



CNA Russia Studies Program

THIS WEEK'S ABSTRACTS

1. THE CRISIS IN US-RUSSIA RELATIONS

Russian media devoted extensive coverage to the crisis in relations between Russia and the West. Discussion of the Russian set of proposals for a new security agreement for Europe, and the subsequent videoconference between presidents Putin and Biden, was a major aspect of the coverage. Russia's publication of a draft agreement is seen as a show of strength by President Putin, though most authors believe that the United States will reject the proposal. The December 30 conversation is portrayed primarily as a way for the two principals to clearly define their positions prior to the start of bilateral talks in mid January.

2. PERCEPTIONS OF US AND NATO STRATEGY

Several long articles published in late December 2021 describe Russian perceptions of the strategy being pursued by the United States and NATO to contain and weaken Russia. Several articles highlight Russian perceptions that the United States is focused on organizing regime change in Russia and its allies, including through hybrid warfare. Other articles discuss the US shift to Asia as part of a continuing effort to preserve US hegemony in the world.

3. IN YEAR-END SPEECHES, PUTIN AND SHOIGU ARTICULATE CONCERNS ABOUT US AND NATO THREATS

In a December 21 speech and in his December 23 annual press conference, Putin expressed frustration at what he describes as the persistent disregard by the US and NATO of Russian

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concerns about NATO expansion, alleging that the US supported “terrorist organizations” in the North Caucasus against Russia, and argued that the US and NATO are aiming to weaken and collapse Russia. In a December 21 speech, Russian defense minister Sergey Shoigu summed up annual results of modernization and activities in the Russian armed forces, according to *Krasnaya Zvezda*. Shoigu also extensively discussed Western activities and the political-military and threat environment around Russia.

4. THE SITUATION IN UKRAINE

Coverage on Ukraine remains a key area of focus in Russian media. Several articles address the January 2 Biden-Zelensky call in which President Biden pledged to “respond decisively” should Russia invade, and to keep Ukraine fully involved in the ensuing effort to resolve the crisis. Meanwhile, Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov expressed concerns about military developments in Ukraine. Several articles also address Defense Minister Shoigu’s recent allegations of nefarious US military actions in the region, including the transfer of chemical weapons and provocations from private military contractors.

5. EUROPEAN REACTION TO RUSSIA’S POSITION

Several articles highlight European reactions to the growing confrontation with Russia. The dominant perspective is that the EU and its member states want to make sure they are included in high-level discussions and that the US and Russia do not make any decisions without their input. Other articles highlight NATO efforts to heighten military readiness in response to Russia’s arms build-up near Ukraine and note that Russia is acting to counter NATO threats on its border.

6. RUSSIAN REACTIONS TO FINLAND’S MILITARY ROLE

Several articles address developments in Finland’s force structure. One article calls for a realistic assessment of Finland’s military aspirations, referencing Helsinki’s recent purchase of 64 F-35a fifth-generation fighter-bombers from the US. The author characterizes this deal as an “unfriendly step towards Russia.” Several other articles discuss recent statements from senior Finnish officials that reiterate Finland’s right to apply for NATO membership should it choose to. One expert characterizes these statements as “typical rhetoric” that “should not be taken seriously” while another suggests that Russia should strengthen its Baltic Fleet forces if Finland enters the alliance.

7. RUSSIAN VIEWS OF AUSTRALIAN DEPENDENCE ON THE US AND GROWING CHINESE POWER

Many Russian writers focused on issues in the Asia-Pacific theater, especially in light of the AUKUS deal, the changing US-Chinese naval balance, and new developments in the Russian-Chinese relationship. Although the articles were disparate in their subject matter and approaches, most took a pessimistic and doubtful view regarding the United States and its efforts in the region, noting the increasing dependence of Australia on American military and economic support, as well as confirming that the rise of China is a key point of interest for Russian observers.

