joint Strike Fighter, the F-35, for instance.

So I think co-production is one way to both speed up delivery for platform—

Mr. PERRY. Yes, but hold on a second. So I get it. It is essentially what we would call—although I think it is a fantastic machine and if I had my choice that would be one of the things I would choose to fly. But it is essentially a legacy aircraft from an American perspective. We should be able to turn them out like—like all the tooling and the die, all that stuff is done and all the questions, potentially, have already been answered for years upon years.

Why aren't we just cranking these things out like, you know, an assembly line factory?

Mr. RUMLEY. Yes. Absolutely, Congressman, I think and I would have to defer to defense industry on this one. I think it is simply the out-year demand signal that makes it hard for industry to allocate all the resources toward—

Mr. PERRY. I mean it is not a finite pie. We got, I mean in some respects maybe you do not have manpower or something, but that is the question. What has changed that we cannot produce what we need to produce in a timely fashion? And it doesn't seem like, really, I do not know if you just do not have the answer or you are guessing or whatever and I am not saying you should. But it doesn't seem to be that I am getting, I do not hear anything that makes me think that we shouldn't be able to do this. I yield.

Mr. DEUTCH. Thank you, Representative Perry.

Representative Manning, you are recognized.

Ms. MANNING. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to our witnesses for being here today. I want to go back to the issue of food security that we have been talking about just a little bit. Mr. Malinowski talked about the enormous benefit that some of the Gulf countries are getting in terms of banner oil profits.

So Ms. Welsh, or any of the others who want to weigh on this, what is the capacity or the willingness, really, of the wealthier Gulf countries to set up and help provide financing and food to those who need it the most within the region?

Ms. Welsh, do you want to comment on that?

Ms. WELSH. Certainly. Thank you, Representative, for that good question. You know, I do not know specifically. I can speak to past efforts from my time at the State Department to get Gulf countries to invest multilateral financing facilities for agricultural development, for example. Those efforts were not necessarily successful. So

in my own experience, it hasn't been easy to get Gulf countries to invest in food security and agriculture for the rest of the region.

I do think that that is potentially an untapped source, untapped resource when it comes to the impacts on food security. Again, we are seeing high oil prices highly correlated to the price of food, which again it is only exacerbating the problem. So I think it is a good point that you brought up.

Ms. MANNING. Thank you. And what about the impact of countries' export bans on the region such as India's recent ban on wheat? What other sources are there, potential sources for countries that previously relied on Russian or Ukrainian imports to diversify their supply?

Ms. WELSH. Thank you for that question. At present, about 20 countries are putting in place export restrictions. They are not outright bans, but restrictions on some products. India has not outright banned its exports. It is still letting some of its exports to continue to countries that it had agreements in place prior, prior to last week, and it is also exempting humanitarian assistance from its export restrictions. Regardless, India's restrictions are coming at a very bad time, of course.

Other options are production from other producing regions, from United States, Argentina, Australia, but again prices are global so for all importing countries the ultimate bill is going to be higher.

Ms. MANNING. Thank you.

Mr. Rumley, I want to turn to you. In your testimony, you mentioned that Russia will face difficulty maintaining its current posture in the Middle East. Which countries are poised to fill in the gap and how can we prevent Iranian-backed forces from benefiting from this situation that Russia has gotten itself into, particularly in Syria?

Mr. RUMLEY. Thank you, Congresswoman. I think the answer was in the question. I think especially in Syria, Iran and its proxies are going to look to fill the gap there. I think we have already seen sort of initial reports suggesting as much. Hezbollah has also been active in Syria in the past. Again, I would just say, I do think that while we see them repositioning, I do not think we will see a total withdrawal unless Ukraine goes dramatically worse for Russia.

In Libya, I would defer to Dr. Wehrey who is there right now on that, but I would expect that there is no shortage of foreign support flooding into that conflict.

Ms. MANNING. What are the options for preventing the Iranian-backed forces in Syria from increasing their bad actions?

Mr. RUMLEY. Yes, Congresswoman. One of the issues, I think, that we have is that we do not have a ton of great options for it. Our force presence there is we do not have the authorities, necessarily, to combat the Iranian presence. I think our presence in northeast Syria and our presence at al-Tanf garrison serves as a bit of a disruption to Iran's efforts to establish what we called the GLOC, the ground line of communication. But again, I am not certain how much we will be able to necessarily thwart them.

