Russia continues to shape conditions on the ground in Syria and elsewhere in the Middle East following the air safety memorandum of understand- ing signed with the U.S. on October 20, 2015. Russia used its military presence in Syria to set the agenda of the international dialogue over a Syrian political settlement. Russia engaged rival five-way talks on a resolution to the Syrian Civil War including the U.S., Saudi Arabia and Turkey. Russia also successfully lobbied to include its regional partner Iran in the next meeting set for October 29. Moscow is likely behind Bashar al-Assad’s call for post-war elections to give the appearance of success and popular legitimacy to Russia’s intervention, which it continues to back through naval deliveries through the Bosphorus. Meanwhile, Russia strengthened its regional foothold by drawing another U.S. ally, Jordan, into a new partnership with Russia that may block U.S. efforts to support Syrian rebels through Jordan. Russia is also increasingly poised to vie for influence in Afghanistan where President Ashraf Ghani repeatedly requested Russian military hardware, including attack helicopters. Pro-Western governments in the former Soviet Union remain vulnerable to Russian political destabilization efforts. Pro-Russian parties in Moldova issued a motion of no confidence against the country’s pro-EU government, capitalizing on the momentum of two months of large-scale anti-gov- ernment protests. Ukraine postures elections in the key southeastern port city of Mariupol over fraud suspicions, likely in response to Ukrainian oligarchs and former pro-Russian MP Rinat Akhmetov’s control over the ballot printing. Meanwhile, the leader of the Russian-backed breakaway Georgian region of South Ossetia called for a referendum on accession to Russia in advance of 2017 elections, escalating Russian-Georgian relations in tandem with political destabilization in Moldova and Ukraine. Russia is culprit in this destabilization whether or not the Kremlin is actively orchestrating events on the ground because of its long-term campaign to secure a permanent foothold in all the former Soviet republics, by backing pro-Russian parties and separatist movements in West-leaning states and increasing security integration with allied governments. Russia is projecting aggression toward the U.S. and its allies with its activities on an increasingly global scale. Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu announced that Russia had nearly completed its northernmost base in the Arctic Circle that will bolster its claims over a resource-rich territory disputed by NATO allies Canada and Denmark. Shoigu announced plans to build at least three new Russian bases in the far-northeast of Russia that will allow Russia to project its military presence toward Alaska. Shoigu also revealed Russian plans to establish a base in the Kuril Islands, some of which are claimed by another U.S. ally, Japan. Russia may be cultivating political destabilization in the Balkans, where it has been accused of playing a tacit role in organizing anti-government protests against the government of Montenegro, a NATO and EU aspirant. Russia is undertaking covert efforts to deepen its partnership with Syria, much as it has done in the past two months with allied former Soviet countries. Russia’s global efforts to project military force by bolting its alliances, weakening pro-Western states and pulling new partners into its orbit demonstrate that its Syrian intervention is not an isolated operation but part of an grand strategic effort to recapture a bipolar world order.

1) Syria. 18-27 OCT: At least six Russian large landing ships were seen passing through the Bosphorus into the Mediterranean Sea alongside civilian transport ships, likely to supply Russia military operations in Syria. 21-27 OCT: Russia continued its air campaign in Syria, claiming airstrikes in Hasaka, Latakia, Damascus, Aleppo, Homs, and Hmeimim in the occupied peninsula. 23 OCT: An anonymous Russian defense official confirmed that Russia deployed a small group of Special Forces from eastern Ukraine to Syria during its intervention. A Russian soldier revealed that generals from Russia’s 58th Army were involved in “military operations” in Syria. 24 OCT: Russian foreign minister Sergey Lavrov called for president- 4}