8. JAPANESE MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS

At least three articles addressed Japanese military developments during this reporting period. One article notes that Japan's draft budget has increased next year's military spending by 6.5 percent, to a total of US \$51.5 billion. Another article reports that Japan is also interested in hosting a US military base on the Ryukyu Islands to prepare for a possible escalation of the Taiwan conflict. One author notes that while Japan sees China and North Korea as its primary threats, it is increasingly worried about defense cooperation between China and Russia.

9. FALLOUT FROM AFGHANISTAN CONTINUES

The fallout from the US withdrawal from Afghanistan remains a source of interest for Russian foreign policy commentators. Vladimir Vinokurov asks "what the US defeat in Afghanistan" means nearly half a year on. In a wide-ranging argument, he concludes that the withdrawal represents a significant blow to the hegemon status of the United States and is likely to usher in fully the multipolar world that has been long suggested by commentators. Similarly, Aleksandr Khranchikhin underlines the alliance-disrupting impact of the Afghanistan withdrawal.

10. DEMOCRACY SUMMIT RIDICULED AS DESPERATE ATTEMPT TO BOLSTER AN "OPERETTA DEMOCRACY"

The recent Summit for Democracies was a subject of interest and ridicule by Russian political analysts. An essay by Grigori Nikonorov and Igor Rodionov expresses this framing of the Summit in full form. The authors describe the United States as an "operetta democracy," due to a "series of failures in domestic and foreign policy." The authors frame the event as a means for the United States to "consolidate the shaky position of the United States as the leader of the Western world," but find it not up to the task given the diffuse troubles of the current world order, the rise of China and Russia to international prominence, and the legitimacy crisis besetting Western democracies in particular.

11. US AND NATO WEAPONS AND THREATS TO RUSSIA

Numerous Russian articles provide overviews of current and emerging Western weapons technologies, including US and NATO missile defense infrastructure, unmanned aircraft that could potentially accompany the B-21 Raider bomber, and missiles and hypersonic systems.

12. REACTION TO RESTRICTIONS ON EXPORT OF US SPACE TECHNOLOGIES

Evgeniy Fedorov discusses a bill introduced in December 2021 by Senator Marco Rubio called the Space Protection of American Command and Enterprise (SPACE) Act. He notes that the bill seeks to reduce risks of industrial espionage to the US space industrial base and restrict the export of space technologies to Russia and China.

1. THE CRISIS IN US-RUSSIA RELATIONS

Russian media devoted extensive coverage to the crisis in relations between Russia and the West. Discussion of the Russian set of proposals for a new security agreement for Europe, and the subsequent videoconference between presidents Putin and Biden, was a major aspect of the coverage.

Topwar.ru devoted three articles to analyzing the draft agreement with the United States and NATO proposed by Russia in mid December. Roman Skomorokhov characterizes the draft as a mutual security treaty in which Russia would guarantee that it would not threaten the United States while the US in turn guaranteed that it would not threaten Russia. He rejects the idea that the agreement presents any kind of ultimatum or Russian red lines. He reviews the substance of the agreement from the US point of view, finding that some aspects of it may be acceptable while others will be rejected out of hand. Overall, he argues that it can be the starting point for a fruitful negotiation.¹

In contrast, Sergei Preobrazhenskiy describes the draft agreement as a set of red lines that Putin has placed before Biden and argues that “it is quite obvious that these ‘lines’ violate all the canons of US foreign policy and cannot be fulfilled a priori.” He states that this is not even an ultimatum, but an entire set of threats that would torpedo all of “the unshakable sacred foundations on which the entire US foreign policy was built for more than two centuries.” He goes on to argue that the United States would like to leave the region in order to focus on China, but wants to do it on their own terms and in order to do so will want to extend negotiations for as long as possible. The author makes it clear that he believes Putin holds all the cards and the United States is just trying to find a face-saving way to get out of the situation.²

The final article, by Yuri Antyukhov, highlights that on two occasions in 2021, the United States responded to perceived Russian threats against Ukraine by asking for talks. Since the publication of the draft agreement, Russian rhetoric has only become harsher, although the main points are being made by deputies such as Sergey Ryabkov, rather than by ministers or the president. The article suggests that a moment of truth in NATO-Russia relations is approaching and that the situation is coming to resemble the Cuban missile crisis. The author suggests that Western elites cannot accept the agreement, and that once it is rejected, Russia will be free to act to enforce its sphere of influence in Eastern Europe, Central Asia, and the Caucasus. He also suggests that the Russian military has reached a level that allows Russia to talk to the United States as an equal, from a position of strength.³