I think our other partners in the region, most in particular Israel, are currently working on this problem set and working to roll back some of Iran's gains there, and so I think perhaps the best way to answer that is to continue to support Israel.

Ms. MANNING. And what impact if any do you see by the recent election in Lebanon?

Mr. RUMLEY. Thank you, Congresswoman. I think what we are seeing out of Lebanon is unfortunately likely to be not what the country needs in terms of delivering proper governance. I think the election results were leaning toward the inconclusive at this point in terms of who is going to actually come out on top, and I am most of all concerned for the future of Lebanon and its people.

Ms. MANNING. Thank you. I believe my time is about to expire. I yield back.

Mr. DEUTCH. Thank you, Ms. Manning.

Mr. Burchett, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. BURCHETT. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It is always a pleasure being with you. I have several questions. I will get right to them. Do you all think that the countries in the Middle East and North Africa regions will have some second thoughts about buying Russian-made armaments after seeing them in the field in Ukraine? It seems like they have been a little less than successful.

Mr. RUMLEY. Yes, Congressman. I think the performance is not up to perhaps the sales pitch. But while, as I said earlier, while I do think their reputation has taken a hit, I think customers will distinguish between the way Russia has fought this conflict and the way its standalone platforms operate.

Mr. BURCHETT. Yes, I agree with you. In the Second World War, you know, they had the T-34 tanks and they took on the much stronger German Tigers and other things and they whipped them. A German tank commander said we would blow one up and there would be 12 more behind them. But the interesting thing about it was that they, during the Second World War, they would have maybe a tank crew of four people, I believe, and they would have three different languages in there and they had a lot of difficulties there, but apparently now they have similar languages but they just do not have the fighting men that they did.

Do you think there is any, do you think that the Russians are using Syrians to fight in the Ukraine? Has that been pretty much documented or is that just internet rumors?

Mr. RUMLEY. I think, as I understand it, Russia's key gap in the Ukraine right now is one of manpower, and so I would expect them to continue to call up their mercenaries around the region to support their efforts there.

Mr. BURCHETT. So is that a maybe?

Mr. RUMLEY. It is hard to say from an open source standpoint.

Mr. BURCHETT. All right. That is an honest answer. How do you think we will be able to prevent the Chinese from filling the defense procurement space, so have it that may be vacated by the Russians in the Middle East?

Mr. RUMLEY. I think, yes, Congressman. I think Dr. Wehrey actually hit the nail on the head there when he said, when he noted that China has a lot of legacy Russian platforms and will likely be a leading candidate to transfer some of these platforms to countries that had purchased Russian arms in the past and may be seeking maintenance and sustainment for them.

I think China is already active in the Middle East, already flooding the market with armed drones. It is already looking to market

other platforms as well. It sold their defense systems to Serbia. It is looking to advance its arms sales. And so if we aren't going to be the supplier, China is, in my view, going to step in.

Mr. BURCHETT. OK. What is the situation of the food in the region, the food imports, due to the Russian invasion of Ukraine?

Ms. WELSH. Thank you for the question, Representative. As I noted, many countries in the Middle East and North Africa rely on imports from Russia and Ukraine. And at present, I will say that it is an open question. As I noted earlier, USDA has projected that 35 percent of the current crop, current wheat crop from Ukraine, will not be harvested this year. So their crop is, their exports are curtailed at the same time Russia's exports are continuing.

Russia has been exempted. Russia's agricultural exports and fertilizer has been exempted from sanctions for the United States, EU, and other countries, so Russia continues to export. In fact, USDA is estimating that Russia's exports are increasing at this time, and I am also seeing open source reporting of Russia stealing grain from Ukraine, relabeling it, and exporting it at a premium to countries in the Middle East and North Africa.

Mr. BURCHETT. Russians are going to do like Russians are going to do. They are thieves, basically.

Are there any counter ISIS operations at risk due to Russia's invasion of Ukraine? And if you could, if that is a yes, could you explain that to me?

Mr. RUMLEY. That is a great question, Congressman. I do not—

Mr. BURCHETT. You will get nowhere complimenting me up here with these people. They will just mark you down a couple notches, so it is better if you insult me like they do. Like Ted does. Just kidding.

Mr. RUMLEY. No, it is an important question. It is one my former colleagues in the Department of Defense will be looking at. I think that the biggest risk perhaps to the D-ISIS mission and our presence in Syria is any potential one-off conflicts or clashes with both Iranian-aligned groups, but also Russian mercenaries like we saw in 2018 in Deir ez-Zor. Ostensibly, should Russian mercenaries be pulled back from areas of Syria that may alleviate some of those concerns, so I am optimistic we will be able to continue the D-ISIS mission.

