



Russia Studies Program

This newsletter covers developments up to February 21, 2022. Russian media discussions of Russia's recognition of the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics on February 21, 2022, as well as the Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, will be covered in the following issue.

THIS WEEK'S ABSTRACTS

1. [HIGHLIGHTS OF PUTIN SPEECH](#)

The key points of Vladimir Putin's speech on February 21 include the following: Ukraine is preparing for a conflict with Western military support. Ukraine will seek to create nuclear weapons, or potentially get Western assistance to do so. Ukraine joining NATO is just a matter of time. Ukraine in NATO is a "direct threat to Russian security." The US and NATO have sought not only to arm and train but also to integrate Ukraine's military. These actions present a threat to Russia. NATO military bases are already present in Ukraine. Previous rounds of NATO expansion have not led to an improvement in relations with Russia, as the West has promised. Russia has unsuccessfully sought to cooperate with the West in various formats. Instead, the West has "cheated" and NATO infrastructure is now on Russia's doorstep. US missile defense and strike capabilities are expanding and will pose a threat to Russia from Ukrainian territory. The West has "ignored" Russian proposals to resolve the current situation and this will have consequences.

2. [PERCEPTION OF US GOALS IN THE CRISIS](#)

Several articles discuss Russian perceptions of what the United States is looking to achieve in the current confrontation between the West and Russia. They focus on US domestic problems and fears of a loss of world domination as reasons that Washington is provoking a confrontation with Russia. They also suggest that the current confrontation is just the culmination of a long-term US plan to weaken Russia. They also argue that the US feels that Russia has little to offer in the way of potential concessions to end the crisis.

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3. RUSSIAN GOALS IN THE CONFRONTATION

Several articles discuss Russian goals in the confrontation with the West and what Russia has achieved. Unlike Western analysts, who tend to focus on efforts to stop NATO enlargement or reorient Ukraine, Russian analysts address possibilities such as averting a new European missile crisis or forcing Ukraine to carry out the Minsk agreements. Russian achievements during the confrontation including bringing the US and its European allies to the negotiating table on major security issues, while negative consequences include reinforcing Western unity and creating a more negative perception of Russia in the West.

4. THE CONSEQUENCES OF WAR AND POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Two authors discuss the potentially dangerous consequences for Russia of a war in Ukraine, while several offer possible solutions to the crisis. Writing from opposing perspectives, a conservative commentator and a liberal former FSB general agree that Russia is not prepared for war in Ukraine and for confrontation with the West. Possible solutions to the crisis focus primarily on the possibility of a neutral Ukraine, though some propose a broader array of confidence-building measures to reduce the extent of confrontation in Europe as a whole.

5. IMPLICATIONS OF US AND EUROPEAN SANCTIONS

Numerous articles in the Russian press discuss and even dismiss the potential implications of US efforts to impose sanctions on Russia. In *Gazeta.ru*, Anatoliy Akulov analyzes the challenges of US consensus-building among European actors to sanction Nordstream 2. In *Topwar.ru*, Aleksandr Staver critiques US targeted sanctions against Russia, arguing that they in essence view the children of Russian investors in the UK as hostages. In *Izvestiya*, Mariya Vasil'eva focuses on the sanctions' potential impact on the Russian embassies abroad, arms exports, and electronics, among others. In *Voенно-Promyshlennyi Kur'er (VPK)*, Vladimir Eranosyan writes about the challenges that the US faces in making good on its threat to disconnect Russia from SWIFT as well as about the INSTEX system created in the wake of Iran's disconnect from SWIFT. Finally, in another article in *VPK*, Vitaliy Orlov writes about how Russia could transition away from the use of the US dollar for exports of Russian armaments abroad.

6. WESTERN FORCE DEPLOYMENTS GARNER RUSSIAN ATTENTION

As the crisis between Ukraine and Russia heats up, Russian authors have been quick to point out new military deployments by Western powers in the region. American deployments to Poland and Slovakia have been of interest, as well as UK support elsewhere in Eastern Europe. Overall, the articles view these deployments as ominous, but also par for the course given the bellicose trajectory of interstate relations in recent months.

7. UKRAINE ARMS FOR WAR

Many articles in the Russian press are reviewing current political and military tensions surrounding Ukraine. Taking a variety of tacks, articles largely focus on the state of the Ukrainian military and its support by Western powers. They encompass details about military equipment and technology transfers, discuss the broader abilities of the Ukrainian armed forces, and launch critical broadsides against Ukraine's perceived bellicose position relative to Russia and the separatist republics.

8. BELARUS AIDS IN RUSSIA'S MILITARY BUILDUP

Cooperation between Russia and Belarus are a point of interest for several observers, especially as tensions continue to ratchet up with neighboring Ukraine. Belarus and Russia are jointly undertaking combined-arms military exercises in the form of "Union Resolve – 2022," which some view as a further step away from any

putative neutrality by Belarus. Others noted that Belarus has taken a hard line vis-à-vis Ukraine in terms of public declarations of support for Russia's side, which is a shift from previous years. Finally, a military doctrine for the Russo-Belarusian Union State has been recently approved, which has further underlined the considerable alignment between the two countries.

9. TURKEY AS A MEDIATOR FOR THE RUSSIA-UKRAINE CONFLICT

An *Izvestiya* article interviews Russia's ambassador to Turkey, who discusses Ankara's offer to mediate the Russia-Ukraine crisis. While Turkey claims that it is "the only country" that can meet both Russia and Ukraine halfway to find resolution, the ambassador has doubts of Turkey's impartiality, noting its "well-known military-technical ties with Ukraine." Moreover, the ambassador suggests that Ankara may not adequately understand the extent of Russia's grievances. He states, "If our Turkish partners can influence the Ukrainians and encourage them to fulfill the previously-made [Minsk] agreements and obligations, this can be welcomed."

10. SIVKOV CAUTIONS US ABOUT NUCLEAR WAR

In *VPK*, Russian commentator Konstantin Sivkov extrapolates from what he alleges to have been a statement made by Gen. David Goldfein about "three steps to destroy Russia." He concludes that a nuclear conflict between the US and Russia would be fatal for both Russia and the United States—and lead to the dominance of other states in the international system. This, he notes, should force "global and US elites to think—should they free up a "place in the sun" for others?"

11. PERSPECTIVES ON INFORMATION WARFARE

In a February 11 article in *Nezavisimoe Voennoe Obozrenie (NVO)*, Yuriy Yur'ev writes about the concept of information warfare as a "component part of hybrid warfare" and traces the evolution of US information warfare concepts, arguing that Russia has lost the initiative to its opponents in this area. In *Krasnaya Zvezda*, Oleg Martynov discusses the creation in Poland of a cyber defense force. This article traces the evolution of US and NATO concepts in the cyber domain and posits that NATO has long "viewed the cyber sphere as a domain for military action."

12. NEXUS OF CRIMINALS AND TERRORISTS IN HYBRID WARS AND COLOR REVOLUTIONS

In *VPK*, Konstantin Strigunov focuses on the nexus of criminal and terrorist groups as a potential globalization trend that weakens state governments. He argues that criminal, terrorist, and other groups are also utilized in "non-classical wars" such as hybrid wars and color revolutions.

