Russia’s intervention in Syria has forced the West to reengage Moscow in order to resolve the threat more immediately posed by ISIS even as President Vladimir Putin continues to bend international norms in his favor. Secretary of State John Kerry signaled that he found “some common ground” with Russian President Vladimir Putin on Syrian rebel groups eligible for peace talks, paving the way for international talks including Russia, the U.S. and regional powers on December 18 in New York. Kerry said that the U.S. was not pursuing “regime change” in Damascus but rather a political settlement where Syrians would determine their country’s future, possibly signaling better relations alignment with Moscow’s stance on Assad. Kerry announced that the U.S. was prepared to cooperate with Russia to defeat ISIS following his meeting with Putin in Moscow.

United States. 15 DEC: Secretary of State John Kerry said that he found “some common ground” with Russian President Vladimir Putin on Syrian rebel groups eligible for peace talks, paving the way for international talks including Russia, the U.S. and regional powers on December 18 in New York. Kerry said that the U.S. was not pursuing “regime change” in Damascus but rather a political settlement where Syrians would determine their country’s future, possibly signaling better relations alignment with Moscow’s stance on Assad. Kerry announced that the U.S. was prepared to cooperate with Russia to defeat ISIS following his meeting with Putin in Moscow.

Syria. 11 DEC: President Vladimir Putin alleged that an annual Russian Defense Ministry meeting that Moscow was providing air support and arms to 5,000 members of the Western-backed Free Syrian Army (FSA). FSA-affiliated groups denied coordination with Russia.

Saudi Arabia. 12 DEC: Russia’s Foreign Ministry criticized the Syrian opposition conference in Riyadh as unrepresentative of opposition and called for a new round of talks where opposition groups would be invited to participate in a peace process with the condition of Assad’s removal at the start of any political transition.

Turkey. 09 DEC: Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutolu accused Russia of providing “combat duty” in 2016. Shoygu announced that Russia would place five new nuclear forces as a priority objective at an annual Defense Ministry meeting. Defense Minister Sergey Shoygu announced that Russia would place five new S-400 surface-to-air missile (SAM) systems on “trial basis” in 2016.

South Caucasus. 09-10 DEC: The Georgian Defense Ministry accused Moscow of violating Georgian airspace with a drone and transport helicopter from the Russian-occupied breakaway region of South Ossetia. 10 DEC: Azerbaijani tanks shifted the disputed Arme- nian-controlled breakaway state of Nagorno-Karabakh for the first time since a 1994 ceasefire. Turkey recently pledged to “do everything possible to liberate the occupied lands” of its ally Azerbaijan, referring to the Nagorno-Karabakh enclave controlled by Russia’s military ally Armenia.

Crimea. 12 DEC: Two new fast-attack ships joined the Black Sea Fleet in the Crimean port of Sevastopol equipped with “Kalibr-NK” long-range cruise missiles, which Russia has launched into Syria from the Caspian and Mediterranean Seas.

Montenegro. 12 DEC: Several thousand pro-Serbian and pro-Russian demonstrators protested the anticipated accession of Montenegro on December 2, 2015. Montenegro’s NATO membership raises the prospect of further Russian destabilization in Eastern Europe even if it does not play a direct role in facilitating the protests. Russia continues to posture for long-term competition with NATO with its declared prioritization of its nuclear forces and force projection in the Arctic. Russia’s aggression towards NATO and aspiring alliance members such as Ukraine and Georgia has not restricted its ability to pursue renewed great power status.

United Kingdom. 08-10 DEC: Russia’s proxies in southeastern Ukraine intensified attacks on government positions around the separatist stronghold of Donetsk city, opening fire with multiple launch rocket systems (MLRS) and tanks. Ukrainian authorities conducted raids against a suspected pro-Russian袭aordage cell in Kyiv and the northeastern city of Kharkiv.

Arctic. 10 DEC. Russia placed “several” long-range S-400 anti-air defense systems on “trial duty” in Russia’s northern border. The systems may be stationed on the Novaya Zemlya archi-

Finland. 10 DEC: Finland reported that an unidentified helicopter crossed six miles into Finnish airspace from Russia over the Gulf of Finland.

Russia. 11 DEC: President Vladimir Putin emphasized bolstering the “combat capabilities” of Russia’s strategic nuclear forces as a priority objective at an annual Defense Ministry meeting. Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu announced that Russia would place five new nuclear regiments with modern rocket systems on “combat duty” in 2016.