Mr. BURCHETT. Thank you. Mr. Chairman, I yield back 6 seconds of my time.

Mr. DEUTCH. Thank you very much, Mr. Burchett. And I, for the record, would never insult you.

I have just two final questions before we wrap up this, I think, really important and productive hearing. One, Dr. Notte, I just want to go back to you on this nuclear issue again. There has been some conversation here, there has been conversation, generally, about, a lot of conversation here about our allies in the region and their belief in America's staying power in the region. There is some suggestions that our allies are trying to manipulate us.

I would just ask you since you spoke about nuclear proliferation, from the perspective of our allies, in particular the Emiratis who faced attacks on Dubai from Iranian-backed groups, and on the Saudis who faced attacks on their soil, and given the ongoing

threats from Iran, from the IRGC, is when you look at the region and you think about nuclear proliferation it seems clear, but I want to make sure I am not missing anything, that for those countries the best decision is to stand with the United States against Iran's malign influence in the region and against Iran's efforts to develop nuclear weapons. And it seems also in the best interest of the United States to make clear that it is our position that Iran—that we won't tolerate Iran's malign activities and that we will never allow Iran to have nuclear weapons. Do you agree with that?

Dr. NOTTE. Thank you, Chairman. I absolutely agree with this assessment. I do think that there is partially a problem that the United States has at the level of perception. You know, there is this widespread perception that the United States is not taking the missile and proxy threat by Iran seriously enough, is not doing enough, when of course, and some other witnesses have said it, the United States is still doing a lot in the region while certainly Russia and Iran, Russia and China will not support regional countries in withstanding the missile and proxy issue either. In fact, I would pose to you that it is to Russia's advantage if Iran and proxy and missile threats destabilize the region to a certain extent because again it pins down U.S. resources that could otherwise be freed up for elsewhere.

So I think that perception has to be mitigated. Make clearer to partners that the United States is still very much engaged. Witness Wehrey noted the new naval force that has been put in place for the Red Sea. I believe the new CENTCOM chief is currently visiting the region.

I think the United States could also do a little more to perhaps leverage European allies in sort of carrying the burden of responsibility for mitigating the Iranian proxy and missile threat in the region. The Europeans have not been historically very involved in that effort and Europe is the direct neighborhood of the Middle East. We Europeans are fundamentally reliant on stability in the region, so perhaps more could happen there.

But yes, I fundamentally agree with your assessment that it is the best choice of regional countries to partner with the United States, perhaps also now building on operationalizing the Abraham Accords, more defense and deterrence cooperation between Gulf Arab States and Israel, where again CENTCOM is also positioning itself in a leading role to support that process.

Mr. DEUTCH. So I appreciate that, Dr. Notte.

Mr. Rumley, then I will turn to you. The best approach, just trying to pull some of what Dr. Notte said together, is for the United States to lead the effort to stand up to Iran. That means rallying our allies including, I think Dr. Notte is quite right, our allies in Europe and it also means standing and working with our allies in the region. Israel as part of CENTCOM now means there are greater opportunities from a security standpoint to work together with Israel, our Gulf allies in the region to confront this.

But the best way to do that is for just as America has rallied support from our allies in opposition of Russia's violation of the territorial integrity of Ukraine, we should be doing the same thing with respect to Iran, correct?

Mr. RUMLEY. Absolutely, Mr. Chairman. I think there is a real desire in the Middle East right now for a type of security architecture designed to combat Iran's, or counter at least, Iran's malign activities in the region. You will recall the previous Administration tried to sort of build the security architecture. It did not work for a number of reasons. I think it was A, a bit too ambitious. At the time, it tried to cover so many disciplines and subdisciplines. It was also before the Abraham Accords and the normalization.

But things have changed now. We have these normalization agreements. We have these peace agreements. We have moved Israel under the UCP into CENTCOM. So I think we have the window and the opportunity to start building this and I would recommend that we start with sort of a modest approach. Focus on one capability like air defense and link our partners in the region, bring in our European partners as well, and work with our partners in the region on establishing sort of a network of air defense systems to counter Iran's activities.

Mr. DEUTCH. Mr. Rumley, I agree with you as well.