13. US EXERCISES AND WEAPONS SYSTEMS

VPK and *Kommersant* discuss US and allied exercises and weapons systems. In *Kommersant*, Marianna Belen'kaya discusses Western reactions to the Russo-Belarusian Allied Resolve 2022 exercises and Russian commentators' perspectives on military activities in the region. In *VPK*, authors discuss US presence in the Mediterranean for the Neptune Strike-2022 exercises, the testing of the joint air-to-ground missile, and US ballistic and cruise missile programs.

14. CHINESE-RUSSIAN STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

Several articles reported on the meetings between presidents Putin and Xi on the sidelines of the Beijing Winter Olympics: the leaders declared that there were no limits to their strategic partnership; they vowed to counter instances of foreign interference in internal affairs; and Beijing announced that it joins Putin in opposing further NATO expansion. While some articles gloat at these new developments, others are more cautious—noting drawbacks and inequities in the alliance in the context of the Ukraine conflict. Another article argues that the US is trying to use Ukraine to drive a wedge between China and Russia.

15. KURIL ISLANDS DEVELOPMENTS; RUSSIAN-JAPANESE RELATIONS

Several articles report on an alleged US Virginia-class submarine incident that occurred near the Kuril Islands on February 12, which the Russian Ministry of Defense characterized as “a gross violation of international law.” According to reports, the submarine entered Russian territorial waters during a planned Russian military exercise, ignored warning messages instructing the vessel to surface, and was chased away by a Russian frigate. Other articles discuss the Japanese-Russian territorial dispute surrounding the South Kuril Islands, and how potential anti-Russian sanctions from Tokyo might affect the bilateral relationship.

16. IRAN NUCLEAR NEGOTIATIONS

Two articles discuss the US decision to reintroduce sanction waivers to Iran in hopes of reviving the nuclear negotiations. In an interview, the Russian Permanent Representative to International Organizations in Vienna notes that this step “should have been taken long ago” but welcomes the decision. A different article questions whether this is enough to save the Iran deal, noting Tehran’s lack of enthusiasm in response to the waivers, and the lack of trust that a diplomatic resolution would be upheld by future US administrations.

1. HIGHLIGHTS OF PUTIN SPEECH

While the February 21 speech of Russian president Vladimir Putin offered his perspective on Ukraine's history, he also made the following points about the US and NATO:¹

- *Ukraine is preparing for a conflict with Western military support.* "In March 2021, a new Military Strategy was adopted in Ukraine. This document is almost entirely dedicated to confrontation with Russia and sets the goal of involving foreign states in a conflict with our country. The strategy stipulates the organization of what can be described as a terrorist underground movement in Russia's Crimea and in Donbass."
- *Ukraine will seek to create nuclear weapons, or potentially get Western assistance to do so.* Such an effort would not be difficult because it already has the requisite production infrastructure, he argues. "If Ukraine acquires weapons of mass destruction, the situation in the world and in Europe will drastically change, especially for us, for Russia. We cannot but react to this real danger, all the more so since, let me repeat, Ukraine's Western patrons may help it acquire these weapons to create yet another threat to our country."
- *The US and NATO have sought not only to arm and train but also to integrate Ukraine's military.* Here, he argues that "the Ukrainian troop control system has already been integrated into NATO" and that "the United States and NATO have started an impudent development of Ukrainian territory as a theatre of potential military operations."
- *These actions present a threat to Russia.* In this regard, "such undertakings are designed to be a cover-up for a rapid buildup of the NATO military group on Ukrainian territory." Here, he notes that Ukrainian airfields "upgraded with US assistance," and he remarks on the openness of Ukraine's airspace to "US strategic and reconnaissance aircraft and drones that conduct surveillance over Russian territory," and the potential use of the "US-built Maritime Operations Centre in Ochakov" that could enable US/NATO use of precision weapons against "the Russian Black Sea Fleet and our infrastructure on the entire Black Sea Coast."
- *NATO military bases are already present in Ukraine.* Despite Ukraine's constitution prohibiting foreign military bases on its territory, "Ukraine is home to NATO training missions which are, in fact, foreign military bases."
- *Ukraine in NATO is a "direct threat to Russian security."* At the NATO Bucharest summit in 2008, the US "pushed through" a decision on the eventual NATO accession by Ukraine and Georgia and it was responsible for this "clearly anti-Russian policy."
- *Ukraine joining NATO is just a matter of time.* Contrary to European and US assurances that an accession wouldn't happen quickly, "we are aware of the US leadership's position and words that active hostilities in eastern Ukraine do not rule out the possibility of that country joining NATO if it meets NATO criteria and overcomes corruption."
- *Previous rounds of NATO expansion have not led to an improvement of relations with Russia, as the West has promised.* "The governments of certain Eastern European countries, speculating on Russophobia, brought their complexes and stereotypes about the Russian threat to the Alliance and insisted on building up the collective defense potentials and deploying them primarily against Russia."

- *Russia has unsuccessfully sought to cooperate with the West in various formats.* These efforts have not been met with success and, worse, have been met with hostility. “They just do not need a big and independent country like Russia around. This is the answer to all questions. This is the source of America’s traditional policy towards Russia. Hence the attitude to all our security proposals.”
- *Instead, the West has “cheated” and NATO infrastructure is now on Russia’s doorstep.* “This is one of the key causes of the European security crisis; it has had the most negative impact on the entire system of international relations and led to the loss of mutual trust. The situation continues to deteriorate, including in the strategic area.”
- *US missile defense and strike capabilities are expanding and will pose a threat to Russia from Ukrainian territory.* “I will explain that American strategic planning documents confirm the possibility of a so-called preemptive strike at enemy missile systems. We also know the main adversary of the United States and NATO. It is Russia. NATO documents officially declare our country to be the main threat to Euro-Atlantic security. Ukraine will serve as an advanced bridgehead for such a strike. If our ancestors heard about this, they would probably simply not believe this. We do not want to believe this today either, but it is what it is. I would like people in Russia and Ukraine to understand this.”
- *The West has “ignored” Russian proposals to resolve the current situation and this will have consequences.* “I would like to be clear and straightforward: in the current circumstances, when our proposals for an equal dialogue on fundamental issues have actually remained unanswered by the United States and NATO, when the level of threats to our country has increased significantly, Russia has every right to respond in order to ensure its security. That is exactly what we will do.”

2. PERCEPTION OF US GOALS IN THE CRISIS

Several articles discuss Russian perceptions of what the United States is looking to achieve in the current confrontation between the West and Russia. They focus on US domestic problems and fears of a loss of world domination as reasons that Washington is provoking confrontation with Russia. They also suggest that the current confrontation is just the culmination of a long-term US plan to weaken Russia. They argue that the US feels that Russia has little to offer in the way of potential concessions to end the crisis.