Four articles cover the December 30 conversation between the two presidents. *Novye Izvestiya* highlights Biden’s statement that if Russia escalates the situation around Ukraine, the United States will respond with large-scale sanctions, and Putin’s response that such a development would be a most serious mistake that would potentially result in a complete break in bilateral relations.⁴ A brief article in *New Times* states the key points from both sides. The Kremlin’s version highlighted the following points:

Biden made it clear that the United States did not intend to deploy offensive strike weapons in Ukraine. Putin told Biden that Russia would behave the way the United States would behave in matters of its security. Biden warned of sanctions, Putin said that in this case, a break in relations could follow. The January talks in Geneva will be held under the personal supervision of the presidents. Biden has emphasized more than once that a nuclear war cannot be started or won. The leaders agreed to continue the dialogue after the New Year.⁵

Lenta.ru highlights the desire of both sides to continue the dialog, noting that Biden had “seriously and

logically reacted to the point of view of the Russian leader.” The article extensively quotes presidential advisor Yuri Ushakov, who states that Moscow needs a result in the form of legally binding security guarantees. Ushakov describes Putin’s position in the conversation as follows: “Our president emphasized that in this rather difficult situation we would behave as the United States would behave if offensive weapons were deployed near American borders. Our president tried in every possible way to make several attempts to ensure that this key idea of ours reached Biden well.” The article continues by noting that Biden assured Putin that the United States is not planning to place strike weapons on Ukrainian territory. At the same time, Biden noted that the United States will continue to strengthen NATO forces and provide Kyiv with additional assistance in order to deter Russia. Overall, the discussion between the two presidents was characterized as an opportunity for both presidents to understand the other’s position prior to the beginning of bilateral talks on January 10.⁶

Nezavisimaya Gazeta notes that in preparation for the talks, the US government has temporarily suspended its opposition to the NordStream-2 pipeline, with Congress passing and President Biden signing the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) even though it does not include any strong anti-Russian sanctions. It also notes that the NDAA is primarily focused on China rather than Russia, with only \$300 million in assistance to Ukraine, versus \$7.1 billion allocated for containing China.⁷

2. PERCEPTIONS OF US AND NATO STRATEGY

Several long articles published in late December 2021 describe Russian perceptions of the strategy being pursued by the United States and NATO to contain and weaken Russia. Several articles highlight Russian perceptions that the United States is focused on organizing regime change in Russia and its allies, including through hybrid warfare. Other articles discuss the US shift to Asia as part of a continuing effort to preserve US hegemony in the world.

Konstantin Sivkov, writing a year-end summary article in *Voenno-Promyshlennyi Kur’er (VPK)*, argues that the world is facing a period of polarization between two models of development: a multipolar world consisting of strong and equal states following traditional values and a “liberal fundamentalist” world government with national states becoming effectively provinces. In terms of geopolitics, he argues that the United States has built a system to pressure Russia and China: the Central European states and Ukraine provide the forward echelon against Russia, backed by an “Old Europe” second echelon led by France and Germany; and the Atlantic, led by the US and UK, serves as the rear echelon. A similar situation pertains in Asia, with the forward echelon represented by India, Japan, and South Korea, and the rear echelon consisting of the newly formed AUKUS bloc, including the US, UK, and Australia. He argues that Russia should respond to this pressure by forming an alliance with China.⁸