Ms. Welsh, let me just wrap up with you. Mr. Rumley talked about how things are different. I want to just finish by talking about how things were before and what we need to do to ensure that we do not go back there. High food prices were one of the driving forces behind Arab Spring, and the question is whether the food insecurity issues as wrought by the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the rising food prices that we have seen contribute to anti-government sentiment, contribute to instability, and what should we be doing to ensure that we are in the best position to prevent instability and to work to continue to address humanitarian needs and the need for greater democracy and human rights in the region.

Mr. WILSON. Chairman? OK.

Mr. DEUTCH. I am sorry?

Mr. WILSON. Mr. Chairman, not to interrupt our witness, but I appreciate you raising the issue of the Iranian nuclear threat and I would like to submit for the record an article that we just received, Iran is in Position for a Surprise Nuclear Breakout, by Andrea Stricker of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies. And I would like to move that this be included in the record. Thank you very much.

Mr. DEUTCH. Without objection, Mr. Wilson.

[The information referred to follows:]

May 17, 2022 | The Dispatch
Iran Is in Position for a Surprise Nuclear Breakout
No wonder it's in no rush to renegotiate a nuclear deal.

[Andrea Stricker](#)
[Research Fellow](#)

“Our nuclear program is advancing as planned and time is on our side,” an unnamed Iranian official bluntly told Reuters on May 5. “Oil sales have doubled,” noted Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi last Monday. In short, since the election of Joe Biden, Tehran has not only made impressive strides toward a nuclear weapons capability but repaired much of the financial damage done by U.S. sanctions.

It’s plain to see the clerical regime is in no rush to negotiate a revised nuclear deal. What’s the hurry when both oil exports and enriched uranium stockpiles are surging? But the risk here is not just that Tehran keeps stalling. It is that protracted negotiations may provide cover for a nuclear breakout—that is, the production of enough weapons-grade uranium for one or more bombs.

How Biden Let It Happen

The Biden administration has a standard response when reporters ask why Iran is enriching uranium to higher and higher levels or deploying more advanced centrifuges: It’s all Donald Trump’s fault. Tehran’s provocations are just an ongoing response to Trump’s withdrawal from

the 2015 nuclear deal formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

A bit of history shows this is a hollow excuse. Before Biden won the 2020 election, the clerical regime made cautious and incremental moves on the nuclear front. Sensing Biden's avid interest in restoring the JCPOA, the regime in Tehran began to test him. Would he stay at the table and keep relaxing sanctions enforcement even as the clerical regime ramped up its nuclear program? He would.

On the one hand, this was a sharp negotiating tactic. Nuclear advances are bargaining chips Tehran can trade for American concessions. Yet taken together, these advances are also positioning Iran for a nuclear breakout.

In January 2021, Iran *reactivated* its fortified underground enrichment plant at Fordow and began enriching uranium to 20 percent purity. That February, it ended International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) monitoring at sites associated with certain nuclear infrastructure. Then, under a dubious civilian pretext, Tehran *produced* uranium metal, a sensitive material used in the core of atomic bombs.

In April 2021, Iran *breached* unofficial Western red lines by enriching uranium to 60 percent—highly enriched uranium that, according to the Institute for Science and International Security, is itself *technically usable* in a crude nuclear weapon. Tehran did all this despite international safeguards at the above-ground Natanz pilot enrichment

plant—essentially rubbing the act in the world’s face—and used centrifuge arrangements that look to experts like [practice](#) for breakout.

By December 2021, the regime had used for the [first time](#) hundreds of its fastest IR-6 centrifuges at Fordow, the likely model of choice for a sprint to nuclear weapons. Iran [now possesses](#) more than 2,200 advanced centrifuges, compared to some 1,200 machines in 2015, at least 500 of which are the more productive IR-6 models.

Iran also took steps to fortify its enrichment supply chain after alleged foreign [sabotage](#). It [relocated](#) two centrifuge manufacturing and assembly facilities underneath mountains—one [near](#) the Natanz enrichment plants and [another](#) in a tunnel complex at Esfahan—where they are invulnerable to military strikes.

Since February 2021, IAEA inspectors have been unable to monitor how many advanced centrifuges Tehran has made—meaning the regime could be squirrelling away untold quantities at a secret location. Maintaining such an inventory is critical, since, using existing enriched uranium stocks, Iran would need [only 650 IR-6 machines](#) at a clandestine facility to enrich uranium to 90 percent, the ideal purity level for nuclear weapons. Thus, all the necessary elements have aligned for the Islamic Republic to move for nuclear weapons: reduced international monitoring, substantially improved atomic assets that are increasingly hardened against aerial strikes, an absence of international penalties, a reviving economy, and [brutal ultra-hardliners](#) in charge of the government who might be eager to go nuclear. The [help](#) of China, Russia, the United Arab Emirates, and others, who would continue to buy goods and oil, albeit at

a discount, might convince the regime that it can weather inevitable Western sanctions against a breakout.