Yevgeniy Shalamberidze, writing in *VPK*, argues that under the cover of strategic deterrence, the United States is waging war against Russia. After reviewing the history of strategic deterrence, the author suggests that the Soviet Union was destroyed by a long-term US campaign to undermine its internal coherence. A similar campaign is now being waged against Russia. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, this included a plan to integrate Russia into the US-led international community by 2025, thus establishing a US global monopoly on power. There were also plans to divide Russia into several states, the creation of an arc of instability in countries on Russia’s borders, and the use of protests to mask attempts at regime change in Belarus and elsewhere. These are all hybrid methods of pressuring and harming Russia without giving it cause to blame the US for active aggression. The author argues for a strategic plan to counter this undeclared war against Russia, to include an expansion of the definition of aggression and a willingness to use traditional armed force to respond to hybrid forms of aggression.²

In *Topwar.ru*, Yuriy Aptukhin discusses what the US and UK stand to gain from the conflict in Ukraine. He sees continental Europeans as the losers in the conflict, but also as irrelevant, because “they have long lost their geopolitical independence and are under the complete control of the Americans. Fulfilling their will

and understanding the perniciousness of their actions that are designed to realize American interests to the detriment of themselves, they can nevertheless no longer break out of the embrace of their overseas partner.” The “Anglosaxons” are seeking conflict for both domestic and foreign policy reasons. On the latter front, their system of global domination is collapsing. Domestically, they are facing elite divisions and a lack of resources to maintain their dominant position in the world. The UK, in addition, wants to restore its image as a global power. These issues are pushing the two allies to seek ways to strike at their main geopolitical opponents—Russia and China—in order to distract from their various internal problems. Having decided on Russia as a better target, Ukraine was chosen as the location, as a suitably Russophobic country. Russia has been able to respond because of its partnership with China, which has given it the confidence to present its own vision of European security and to ask for security guarantees in response to the actions of the Anglosaxons. The confrontation is rapidly approaching its climax and the result will either be a new iron curtain for Russia or a recognition by the US that it has lost its global dominance and a concurrent rise in the positions of Russia and China.³

Writing in *Argumenty i Fakty*, Valeriy Rukobraskiy suggests that the United States is looking for a war in Ukraine to distract its population from US domestic problems. He highlights an unusually high inflation rate, by US standards, which may cause a credit crunch and the end of the post-covid economic bubble. This in turn, he argues, would lead to a Republican takeover of Congress and then a potential return of Trump to the presidency in 2024. Since President Biden and liberal elites cannot abide such an outcome, they are looking to stoke a conflict to distract the population from price increases, high levels of domestic indebtedness, and high crime rates.⁴

Aleksei Fenenko writes in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* on why NATO is not prepared to compromise with Russia. He argues that the 1997 NATO-Russia Founding Act established rules of the game for Eastern Europe that provided new alliance members with security guarantees while assuring Russia that these new members would not have NATO military infrastructure on their territory. This agreement was broken after NATO’s 2014 Wales summit and in any case may have no longer been in force since Poland vetoed its renewal in 2017. The US is not interested in a new agreement, because the current tensions in the region suit it. The only concessions from Russia that would be of interest—the end of partnership with China or Russia’s withdrawal from the Middle East—are obvious non-starters for Moscow. Reduction of Russian forces in Europe affects European interests, not those of the US. The US sees Russia’s unwillingness to fight a major war as weakness, a leftover desire from the experience of World War II to avoid major war at all costs. The US is also less afraid of the possibility of nuclear war than is Russia. Finally, Western leaders think that Russian citizens have gotten used to a high standard of living and are not prepared for the sacrifices that would be required in the event of a major conflict. According to Fenenko, the only way to force the US to compromise is to convince it that Russia is willing to fight and accept sacrifices.⁵

3. RUSSIAN GOALS IN THE CONFRONTATION

Several articles discuss Russian goals in the confrontation with the West and what Russia has achieved. Unlike Western analysts, who tend to focus on efforts to stop NATO enlargement or reorient Ukraine, Russian analysts address possibilities such as averting a new European missile crisis or forcing Ukraine to carry out the Minsk agreements. Russian achievements during the confrontation including bringing the US and its European allies to the negotiating table on major security issues, while negative consequences include reinforcing Western unity and creating a more negative perception of Russia in the West.

Aleksandr Yermakov seeks to answer the question of what Putin means when he notes that if Russia and the West fail to come to an agreement, Russia will have to respond with “military-technical means.” Officially, these would include the deployment of advanced weaponry, particularly short-range and medium-range cruise missiles, near Russia’s borders with NATO. These would include dual-use weapons such as Kalibr and Tsirkon, and potentially even purely nuclear missiles such as Rubezh. Russia would be willing to deploy nuclear-capable weapons, because it considers such weapons to be the only means of correcting the imbalance of forces between the two sides. This would bring back the European missile crisis of the 1980s, with Russia once again targeting US junior partners, while the US targets Russia itself. The difference is that China is now on Russia’s side and Moscow does not need to deter Beijing, while the US sees Europe as a secondary theater and would prefer to focus on China. The author concludes by suggesting that all of the tensions of recent months may be an effort by Russia to avert a new European missile crisis.⁶

Writing in *Kommersant*, Andrey Kortunov argues that Russia is once again at a crossroads between the West and the East. In the aftermath of his meetings with Xi Jinping and Emmanuel Macron, Putin has found agreement on most key questions with China, and disagreement with France. Kortunov argues that there can be no solution of Russia’s fundamental problems with NATO and the EU, and therefore it should look for options in China. He then makes the argument that Russia should not completely give up on the EU, as maintaining relations with the EU would strengthen Russia’s negotiating position with China. He also believes that Europe is more interested in Russian modernization than China is, since the latter is quite happy to just continue exploiting Russian natural resources, while Europe would like to work with Russia in innovative economic sectors. The author also notes the greater cultural similarities between Russia and EU member states, with Europe remaining far more attractive for Russian society than China could be. He advocates focusing on areas for cooperation with Europe that are not politically toxic, such as climate change and the energy transition.⁷

Elena Chernenko and Vladimir Solovyev, writing in *Kommersant*, discuss what Russia has achieved from three months of diplomatic and military pressure on the West. There was a new conflict-resolution meeting in the Normandy format, which initially provided some optimism, though a second round ended in collapse, something they believe serves the interests of the Ukraine government. The authors note that if Western leaders had forced Ukraine to carry out the Minsk agreements, this would have precluded Ukraine’s membership in NATO. The Donetsk Luhansk People’s Republics’ special status would have given them veto power on major government decisions, including on foreign policy. Furthermore, the example might have encouraged other regions to also seek special status, leading to political chaos. A second achievement is the willingness of the US government to discuss transparency and limits on military assistance to Ukraine. Russian pressure has also led to the start of a discussion among Western experts about the value of further NATO enlargement and whether Europe would be better served by an alternative security architecture. Finally, US willingness to discuss arms control, including cruise missile and missile defense deployments, is definitely a sign of progress.⁸

The authors note that Russian pressure has also had numerous negative effects. These include an increase in military assistance to Ukraine, an increase in deployments of Western military forces to Russia’s western border, and an increase in anti-Russian attitudes in Ukraine and in Western countries. Other negative consequences include greater unity among NATO member states and between NATO and the European Union, an increase in the number of people in Finland and Sweden who support joining NATO, and a decline in the stock value of Russian companies and the exchange rate for the ruble.

4. THE CONSEQUENCES OF WAR AND POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Two authors discuss the potentially dangerous consequences for Russia of a war in Ukraine, while several offer possible solutions to the crisis. Writing from opposing perspectives, a conservative commentator and a liberal former FSB general agree that Russia is not prepared for war in Ukraine and for confrontation with the West. Possible solutions to the crisis focus primarily on the possibility of a neutral Ukraine, though some propose a broader array of confidence-building measures to reduce the extent of confrontation in Europe as a whole.

Sergey Rusov, writing in *Topwar.ru*, cautions readers against believing stories about Western weakness, Putin's masterful chess game, and Russia's return as a great power. He starts by noting that the majority of Russians (himself included) view the collective West as Russia's greatest enemy, which has undertaken four attempts to destroy the motherland in the last 100 years (1917, 1941, 1991, 2014). This has led to fragmentation, conflict, and poverty on historical Russian territory. However, he argues that Russia is not prepared for war with the West, because the latter controls the world financial and media systems, and dominates demographically and technologically. He puts forward the conspiracy theory that Western governments are actually controlled by secret organizations that manipulate the international system to their advantage. The Russian governing elite cannot compete with these organizations, since it is corrupt and came to power by betraying its own people. Russia lacks an ideology and a vision of the future, without which success is impossible.⁹

A more rational note of caution comes from retired Russian FSB general Savostyanov. In a long interview with *Republic*, he suggests that a war with Ukraine could result in a catastrophe for Russia. He argues that Vladimir Putin is receiving poor information and viewing how an invasion would go through rose-colored glasses. He thinks that Russian military forces would suffer high casualties from the start. He also argues that war is pointless and that Russia does not face any kind of security threat from the West, since Europe is not looking for conflict with Russia and would rather be left alone to live in peace. "There are no rational scenarios for an attack on Russia from Europe." At the same time, strengthening Russian defenses near Ukraine is a rational response to the conflict in the region. So are negotiations over the placement of missiles and other weapons on NATO's eastern borders. He also criticizes Russia's strategy of becoming China's junior partner.¹⁰

Andrey Kortunov calls for de-escalating the accelerating crisis, based on the assumption that no one wants a war in Europe. Not only would it have negative consequences for all participants, it also would mean the final collapse of the existing international order. The consequences of such a catastrophe would be felt for decades. But war is possible nonetheless because neither side is willing to pull back, with any retreat being seen as signaling weakness and inviting the adversary to further increase the pressure. All sides have at various points engaged in escalation—Ukraine in the Donbas, NATO in the Black Sea, Russia on its border with Ukraine. A conflict could start from a miscalculation, and one that takes place not just near Ukraine but anywhere—for example in the Arctic or even in the cyber domain. De-escalation is therefore absolutely necessary across the entire line of confrontation, not just in Ukraine, and also in rhetoric. The Normandy format can be used for de-escalation in Donbas, and the NATO-Russia Council for de-escalation between Moscow and Brussels. The OSCE can work on arms control and confidence-building measures. Additional agreements are needed for the Black Sea, the Arctic, and elsewhere. These steps would not solve the disagreement, but could bring both sides back from the brink.¹¹

An article in *Gazeta.ru* discusses leading Russian political scientists' views of possible solutions, most of which hinge on Ukraine taking the lead on accepting neutral status. Fyodor Lukyanov believes that the crisis will continue until Moscow and Washington resolve the question of NATO's role in Eastern Europe. Ukraine's security could be guaranteed through official neutrality, a role as a buffer state, or guarantees from external powers. Oleg Barabanov suggests that the West is willing to compromise on Ukraine, but not on general principles related to NATO membership. He believes that it is up to Ukraine's leaders to understand that their country is being used as a pawn in a broader confrontation and to take the lead in moderating its position and accepting neutrality. Dmitry Danilov also sees Ukraine as being hostage to the larger confrontation between Russia and the West and suggests that guaranteed non-bloc status for Ukraine is a solution acceptable to everyone. Some contrary opinions come from Vladimir Bruter and Yuriy Shvytkin, who believe that aiming for a neutral Ukraine is naïve, since it will always remain a pawn of the collective West.¹²

Finally, an article in *Kommersant* by Aleksandr Dynkin and Thomas Graham proposes four steps to avert war. They highlight that the crisis is not limited to Ukraine, but reflects different visions of post-Cold War European security architecture. The crisis therefore cannot be solved without some changes to that architecture. They propose a number of confidence-building measures that could bring both sides back from the brink of open conflict. These steps would include the following:

First, restrictions on military operations along the borders of NATO and Russia. Second, a moratorium on NATO's eastward expansion. Thirdly, the resolution of current and frozen conflicts in the post-Soviet space and in the Balkans. And fourthly, the modernization of the Helsinki Accords of 1975, which created the OSCE and formulated the agreed principles of interstate relations that formed the basis of detente between East and West.¹³

5. IMPLICATIONS OF US AND EUROPEAN SANCTIONS

Numerous articles in the Russian press discuss and even dismiss the potential implications of US efforts to impose sanctions on Russia.

In a February 8 article in *Gazeta.ru*, Anatoliy Akulov analyzes the challenges of US consensus-building among European actors to sanction Nordstream 2.¹⁴ He argues that, instead of sanctions, the Biden administration might as well just engage in a missile strike on the pipeline or, if it so desires, maybe even do the same for other Russian "energy weapons" to Europe—Nordstream-1 and Yamal-Europe pipelines. He then posits that the US may seek to "bribe" the German green party and pressure the German chancellor to ease the way for sanctions. Other approaches could include alternative suppliers of LNG, including Egypt, Algeria, Qatar, and the USA, but even those would not match the amount that Gazprom supplies to Europe. And, if Asian suppliers are added to the mix, this might have dramatic implications for prices. The most likely scenario the author sees involves pressure against the operator of the pipeline, Nordstream 2 AG, but in these efforts, the US would butt heads with Germany.

A February 9 article in *Topwar.ru* by Aleksandr Staver critiques US targeted sanctions against Russia, arguing that they in essence view the children of Russian investors in the UK as hostages.¹⁵ He first discusses the US "sanctions from hell" that Russia was "supposed to fear" in the aftermath of the Magnitsky law, the 2014 Ukraine crisis, the US election hacking, trade with North Korea, and others, and posits that those sanctions targeted at certain individuals and banks had an insignificant impact on Russia. He then discusses an article that proposes much more stringent restrictions on Russian oligarchs and their properties and funds, as well

as their children, particularly in the UK, noting that “no matter how it seems that money allows you to “become a citizen of the world”, Russians, of any nationality, have always been and remain enemies or hostages for the West.”

In a February 15 article in *Izvestiya*, Mariya Vasil’eva focuses on the sanctions’ potential impact on the Russian embassies abroad, arms exports, and electronics, among others.¹⁶ She writes that the European parliament is considering sanctions on energy, electronics, and the chemical industry, even though there is no consensus among members on the issue. While the UK has already passed legislation allowing the government to sanction Russia, the US government and the European parliament are being more secretive about timing and the content of the sanctions, she notes. At the same time, she notes that congressional legislation in the US on sanctions has been at a dead end and that European countries have been against disconnecting Russia from SWIFT. She quotes the first deputy chairman of the Federation Council Committee on International Affairs, Vladimir Djabarov, as saying, “The West is purposefully escalating the situation both in Ukraine and in our relations. They don’t want to respond to our security concerns. At any cost, they are trying to provoke conflict and impose sanctions. But they are wrong. Sanctions will not have the value they expect. Over the years, Russia has already learned how to overcome restrictive measures.”

In a February 15, 2022, article for *VPK*, Vladimir Eranosyan writes about the challenges that the US faces in making good on its threat to disconnect Russia from SWIFT as well as about the INSTEX system created in the wake of Iran’s disconnect from SWIFT.¹⁷ He notes that the US needs agreement from at least 10 SWIFT countries and that, even if Russia was disconnected, this would probably not affect the lives of ordinary Russians. Countries that need to conduct transactions with Russia will find a way around the system, while Russia also has the option of using a system created by China at its disposal.