How Breakout Could Happen

As part of its pre-2003 nuclear weapons program, known as the Amad Plan, Tehran sought to build an initial five nuclear weapons and develop the ability to conduct an underground demonstration test. While it is unlikely that Iran would opt to demonstrate a crude nuclear weapon based on 60-percent enriched uranium, it has technically amassed enough of that material for one bomb. Overall, the regime may have enough low-enriched and high-enriched uranium that if further enriched would yield sufficient material for five or more atomic weapons. Unhindered by the threat of American military intervention, Tehran might opt to cross the nuclear threshold.

If Iran dashed to nuclear weapons, it would likely pursue weapons-grade enrichment in either a hidden facility or a known, heavily fortified one. It could obstruct IAEA access to its declared facilities at Natanz and/or Fordow and move existing enriched uranium stocks from one or both to an undisclosed site. A clandestine enrichment plant might be at a military site and highly fortified against prying satellites, and potentially, air strikes. The IAEA would sound an alarm about potential diversion, but Western powers may not have reliable information about the location of a hidden facility.

Iran could also opt to centralize its enriched uranium at Fordow, where the regime is enriching uranium to 20 percent in cascades that it could quickly reconfigure to make weapons-grade material. Fordow is fortified against all but so-called “bunker-busting bombs,” which only the United States possesses. The IAEA would report the activity at Fordow, but with force as one of few options to prevent a breakout, Washington might accept the breakout as a *fait accompli*.

A nuclear breakout is not the same as having a functional weapon, although once a proliferator has weapons-grade uranium, preventing weaponization must happen quickly. Tehran could finalize a weapon at a site adjacent to its enrichment facility, a process likely to require several months, given what is known about Iran’s weaponization progress since 2003. Incorporating an atomic weapon on a missile would take substantially longer.

Meanwhile, foreign powers would waver about what to do. The U.N. would convene meeting after meeting, demanding Iran grant the IAEA access to suspect sites. But gone are the days of unanimous U.N. Security Council action—such as that seen in response to North Korea’s 2006 nuclear test or against the first revelations of Iran’s clandestine enrichment program in 2002.

In the end, a U.S. president could be left with the undesirable choice of conducting military strikes, possibly with Israeli help, or accepting a nuclear Iran.

The Path Forward

President Biden can start by declaring the nuclear talks dead. The JCPOA never did more than postpone the inevitable reckoning. The deal loosens restrictions on Iranian enrichment starting in 2024, which would only increase the risk of breakout.

Instead, the administration should announce that it will begin a zero-tolerance campaign of sanctioning state and private buyers of Iranian oil. The administration will need to alert the shipping industry that transporting Iran's oil will once again be subject to swift penalties.

Next, Western powers must snap back into place the previous U.N. sanctions resolutions on Iran that were lifted by the JCPOA and use them as a basis to penalize Chinese and Russian assistance to Iran's nuclear, missile, and military programs. The further Iran progresses, the more they must tighten the economic noose. Thankfully, the Iranian economy remains vulnerable to renewed pressure despite oil sales. At the IAEA Board of Governors, which next meets in June, Washington and its European allies should spearhead a resolution condemning Iran's nuclear advances. The agency's director general is also due to report that Iran has not been cooperating with a four-year IAEA inquiry into Tehran's illicit nuclear work. A two-thirds vote of the board is needed to pass censure, so there is not a moment to lose in corralling votes.

Washington must also re-establish a [credible threat](#) of military strikes using deep-penetrating bombs should Iran attempt to divert nuclear assets.

The Islamic Republic's international language is aggression, expansion, and provocation, which can only be countered via pressure, containment, and deterrence. It is time the Biden administration accept that its policies have not worked. The president must turn the tables before Iran goes too far.

Andrea Stricker is a research fellow on nonproliferation issues at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies (FDD). Follow her on Twitter [@StrickerNonpro](#). FDD is a Washington, D.C.-based nonpartisan research institute focusing on national security and foreign policy.

Mr. DEUTCH. I would point out that—to you as ranking member, before, since you surprised us, it took a while for your image to appear so you were literally the voice of god in this hearing room, which invites lots of thoughts on our part. But it was good to hear you and we—

Mr. WILSON. Very unusual.

Mr. DEUTCH [continuing]. Appreciate you submitting that for the record.

Ms. Welsh?

Ms. WELSH. Thank you, Chairman Deutch, for your question. Certainly, high food prices put pressure on governments as you mentioned during the Arab Spring. U.N. food price index reached an all-time high, and the period of the highest prices directly coincided with protests that led to regime change in Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, and again protests across the Middle East and North Africa.

High food prices are very rarely, if ever, the only cause of protests that lead to regime change. They do cause disruption, political and social disruption when there are preexisting sentiments, preexisting displeasure with, you know, with government or other factors. We can expect high food prices to lead to disruptions in places where there are governance challenges.

What we can do to quell those impacts are as I mentioned all the efforts that are under discussion in the global fora right now to blunt, to reduce the price of food for food importing countries. So that is a short-term response. And short-term responses, I would put both emergency humanitarian assistance, which it is incredibly important to continue to fund that robustly, and also financing for countries that are not the most food insecure but still need funding to meet their food security needs, which to me is a separate bucket and I consider that a separate response in emergency assistance.

In the long term, I think it is very important to continue to invest in agricultural systems particularly in the Middle East and North Africa where water security is a very big challenge, to continue to invest in agricultural production in countries that are food importing, in the food producing countries, in major exporting countries around the world. We shouldn't though assume, we shouldn't confuse investing in agriculture to be a short-term solution, because certainly at a time of high fertilizer prices it might help in the long term but certainly not in the short term.

Mr. DEUTCH. Great. I appreciate your insight. I think it is clear from the hearing and the interest of the members the Russian invasion of Ukraine has no doubt altered the course of world events. That is particularly true in the Middle East and North Africa, the effect as it relates to food security and military presence and the diplomatic landscape. With support from the United States and partners in the region, we will have to meet these challenges and we have the opportunity to be a key pillar of resistance to Russian influence and aggression both in Ukraine and around the world in the region.

And I appreciate all that our witnesses contributed to this conversation. I thank them for being here today. Members of the subcommittee may have some additional questions for you and we ask our witnesses to please respond to those questions in writing. I would ask my colleagues to—that any witness questions for the

hearing record be submitted to the subcommittee clerk within five business days.

And with that, without objection, the hearing is adjourned. Thank you very much.

[Whereupon, at 3:43 p.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

APPENDIX

**SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING NOTICE
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6128**

Subcommittee on the Middle East, North Africa, and Global Counterterrorism

Ted Deutch (D-FL), Chair

May 18, 2022

TO: MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

You are respectfully requested to attend an OPEN hearing of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, to be held by the Subcommittee on the Middle East, North Africa, and Global Counterterrorism in Room 2172 of the Rayburn House Office Building and via Cisco WebEx (and available by live webcast on the Committee website at <https://foreignaffairs.house.gov/>):

DATE: Wednesday, May 18, 2022

TIME: 2:00 p.m., EDT

LOCATION: 2172 Rayburn House Office Building

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

WITNESSES: Hanna Notte, Ph.D.
Senior Research Associate
Vienna Center for Disarmament and Non-Proliferation

Frederic Wehrey, Ph.D.
Senior Fellow
Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

Ms. Caitlin Welsh
Director of the Global Food Security Program
Center for Strategic and International Studies

Mr. Grant Rumley
Senior Fellow
The Washington Institute for Near East Policy

*NOTE: Witnesses may be added.

By Direction of the Chair

The Committee on Foreign Affairs seeks to make its facilities accessible to persons with disabilities. If you are in need of special accommodations, please call 202/225-5021 at least four business days in advance of the event, whenever practicable. Questions with regard to special accommodations in general (including availability of Committee materials in alternative formats and assistive listening devices) may be directed to the Committee.

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COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

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MINUTES OF SUBCOMMITTEE ON Middle East, North Africa, and Global Counterterrorism HEARING

Day Wednesday Date 5-18-2022 Room 2172/Cisco Webex

Starting Time 2:06 p.m. Ending Time 3:48 p.m.

Recesses (___ to ___) (___ to ___) (___ to ___) (___ to ___) (___ to ___) (___ to ___)

Presiding Member(s)
Chairman Theodore E. Deutch

Check all of the following that apply:

Open Session

Executive (closed) Session

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To select a box, mouse click it, or tab to it and use the enter key to select. Another click on the same box will deselect it.