And in another article in *VPK*, Vitaliy Orlov writes about how Russia could transition away from the use of the US dollar for exports of Russian armaments abroad, among other areas.¹⁸ He notes some challenges, such as countries preferring the US dollar for transactions as well as the weakness of some national currencies that make the US dollar more reliable. But, most of Rosoboronexport’s contracts today are conducted either in rubles or in national currencies, in light of US 2017 legislation targeting Russian arms exports, among others. He then discusses broader Russian efforts to move away from the dollar in 2012, after the US passage of the Magnitsky law, and the gradual decrease of the use of the US dollar in Russia’s trade relations with Europe. He concludes by writing about how the shift away from the US dollar has not decreased the demand for Russian armaments even though Russia now has to be more creative, potentially even agreeing to a barter system with countries desiring to import.

6. SIVKOV CAUTIONS US ABOUT NUCLEAR WAR

In a February 8 issue of *VPK*, Russian commentator Konstantin Sivkov extrapolates from what he alleges to have been a statement made by Gen. David Goldfein about “three steps to destroy Russia.”¹⁹ He posits that, as the first step, there would be a mobilization of forces in the European theater to intercept Russian nuclear missiles (full-scale missile defense system), an improvement of the US strategic missile defense, and then, finally, the launch of 2688 nuclear missiles to destroy Russia. Sivkov notes that it is “concerning” that this is being discussed, and states that “posing the question of the possibility of a massive US nuclear attack on Russia in the hope that a retaliatory strike will be parried by strategic missile defense, forces a more careful assessment of US-Russian nuclear parity.” The rest of the article discusses the various layers of the US global and regional missile defense architecture before Sivkov concludes that “to significantly weaken the Russian

nuclear strike on the United States with the medium-term potential of the American missile defense system as follows from the analysis, it will be impossible. The only thing left [for the US] is preventive action. This is the third step of the American general, as a part of which the possibility of a Russian strategic nuclear forces strike will be lowered to a level that permits the US missile defense system to successfully "grind" it." The article then discusses potential Russian courses of action, particularly given that "Russia has a very strong 'fifth column' and the Russian elite is strongly connected to the West as a whole and the US in particular," before concluding that all of these courses of action and the development of nuclear conflict between the two countries would be fatal for both Russia and the United States—and lead to the dominance of other states in the international system. This, he notes, should force "global and US elites to think—should they free up a "place in the sun" for others?"

7. US EXERCISES AND WEAPONS SYSTEMS

VPK and *Kommersant* discuss US and allied exercises and weapons systems. In a February 9 *Kommersant* article, Marianna Belen'kaya focuses on the Russo-Belarusian Allied Resolve 2022 exercises.²⁰ In terms of the Western reaction to the exercise, she points out Western concerns that Russia is breaching the notification requirements of the Vienna Document. She also discusses Western coverage of potential Russian attack plans and the Ukrainian authorities' dismissal of these assessments. The author quotes expert Mikhail Barabanov as saying, "And most importantly, NATO outnumbers Russia and the potential of the armed forces at times, it is hardly possible to seriously talk about the threat posed by the weaker side." Ilya Kramnik, in turn, is quoted as saying,

I would prefer the word "signal" or "demonstration of capabilities" to the term "fear-inducement," similar to how Stoltenberg announces the transfer of control to NATO of the American aircraft carrier group during the Neptune Strike exercises in the Mediterranean Sea as a signal for Russia. From the West, the scope of the exercises is also growing. For example, more than 40,000 people could take part in Cold Response exercises planned for spring in Norway. It can be said that both sides use military force as a decorative element to create a backdrop for security talks. Not the first time and not the last.

The February 15 issue of *VPK* includes numerous articles focused on the subject matter:

- Vladimir Pasyakin posits that because of the global importance of the Mediterranean, the US has a presence in the region, and, now, so does Russia's Black Sea Fleet.²¹ He details the Sixth Fleet's Neptune Strike-2022 exercises in the Mediterranean and notes, "It is not surprising that more than 10 crews of ships and support vessels of the Black Sea Fleet met the New Year 2022 in the Mediterranean Sea, performing special tasks as part of a permanent group of the Russian Navy in the far sea zone." The rest of the article discusses the Russian naval presence in the Med.
- Sergey Ketonov discusses the testing of the joint air-to-ground missile (JAGM) off the Bell AH-1Z Viper helicopter that reportedly took place in December-January in Arizona.²² The article details the press release about the testing, noting that "these tests are part of a larger effort to improve the combat capability of AH-1Z and UH-1Y helicopters in accordance with the vision of the commandant of the modernization of the USMC forces of maintaining combat efficiency and competitive advantage over potential opponents."

- Aleksandr Khramchikhin offers a historical overview of the US ballistic and cruise missile programs and notes that the US is working on developing of a new generation of precision weapons.²³ He points out the precision strike missile (PrSM) and the long-range hypersonic weapon (LRHW) programs, arguing that “due to the fact that the US Armed Forces from “the fight against international terrorism” are once again refocusing on the fight against opponents with equal forces (Russia and China), the significance of such weapons for them will continue to grow. Long-range missiles of various classes ensuring the suppression and/or overcoming of powerful air defense and the defeat of a wide range of targets, including the most difficult, will be actively developed.”

8. PERSPECTIVES ON INFORMATION WARFARE

Several articles discuss information and hybrid warfare. In a February 11 article in *NVO*, Yuriy Yur'ev writes about the concept of information warfare as a “component part of hybrid warfare.”²⁴ He begins with the statement that others have conducted “warfare” against Russia for two centuries and that, after a short break in the 1990s and early 2000, “the war resumed with even greater bitterness.” But now, with new technologies, he states, the whole of the Russian state and society are under attack. The article then traces the development of the information warfare and information operations concepts in the United States in the 1990s. He then argues that Russia has lost the initiative to its opponents. “We constantly make excuses and prove to the ‘partners’ that we are not ‘bad boys’ and play by the rules. Our explanations seem to be intelligible, but the train has left the station. We deny, but they simply do not want to understand us. Our words do not reach the main mass of the Western public, or they reach them in a distorted form and are not supported by compelling material arguments.” This means, he argues, that now is the time to “go from offense to defense.” The article concludes with a discussion of whether internet media, Western shows on TV, and Western movies do harm to Russian patriotic education.

In a February 14 article in *Krasnaya Zvezda*, Oleg Martynov discusses the creation in Poland of a cyber defense force.²⁵ The author traces the history of the forces and notes, “The creation of cyberspace defense forces in Poland was a manifestation of a trend that emerged in the military development of most NATO countries at the beginning of the 21st century,” kicked off by the US creation of military units and commands. He discusses the creation of USCYBERCOM and its mission and leadership, the NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence, the Tallinn Manual, the evolution of NATO policy, and ongoing exercises on cyber issues. The author posits that NATO has long “viewed the cyber sphere as a domain for military action.” Further, “In fact, offensive cyber operations are recognized as permissible within the framework of the so-called hybrid war, which does not fall under the international legal definition of aggression.” The author concludes, “By the way, the very term “hybrid war”, which Western media today attribute to Russia, was put into circulation by American military experts, and its methods have long been practiced by the West itself.”