TITLE OF HEARING:

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

SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

See Attached

NON-SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT: (Mark with an * if they are not members of full committee.)

HEARING WITNESSES: Same as meeting notice attached? Yes No
(If "no", please list below and include title, agency, department, or organization.)

STATEMENTS FOR THE RECORD: (List any statements submitted for the record.)

*SFR - Rep. Connolly
QFR - Rep. Jackson
DFR - Rep. Wilson*

TIME SCHEDULED TO RECONVENE _____

or

TIME ADJOURNED _____

Clear Form

Note: If listing additional witnesses not included on hearing notice, be sure to include title, agency, etc.

Subcommittee Staff Associate

WHEN COMPLETED: Please print for subcommittee staff director's signature and make at least one copy of the signed form. A signed copy is to be included with the hearing/markup transcript when ready for printing along with a copy of the final meeting notice (both will go into the appendix). The signed original, with a copy of the final meeting notice attached, goes to full committee. An electronic copy of this PDF file may be saved to your hearing folder, if desired.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING

SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE MIDDLE EAST, NORTH AFRICA, AND GLOBAL COUNTERTERRORISM

| <i>PRESENT</i> | <i>MEMBER</i> |
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| | Maria Elvira Salazar, FL |

STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD FROM REPRESENTATIVE
CONNOLLY

The Impact of Russia's Invasion of Ukraine in the Middle East and North Africa
HFAC MENAGCT Subcommittee Hearing
2:00 PM, Wednesday, May 18, 2022
2172 RHOB and via Cisco WebEx
Rep. Gerald E. Connolly (D-VA)

Russia's unprovoked and premediated invasion of Ukraine has generated significant implications for the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. Almost three months into Putin's war, disruptions in energy markets, heightened food insecurity, and shifting geopolitics have impacted millions across the world. As U.S. allies and partners rose to the challenge to implement crushing sanctions and diplomatic pressure, MENA countries, many of which have strong historical partnerships with the United States and the West, have been unable to achieve the same cohesion. Though some leaders make their own political or economic calculations, it is undeniable that Vladimir Putin's actions have upended economic progress in the MENA region and pose a direct challenge to the international rules-based order the United States and its allies have fought to protect.

Often described as the breadbasket of the world, Russia's senseless invasion of Ukraine has caused substantial disruptions to the food market. Russia and Ukraine supply nearly 30 percent of global wheat exports, almost 20 percent of corn exports, and more than 80 percent of global sunflower oil. Less than a year ago, Russia and Ukraine sent around half the wheat they produced to the region. Lebanon, Turkey, Egypt, Libya, the United Arab Emirates all import more than half of their wheat from either Russia or Ukraine. Unfortunately, disruptions in the agricultural production will persist far past Russia's war. Along with bombing schools, civilian sites, and even maternity wards, Russia has systematically destroyed trading ports on Black Sea and Sea of Azov. The strains that Russia has placed on global food exports will unfortunately wreak havoc on ordinary citizens in the MENA region for months, if not years. The only solution will be to stop Vladimir Putin's manufactured conflict and rebuild agricultural and shipping sectors.

Russia has long held security and military interests in the MENA region. Most notably in 2015, Russia prompted a decisive shift to Syrian Civil War by providing unilateral security assistance and weaponry to the Assad regime. Claiming forces would simply support the operations against opposition, Russia, as then Secretary of Defense Ash Carter put it, "put gasoline in the fire of the Syrian Civil War."¹ During their campaign in Syria, Russia indiscriminately dispersed cluster munitions, bombs that have been found to inflict a disproportionate toll against civilians, attacked civilian infrastructure and knowingly supported a regime that deployed chemical weapons on its own citizens. A 2020 Human Rights Watch report found that "'the Syrian and Russian armed forces' repeated attacks on civilian infrastructure in Idlib in northwest Syria were apparent war crimes and may amount to crimes against humanity."²

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine can only be characterized as an attack on democracies everywhere, an attempt to intimidate other countries where the embers of democracy burn and, by extension, undermine the values that are fundamental to the United States and our allies. Among our closest allies in the MENA region, we have observed mixed responses to Russia's flagrant actions. In the United Arab Emirates, for example, reports have suggested Russian oligarchs fleeing sanctions have been

¹ Esteban Villarejo, "Ash Carter: Russia Puts Gasoline In the Fire of Syrian Civil War," *Defense News*, Oct 5, 2015.

² Human Rights Watch, "Syria/Russia: Strategy Targeted Civilian Infrastructure," October 15, 2020.

house hunting in Dubai.³ In April 2022, I led 31 of my colleagues in a letter to Secretary of State Blinken requesting information on the status of the administration's review and assessment following reports that Saudi Arabia rejected calls from the United States to respond to the Russian invasion of Ukraine and produce more oil. The United States must reconsider its unqualified support to countries that have not heeded the calls to counter Russia's attack on Ukraine's democracy and that should include countries in the MENA region that have rebuffed democratic transformation in their own countries.

Our friends and partners in the MENA region must join the large coalition that President Biden and our NATO allies have assembled counter Putin and his oligarchs instead of helping them. This will be an important development to compel Russia to remove their troops from sovereign Ukrainian territory and start to alleviate strains placed on food and energy markets. The hard truth is that when the United States does not act as a forceful advocate for our principles and our interests abroad, we leave a vacuum. When U.S. leadership retreats, adversaries who do not share our interests and values fill that vacuum and endanger U.S. security. With renewed U.S. leadership, I am hopeful for the progress that the Biden administration will make in the MENA region, and I look forward to hearing from our witnesses how the United States can better understand and account for Russia's strategic objectives in the MENA region.

³ John Hyatt and Giacomo Tognini, "Russian Oligarchs Fleeing Sanctions Are House Hunting In Dubai," *Forbes*, April 8, 2022

RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

**Questions for the Record Submitted to the Middle East Subcommittee
Representative Ronny Jackson
House Foreign Affairs Committee
May 23, 2022**

Questions for Mr. Rumley:

1. President Trump inflicted severe economic and diplomatic damage on Iran with his Maximum Pressure Campaign. Now, Biden seeks to undo these victories by opening the door to an even weaker JCPOA and by refusing to enforce existing sanctions, particularly on Iranian oil. Worst of all, Biden keeps an incredibly hypocritical stance as he allows Russian diplomats to be the mediators during the JCPOA negotiations while publicly calling for other countries to drop diplomatic and economic ties with Russia. What leverage do you think the United States loses when it relies on Russia to be our middleman in nuclear negotiations with Iran?

Thank you for the question, Rep. Jackson. I agree with your sentiment that the U.S. is missing leverage in the JCPOA negotiations. Iran's current enrichment and continued hostilities via its proxies in the region clearly demonstrate a lack of fear on the Iranian side of both U.S. reprisals and of negatively impacting the nuclear talks. That the U.S. has not pushed for Russia's removal from the JCPOA process may reflect a calculation from the Administration that doing so might contribute to the collapse of the overall negotiating construct, a calculation that may prioritize continuing negotiations over increasing leverage.

2. I see an opportunity for the United States to return as the global leader in energy, like we were during the Trump Administration. As more and more countries ban or seek alternatives to Russian energy, the United States should increase both domestic production and imports. I hope the Biden Administration will reverse its America Last policy when it comes to energy and instead unleash energy to be a true diplomatic and economic tool. What do you see as a path forward for the United States to use energy diplomacy in the Middle East?

Thank you, Rep. Jackson. Unfortunately, I'm no expert on U.S. energy policy in the region. I would instead humbly refer you to the work of my other colleagues at the Washington Institute, who have written extensively on these issues.

3. The Abraham Accords present a rare opportunity for the United States to engage our most capable Middle East partners to shoulder more of the burdens of upholding regional stability and security. One of my main foreign policy goals is to build upon the success of the Trump Administration in preserving, strengthening, and expanding the Abraham Accords. It took months for the Biden Administration to even refer to the Abraham Accords by name. It seems now that their two main priorities are Ukraine and the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework, leaving the Middle East and the Abraham Accords on the backburner. To fill this gap, what steps should Congress take to broaden and deepen the economic and security relationship among Abraham Accords countries?

Thank you for the question, Rep. Jackson. The Abraham Accords are indeed a rare and exciting opportunity for the U.S., for Israel, and for our Arab partners. Israel's shift to U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) under the Unified Campaign Plan (UCP) in 2021 advanced this opportunity a step further. I think there is a strong desire in the region for deeper security cooperation in areas such as air defense and defense acquisitions, and I think the U.S. should capitalize on this desire by leading efforts to further enhance security coordination between the signatories of the Abraham Accords. Congress can and should continue to support these efforts, such as when it introduced the recent bipartisan legislation urging enhanced air defense cooperation between Israel and the Arab states.