9. NEXUS OF CRIMINALS AND TERRORISTS IN HYBRID WARS AND COLOR REVOLUTIONS

In a February 15 article in *VPK*, Konstantin Strigunov focuses on the nexus of criminal and terrorist groups as a potential globalization trend that weakens state governments.²⁶ He argues that criminal, terrorist, and

other groups are also utilized in “non-classical wars” such as hybrid wars and color revolutions, using the examples of Nicaragua, Bolivia, and Syria. The author then proceeds to discuss Operation Gideon, conducted in 2020 to achieve political-military goals in Venezuela, alleging that participants included US intelligence agencies, “US terrorists from the Silvercorp” private military corporation, Venezuelan dissidents, drug traffickers, and others. He then discusses alleged participation of criminal-terrorist elements trained by Turkish security services in the coup attempt in Kazakhstan. The author concludes that this phenomenon is an underbelly of globalization and that “criminal networks will become more and more like a mosaic of quasi-states participating in world processes and challenging fundamental foundations of international security.”

10. UKRAINE ARMS FOR WAR

Many articles in the Russian press are reviewing current political and military tensions surrounding Ukraine. Taking a variety of tacks, articles largely focus on the state of the Ukrainian military and its support by Western powers. They encompass details about military equipment and technology transfers, discuss the broader abilities of the Ukrainian armed forces, and launch critical broadsides against Ukraine’s perceived bellicose position relative to Russia and the separatist republics.

Several articles focus on the abilities of the Ukrainian military, primarily in terms of fighting potential. One article, by Aleksandr Staver in *Topwar.ru*, is deeply critical of “reforms” supported by President Zelensky to the Ukrainian armed forces, which he believes amount to a desperate attempt to maintain power rather than a genuine effort to professionalize and improve competency.²⁷ He argues that this is all just a trick to bolster flagging poll numbers and give the electorate a reason to support his presidency. Another *Topwar.ru* article focuses on the potential of delivering THAAD missiles to Ukraine, which would significantly strengthen its missile defense capabilities.²⁸ Yet the likelihood of the US actually supplying the complexes remains unknown, and “the appearance of these complexes near Kharkov will worsen the overall situation and will not contribute to the preservation of peace.” This concern over THAAD deliveries was echoed in an article in *Gazeta.ru* as well.²⁹ Doubts about American-supplied weaponry that has arrived in Ukraine, such as Javelin antitank systems, are also represented in a piece by Vladimir Karnozov in *NVO*.³⁰

In *Gazeta.ru*, Aleksei Poplavsky argues that Ukrainians are now regretting having gone along with this general war fever imposed upon them by Western powers, and that they are now facing multibillion dollar economic losses for their trouble.³¹ Elsewhere in *Topwar.ru*, articles by Aleksei Volodin and Roman Skomorokhov both make fun of the idea that Russia is going to invade the country. Volodin points out that the “black soil is frozen, yet there is still no offensive.”³² Skomorokhov delivers a long screed about the decision-making failures of President Biden, hysteria-promotion by Western powers, and the poor capabilities of the Ukrainian army.³³ And Aleksandr Staver argues that Ukraine is being played for a fool by the West, stating that “Americans in general perceive the population of Ukraine at the level of the Bedouins or other peoples living in the past.”³⁴ Only by extricating themselves from American influence can Ukrainians prevent an unnecessary military conflict.

In *Gazeta.ru*, meanwhile, Mikhail Khodarenok reviews the state of Ukrainian air defenses and finds them sorely wanting.³⁵ Interviewing a variety of military experts, he notes that this lack of capacity will be difficult to change even with Western help, as “the most important obstacle to large-scale sales of weapons and military air defense equipment to Kiev at this stage is the possibility of “leaks” of the latest technologies of the collective West in the conditions of a high degree of corruption in the state system of Ukraine.” This

assessment is contested by Aleksandr Khramchikhin in *NVO*, where he notes that while the Ukrainian missile defense is weak, it has been growing stronger.³⁶ Yet in the same article, he argues that “if Ukraine runs into a serious war with Russia, neither the Patriots, nor the Advanced Hawks, nor the Stingers in any of their incarnations will save it. Moreover, for the first time, the Russian Aerospace Forces will have the opportunity to practice suppressing a truly strong air defense.”

Other articles are more complementary of the Ukrainian military-industrial complex. A long article in *VPK* by Nikolai Novichkov investigates the cooperation between Ukraine’s Motor Sich aircraft manufacturing company and Turkish defense companies. He argues that this is a considerable partnership that could very certainly become a major boon to Ukraine’s defense industry as well as the overall technical sophistication of its products.³⁷

An article by Vladimir Mukhin in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* highlights the continued increase in Western military support for Ukraine, which he argues now allows Kyiv to “attack the equipment and positions of the armed forces of the unrecognized republics” in the Donbas.³⁸ An article by Aleksei Poltavstev in *Krasnaya Zvezda* indeed argues that Ukraine is augmenting its forces with “mercenaries”—i.e., “radical nationalists and foreign fighters”—who will be the ones that begin war with separatist republics.³⁹ Vladimir Yerosyan, writing in *VPK*, similarly reports that Ukrainian neo-nazis are preparing for urban combat and are being armed with destructive grenade launchers for the purpose.⁴⁰

Vladimir Solovyov writes at length in *Kommersant* about the potential for a diplomatic solution and about how the fact that Ukraine is intransigent over the Minsk agreements remains the key problem.⁴¹ The Ukrainian reluctance to engage in good faith is also emphasized in an *Izvestiya* article by Roman Kretsul and Andrei Fedorov, who review a variety of military actions by the Ukrainians along the lines of contact in the Donbas and find them to be indicative of Ukrainian falseness.⁴² Similarly, Sergei Kozlov suggests in *NVO* that special operations forces in Ukraine are preparing themselves for the “forceful capture of Donetsk and Lugansk.”⁴³ He is complimentary to Ukraine’s special forces, even if they suffer from numerical deficiencies, noting that “the level of training of Ukrainian special forces has greatly increased.” He reviews Ukrainian formations in depth with regard to their leadership structure, their equipment, and even the legal regime under which they operate.

Finally, writing in *Izvestiya*, Anton Lavrov reviews the prospects for a settlement rather than war over the separatist republics.⁴⁴ He finds that the Ukrainian side has “effectively closed the possibilities for a diplomatic solution to the problem,” and that recognizing the separatists will entail more than just legal niceties. He states that the “problem is that one legal recognition procedure will not be enough. Such a decision will most likely have to be confirmed by force.”

11. WESTERN FORCE DEPLOYMENTS GARNER RUSSIAN ATTENTION

As the crisis between Ukraine and Russia heats up, Russian authors have been quick to point out new military deployments by Western powers in the region. American deployments to Poland have been of interest, as well as those elsewhere in Eastern Europe, such as in Slovakia. Overall, the articles view these deployments as ominous, but also par for the course given the bellicose trajectory of interstate relations in recent months.

An article at *Gazeta.ru* reviewed recent announcements by the British government to bolster forces in Eastern Europe – including multinational NATO forces in Estonia and new weaponry given to Ukraine.⁴⁵ The article rounds up a number of Russian politicians, summarizing that “London is trying to prove its importance through the Ukrainian crisis.” The article also claims that “the possible strengthening of the British presence in Eastern Europe is taking place against the background of discussions on the creation of the so-called tripartite alliance—Great Britain, Poland, Ukraine—which defines Russia and Belarus as threats to the security of the region.” This London-Warsaw-Kyiv axis is seen to be an important new development in inter-regional relations.

A vote by the Slovak parliament to allow American troops on bases in the country has proven to be of concern for Russian observers as well. Articles in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* and *Gazeta.ru* both review the situation, with the former stating that in doing so Slovakia has “taken a step towards worsening relations with Russia” despite strong pro-Russia sentiments in the population.⁴⁶ The controversial nature of the acceptance is emphasized in the latter article, by Aleksei Poplavsky, which provides a history of its origin as early as 2018 and the several “diplomatic scandals” which have resulted over the course of negotiating and passing the treaty.⁴⁷ A point of interest in this piece is the comparison between US troops using military bases and the invasion of the Soviet military after the 1968 political crisis. One expert is quoted saying that “Slovaks, like the Czechs, fear the presence of foreign troops on their territory—the vast majority of Slovaks oppose the deployment of American forces in the country. These sentiments, of course, are exploited by opposition parties....” Furthermore, Poplavsky argues that it is unclear what the genuine benefit to Slovakia is regarding this new level of military cooperation, especially given internal tensions over the deal.

Finally, an article by Yaroslav Vyatkin in *Argumenty Nedeli* reviews the recent deployment of US paratroopers to Poland, describing the size of the forces and asking whether this is of genuine relevance or not.⁴⁸ He argues that this deployment is in a sense a means by which the US keeps Ukraine dependent on a hope for American aid that is not actually forthcoming, describing the relationship as “slow ‘injections’ to Kiev drug addicts keeping them ‘on the needle.’” He states that the deployment is a “grand gesture, worth little in military terms and in terms of the balance of power” but one that has its uses symbolically.

12. BELARUS AIDS IN RUSSIA’S MILITARY BUILDUP

Cooperation between Russia and Belarus is a point of interest for several observers, especially as tensions continue to ratchet up with neighboring Ukraine. Belarus and Russia are jointly undertaking combined-arms military exercises in the form of “Union Resolve – 2022,” which some view as a further step away from any putative neutrality by Belarus. Others noted that Belarus has taken a hard line vis-à-vis Ukraine in terms of public declarations of support for Russia’s side, which is a shift from previous years. Finally, a military doctrine for the Russo-Belarusian Union State has been approved recently, which has further underlined the considerable alignment between the two countries.

Several articles focused on the recent military exercises undertaken by both states on February 10. One article, in *Topwar.ru*, focused on how the exercises represented “the beginning of the formation of a unified army” and further evidence that integration of Belarus’s military-industrial complex into Russia’s is inevitable.⁴⁹ Meanwhile, an article in *Izvestiya* focused on both the promise and the limitations of the same exercises—in this case, noting that President Lukashenka “impressed the public” yet did not intend to allow Russian forward operating bases to exist beyond temporary measures.⁵⁰ These two articles represent

differing lenses—positive and negative, respectively—regarding the fruit of Belarusian-Russian military cooperation.

A separate article, in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, agrees with the general point that Belarus was taking its military cooperation with Russia far more seriously than in previous years.⁵¹ One point is that Belarus committed to the transfer of a large formation of troops to the Russian Far East for the upcoming Vostok-2022 military exercises, which are far out-of-region for the country normally. It also notes that further training infrastructure was being developed in Belarus to develop military talent and raise combat effectiveness.

Finally, an article in *Kommersant* reviews the content of a new version of the Military Doctrine of the Union State, which had not been updated since 2001.⁵² The article notes that the document “lists many more factors that negatively affect the security of the union” relative to previous iterations. Yet it also points out that the prospects of deploying nuclear weapons on Belarusian soil remains closed, at least formally.

13. TURKEY AS A MEDIATOR FOR THE RUSSIA-UKRAINE CONFLICT

A February 14 *Izvestiya* article interviews Russia’s ambassador to Turkey, Alexei Yerkhov. The primary focus of the discussion is Ankara’s offer to mediate the Russia-Ukraine crisis, and the Turkish president’s recent claim that it is “the only country” that can meet both Russia and Ukraine halfway to find resolution. While Yerkhov says that he understands Ankara’s interest in mediating the conflict, both because of Turkey’s geographic proximity to a potential escalation and because of its desire to develop a more active foreign policy, some note that Turkey would not be an impartial intermediary; Yerkhov specifically cites Turkey’s “well-known military-technical ties with Ukraine.”⁵³

Moreover, Yerkhov suggests that Ankara does not adequately understand Russia’s grievances. “We are also trying to convey to our Turkish interlocutors and to local public opinion the idea that the current crisis is based on a systemic misunderstanding by the collective West, and above all the United States and NATO, of the most serious Russian concerns in the field of European and international security. This is the essence of the problem, and to reduce it to a kind of ‘Russian-Ukrainian conflict’, in our opinion, is not entirely correct either politically or methodologically.” He adds, “According to the press secretary of the President of the Russian Federation Dmitry Peskov, the main disagreements between Russia and Ukraine are connected precisely with the stalling of the implementation of the Minsk agreements by Kiev. If our Turkish partners can influence the Ukrainians and encourage them to fulfill the previously-made agreements and obligations, this can be welcomed.”

14. CHINESE-RUSSIAN STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

Several articles address China-Russia relations, particularly in the context of the ongoing crisis with Ukraine. Most articles reported on the meetings between presidents Putin and Xi on the sidelines of the Beijing Winter Olympics, where the leaders declared that there were no limits to their strategic partnership and vowed to “counter interference by outside forces in the internal affairs of sovereign countries under any pretext.” Additionally, Xi’s announcement to join Putin in opposing further NATO expansion was of particular interest in the Russian media.⁵⁴

One article responds to reactions from the West. It states, “The head EU diplomat, Josep Borrell, called the cooperation between Russia and China ‘a powerful authoritarian alliance.’ The wording is harsh, but at the same time understandable—the collective West desperately needs to formulate an ideological base for the onslaught against Russia and China.”⁵⁵

While some articles gloat about these new developments in the bilateral relationship, others are more cautious. A *Topwar.ru* article states, “It would seem that Russia and China are brothers forever? On the contrary, this is a typical example of realpolitik, not mixed with emotions and ideology. In line with this trend, the longer the tension around Ukraine lasts, the more dividends Beijing will reap.” According to the article, the main benefits for China, in addition to long-term contracts with Gazprom, are that the US will be distracted from the situation regarding Taiwan and unable to fully implement its Indo-Pacific strategy. However, while Russia will face the consequences, China will not. “Total sanctions, one way or another, will inevitably affect every inhabitant of Russia. What does China lose from this? Apart from the possible restriction of the transit of goods through Ukraine, nothing. At the same time, Russia, having entered the war, will be very vulnerable and will become even more dependent on China.” Moreover, the author states, if a diplomatic resolution that meets Russia’s demands is found and war is averted, “this will still be perceived by Beijing as a geopolitical defeat.” Based on these reasons, the article concludes that “the forced ‘embrace of China’ in this case is not the best substitute for dialogue with Europe and the United States.”⁵⁶

A different *Topwar.ru* article expresses similar doubts that the alliance will be unbalanced:

Close economic cooperation with China is now vital for our country... If the No. 1 foreign economic partner for the Russian Federation is the PRC, then [China’s] foreign economic makeup is much more diverse. The Russian share fluctuates around a few percent. In other words, economic cooperation will develop, but China will choose the most profitable projects, primarily resource ones. And the Russian Federation will have to make concessions somewhere.

The author cites Chinese interest in the Arctic as an area where Russia will have to make some concessions. The article concludes: “Therefore, it would be better to talk about a ‘dynamic union’ for now, where each side has its own vector of movement.”⁵⁷

Meanwhile, a *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* article argues that the US is repeating Kissinger’s approach of increasing ties with China to balance Russia, even hoping to use the Ukraine crisis to “drive a wedge” between Moscow and Beijing. The author argues that the prospect of this succeeding is very low:

The economic relations between the US and China are now even worse than under former President Donald Trump. As far as politics are concerned, the review of US strategy in the Indo-Pacific region, just released by the Joseph Biden administration, speaks volumes about its nature. This document proclaims that the United States will provide the region with more military and diplomatic resources in order to prevent the PRC from creating its own sphere of influence and becoming the most powerful country in the world.

15. KURIL ISLANDS DEVELOPMENTS; RUSSIAN-JAPANESE RELATIONS

Several articles reported on an alleged US Virginia-class submarine incident that occurred near the Kuril Islands on February 12. According to a *Krasnaya Zvezda* article, the “violation” of Russian borders occurred

during a planned Russian Pacific Fleet exercise in the area.⁵⁸ According to the Ministry of Defense, the crew of the submarine was told: "You are in the territorial waters of Russia. Surface immediately!"⁵⁹ A *Gazeta.ru* article states that the American submarine "ignored" the message, which led to the crew of the Russian frigate *Marshal Shaposhnikov* using unspecified "appropriate means" against the submarine. One Russian military expert speculated that this may have included signal grenades fired from the MRG-1 multi-barrel launcher.⁶⁰ In response, the US sub allegedly "used a self-propelled simulator to split the target using radar and acoustic means and left the sector at maximum speed." According to a second *Gazeta.ru* article, because of the incident, the Ministry of Defense issued a demarche to the American military attaché, noting that the actions of the American submarine "are regarded as a gross violation of international law, and the provocative actions of the American ship created a threat to Russia's national security." An article reports that the US Department of Defense "presented its own version of events," denying accusations of operating in Russian territorial waters.⁶¹

Another recent development also involved the Kuril Islands. According to a *Kommersant* article, Prime Minister Fumio Kishida once again accused Russia of "illegally occupying" the South Kurils at the February 7th National Rally for the Return of the Northern Territories, which *Kommersant* notes has become a "new platform for the consolidation of Japanese radicals." The Russian embassy in Tokyo called on Russian citizens "to exercise increased vigilance and caution, to avoid places of speech by Japanese nationalists."⁶² A *Gazeta.ru* article adds that the US ambassador to Japan reiterated Washington's recognition of Japanese sovereignty over the four islands, which were annexed by Russia following World War II.⁶³ The article states that Tokyo renounced its claims to the South Kuriles by signing the San Francisco Peace Treaty in 1951, and that "moreover, it received these islands as a result of the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905." *Kommersant* states that the revival of this territorial dispute is the latest in a series of "irritants" which have caused Russian-Japanese relations to deteriorate; these irritants also include potential anti-Russian sanctions in response to actions in Ukraine. In regard to this, the article states, "The main intrigue is the question of how far Tokyo can afford to go in demonstrating solidarity with the United States and Western allies, given that the tightening of the Japanese position threatens to bury hopes for the resumption of dialogue with Russia on a peace treaty."⁶⁴

16. IRAN NUCLEAR NEGOTIATIONS

A February 7 *Kommersant* interview features the Russian Permanent Representative to International Organizations in Vienna, Mikhail Ulyanov, who discusses developments in the Iran nuclear deal negotiations.⁶⁵ When asked about the Biden administration's decision to restore sanction waivers to Iran, Ulyanov responded: "This is a step that should have been taken a long time ago." However, he adds that the waivers allow foreign companies, including those from Russia, to pursue peaceful nuclear energy development with Iran. "So the assessment (of the US decision) is positive. This step will accelerate the recovery of the JCPOA." A *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* article, titled "Tehran did not appreciate the US sanctions relief," also discusses the decision, but takes a less hopeful tone. The article notes that the Iranian delegation views these measures as insufficient, responding that "everyone understands that this is not enough...What the US needs to do is lift all sanctions." The article concludes by adding that "[Iran] is trying to get guarantees that the United States will not revise the potential agreement later. No one can promise this, given the sometimes great difference in the approaches of US administrations."⁶⁶

LIST OF SOURCES

- *Argumenty i Fakty*, a weekly newspaper based in Moscow and a publishing house in Russia and worldwide. It is owned by the Moscow city government.
- *Argumenty Nedeli*, a popular Moscow newspaper primarily focused on social and political issues.
- *Gazeta.ru*, a pro-government publication currently owned by the Rambler Media Group.
- *Izvestiya*, one of Russia's oldest and most respected newspapers, noted for its quality military coverage.
- *Kommersant*, a privately owned political and business daily known for quality reporting.
- *Krasnaya Zvezda*, official publication of the Russian Ministry of Defense.
- *Nezavisimaia Gazeta*, a privately owned political and business daily known for quality reporting.
- *Nezavisimoe voennoe obozrenie*, a weekly military affairs supplement to *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, a privately owned political and business daily known for quality reporting.
- *Novye Izvestiya*, an online-only publication that until 2016 was oppositional toward the Russian government but is now classified as patriotic in orientation.
- *Republic* (formerly *Slon*), a private Russian-language online magazine covering business, domestic politics, economy, and culture.
- *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, official daily of the government of Russia, the only one to publish texts of new laws, etc.
- *Topwar.ru*, a website focused on providing quality coverage for military developments in Russia and worldwide.
- *Voенно-Promyshlennyi Kur'er*, a publication informing on developments in the military-industrial complex (funded by the defense industry).

ENDNOTES

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⁶ Alexander Yermakov, "A Military Response to Russians' Infernal Question" [Военно-технический ответ на проклятый русский вопрос], Russian International Affairs Council, Feb. 11, 2022, <https://russiancouncil.ru/analytics-and-comments/analytics/voenno-tehnicheskij-otvet-na-proklyatyy->

russkiy-vopros/.

⁷ Andrey Kortunov, "Russia is Europe" [Россия — це Европа], *Kommersant*, Feb. 11, 2022, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/5207263>.

⁸ Yelena Chernenko, Vladimir Solovyev, "Farce attacks" [Фарс атакует], *Kommersant*, Feb. 14, 2022, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/5216150>.

⁹ Sergey Rusov, "Is Russia ready for war with the West?" [Готова ли Россия к войне с Западом]," *Topwar.ru*, Feb. 8, 2022, <https://topwar.ru/191953-gotova-li-rossija-k-vojne-s-zapadom.html>.

¹⁰ Mariya Litvinova, "Putin is well aware that war is a powerful destabilizer of the situation in the country" [Путин прекрасно понимает, что война — мощный дестабилизатор обстановки в стране], *Republic*, Feb. 11, 2022, <https://republic.ru/posts/103121>.

¹¹ Andrey Kortunov, "The benefits and harms of a cold shower" [Польза и вред холодного душа," *Izvestiya*, Feb. 14, 2022, <https://iz.ru/1291082/andrei-kortunov/polza-i-vred-kholodnogo-dusha>.

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