In a separate article, also published in *VPK*, Sivkov argues that Russia is threatened by the possibility of a color revolution. Sivkov argues that pressure on Russia from the West continues to increase, with regime change continuing to be the main long-term goal of Western strategy. As a result of Russian deterrence of Western provocations in Ukraine, US actions are increasingly shifting from the military to the economic sphere, despite potential economic losses from such actions. Sivkov provides examples such as efforts to slow the approval of NordStream-2 and threats to increase economic sanctions on Russia. The goal is to create a level of economic pain for Russia that results in social unrest, followed by a new revolution that could displace the Putin regime. Sivkov notes divisions among Russia’s elite between a security-minded bloc and an economic-growth oriented bloc. The pandemic has also led to a rise in distrust toward the political elite among the general population, as made clear by resistance to vaccination. Sivkov concludes

by noting signs of weakness in the political regime, including recent cases of ineffectiveness in ending local protests and poor organization of recent Duma elections. All of these problems may be exploited by the West to initiate a social revolution with the goal of achieving regime change.⁹

Konstantin Strigunov, also writing in *VPK*, makes a related argument. He connects Western success in overthrowing the Yanukovich government in 2014 with the 2020 attempt to remove Lukashenka in Belarus, both carried out through the mobilization of popular protest among the general population. He describes the strategy as follows:

[First,] find some opposition candidate controlled by the external organizers of the coup, and through an artificially created crisis situation recognize him as president, and then transfer control over the assets of the target country (if they are located in Western banks) to him. And at the expense of the target country and its people, try to make a coup.

In both cases, he argues, the operation was controlled from Washington, which was operating on an outsourcing principle, with local control being carried out from Poland, from Lithuania, and, in the Belarus case, from Ukraine. He notes that the difference between the two cases is that governments used the 2014 example to learn how to deal with these kinds of operations. Having failed to remove Lukashenka directly, the West is now seeking to tie the possibility of military escalation in the Donbas to the Belarus crisis, with the goal of tying Russia and Belarus into a state of continuous conflict.¹⁰

Two articles in *Nezavisimoe Voennoe Obozrenie* (NVO) focus on US military strategy. Vladimir Ivanov highlights the extensive network of US military bases around the world, noting that they are more numerous than US embassies. He then argues that according to the *US Global Posture Review*, Asia remains the highest priority region for the United States. He states that US leaders believe that Asia will be the military-political and economic center of the world and that the US needs to prevent China and Russia from dominating the region if it is to maintain its world hegemony.¹¹

Aleksandr Bartosh argues that the United States is implementing a hybrid military strategy that includes both high-end and grey-zone warfare. High-end warfare will be based on fifth-generation fighters that use stealth technology to overcome Russian missile defense and air defense systems, long-range air and sea-based antiship missiles to destroy aircraft carriers and other surface ships of the Chinese navy, multipurpose unmanned vehicles for strike and defense purposes, electromagnetic weapons in order to suppress Russian and Chinese integrated air defense elements, offensive cyber weapons, and space-based systems for information and strike purposes. Hybrid warfare consists of "a wide range of actions, including the involvement of military and irregular units at the same time as carrying out, within the framework of a single plan, operations to chaotize the administrative-political, financial, economic, cultural and ideological spheres, and undermine military security."¹²

3. IN YEAR-END SPEECHES, PUTIN AND SHOIGU ARTICULATE CONCERNS ABOUT US AND NATO THREATS

According to *Krasnaya Zvezda* coverage, in a December 21 speech at the expanded meeting of the Russian Federation Ministry of Defense advisory board, Russia's president Vladimir Putin discussed the achievements of the Russian armed forces and their development needs through 2030.¹³ He also said the following about the political-military environment around Russia:

- He has “concern about the build-up of the US and NATO military groups directly on the Russian borders, as well as the conduct of large-scale exercises, including unplanned ones” and concern about the “deployment close to Russia of elements of the US global missile defense system.”
 - “If this infrastructure moves forward, if US-NATO missile systems appear in Ukraine, then their flight time to Moscow will be reduced to seven to ten minutes, and if hypersonic weapons are deployed, to five. For us, this is the most serious challenge— a challenge to our security.”
- Russian ideas sent to the US for discussion “ruled out the further expansion of NATO in the eastern direction and the deployment of offensive strike weapons systems in neighboring countries.”
- Putin notes the need for “long term, legally binding guarantees.”
 - “Well, you and I know them well: and this cannot be trusted, no legal guarantees, because the United States easily withdraws from all international treaties, which for some reason or other become uninteresting to them.”
 - “But at least this, at least something, at least legally binding agreements should be, and not oral assurances. We are well aware of the price of such verbal assurances, words and promises.”
- Putin expresses resentment at US presence at Russian nuclear weapons sites, alleging that the US “supported separatism in the North Caucasus” against Russia, and positing that the US is to blame for the escalation of the security situation in Europe.
- He states that Russia “does not require any special, exclusive conditions for ourselves. Russia stands for equal and indivisible security throughout the Eurasian space.”
- He notes that “in the event that the clearly aggressive line of our western colleagues continues, we will take adequate retaliatory military-technical measures, and react to hostile steps with toughness. And I want to emphasize that we have every right to do this, we have every right to take actions designed to ensure the security and sovereignty of Russia.”
- Putin then states that “in this regard, as I said, it is important to continue the planned, progressive, systemic development of the Armed Forces, including taking into account the priorities that are outlined in the latest version of the National Security Strategy and the Concept for the Construction and Development of the Armed Forces until 2030.”
- He then discusses his five priorities for the development of the armed forces:
 - **Continued modernization.** “It is necessary to continue the planned, balanced equipping of troops with modern weapons and equipment, paying special attention to the supply of high-precision systems, the latest intelligence, navigation, communications and control systems.”
 - **Improvements in forms and methods.** “The priority tasks of combat and operational training should be the mastery of modern weapons, as well as new forms and methods of troop actions.... Because of this, adjustments should be made to the combat training programs in order to take them into account when conducting exercises in the coming year.”
 - **Investment into technologies to support decision-making.** “Develop decision support systems for commanders of all levels, especially at the tactical level, to introduce artificial intelligence technologies into these systems.”
 - **Nurture the ability of commanders to be leaders on the battlefield.** “In the course of operational and combat training, it is necessary to train ... versatile commanders in all respects. They should be in the personnel reserve of military leaders.”

- **Cooperation with allies in Belarus, in Central Asia, and in the Pacific.** “In a difficult international situation, it is necessary to develop military and military-technical cooperation with the SCO and CSTO member states, to pay special attention to strengthening the defense capability of the Allied State of Russia and Belarus.”

Krasnaya Zvezda also covered excerpts of Putin’s December 23 annual press conference.¹⁴ This speech covers similar topics, outlined in the quotes above. In the press conference, Putin expressed frustration at what he described as the persistent disregard by the US and NATO of Russian concerns about NATO expansion, alleged that the US supported “terrorist organizations” in the North Caucasus against Russia, argued that they were aiming to weaken and collapse Russia, and laid out his perspective on the events in Ukraine in 2014 and to the present. He posited that his interest is in the outcomes of the upcoming negotiations between Russia and the West and not the talks themselves and expressed hope that the US is ready to discuss Russia’s position that NATO should stop its eastward expansion.

In a December 21 speech at the expanded meeting of the Russian Federation Ministry of Defense advisory board, which included Russia’s president Vladimir Putin, Russian defense minister Sergey Shoigu summed up the annual results of modernization and activities in the Russian armed forces.¹⁵ According to *Krasnaya Zvezda*, he also made the following points about Western activities and the political-military and threat environment around Russia:

- **The escalation of the perceived threat environment on Russia’s “western and eastern borders.”** The US is increasing its forward presence, and around 8,000 US service members are on rotation in Western Europe. Poland is getting ready to host a US Armored Brigade Combat Team.
- **Potential INF threat.** “In the grouping of US forces on German territory, the command of fire engagement in the theater of operations has been recreated. Until 1991, it was responsible for the use of medium-range missiles. A new ‘multi-domain’ brigade has also been formed, which [the US is planning to] equip with various missile strike systems.”
- **Global missile defense architecture progression.** The Aegis Ashore missile defense system in Poland is almost completed, while in Romania it is “already on combat duty.” Further, “the deployment of the Pacific segment of the US global missile defense system continues.”
- **Allied Joint Force Command Norfolk inauguration.** “To conduct operations and control ocean communications in the North Atlantic and the Arctic, a joint NATO Allied Command was created in Norfolk.”
- **The increase in the “scale and intensity” of US and NATO military activities close to Russia.** “Increasingly, they involve strategic aviation, carrying out simulated launches of nuclear missiles at our facilities. The number of their flights near the Russian borders has more than doubled.”
- **NATO mobility exercises involving non-NATO members.** “NATO is paying special attention to the issues of the transfer of troops to the eastern flank of the alliance, including from the continental United States. The exercises are practicing various options for using coalition groups against Russia with the use of non-NATO-aligned states: Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine.”
- **NATO activities in Ukraine.** NATO’s “desire to involve the Ukrainian armed forces in its military activities poses a threat to [Russian] security, considering the attempts of Kiev to solve the Donbas problem by force. The military development of the territory of Ukraine by NATO countries continues.”
- **US activities in Ukraine.** “The situation is aggravated by the supply of helicopters, attack unmanned aerial vehicles, and ATGMs by the United States and its allies. The presence of more than 120 employees

of American PMCs in the settlements of Avdeevka and Priazovskoe in Donetsk region has been reliably established. They are equipping firing positions in residential buildings and at socially significant facilities, preparing Ukrainian special operations forces and radical armed groups for active hostilities.”

- **Other Ukraine-focused concerns.** “To commit provocations, tanks with unidentified chemical components were delivered to the cities of Avdeevka and Krasnyy Liman. The number of attacks by Ukrainian servicemen on peaceful quarters of Donbass and the positions of the people's militia of the LPR and DPR, provoking them to retaliate, is not decreasing.”

4. THE SITUATION IN UKRAINE

Coverage of Ukraine remains a key area of focus in Russian media. Several articles address the January 2 Biden-Zelensky call in which president Biden pledged to “respond decisively” should Russia invade, and to keep Ukraine fully involved in the ensuing effort to resolve the crisis.¹⁶ Meanwhile, in a December 31 interview with *RIA Novosti*, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov expressed concerns about military developments in Ukraine. He argued that “NATO member states are systematically transforming Ukraine into a military foothold against Russia, building their bases there, and using its territory for conducting exercises.” He noted that while seven such exercises were scheduled for 2021, 10 are scheduled for 2022, including one year-round maneuver. He also noted that the number of Ukrainian and Western military personnel involved in them will almost double what they were in 2021 —they are now up to 64,000. “Kiev’s regime, naturally, perceives such support as carte blanche for a military operation....An adequate response will be given to any possible military provocations by Kiev against Donbas.”¹⁷

Several articles also address recent allegations of nefarious US military actions in the region. According to reports, on December 21:

Sergei Shoigu, at an expanded meeting of the Defense Ministry board with the participation of Vladimir Putin, said that more than 120 employees of American [private military contractors] were present in two settlements of the Donetsk region. According to the minister, they are equipping firing positions in residential buildings and at socially significant facilities, and are preparing Ukrainian military operations and radical armed groups. Shoigu also claims that tanks with unidentified chemical components were delivered to the settlement of Avdeevka and the village of Krasny Liman.¹⁸

These allegations received mixed reactions from the media; a Topwar.ru article explores the military application of the alleged chemical weapons, which were identified by intelligence as botulinum toxin and benzoxazepine, delivered in 40mm cylindrical containers. “Such containers can be used with grenade launchers or unmanned aerial vehicles....It is necessary to take into account the risks of the use of these agents. In sufficient quantities, they pose a great danger to the armies and civilians of Donbas. Fortunately, the preparation of such an action was successfully disclosed and made public on time. Perhaps the publication of this information will force the Ukrainian aggressors to abandon their plans....However, the [Donetsk and Lugansk People’s Republics] must take into account all the risks and dangers, and take all necessary measures.”¹⁹ Others brushed off the allegations of chemical weapons; A *Novye Izvestiya* article notes that while this may have been a propaganda stunt by Shoigu, it is not unheard of; the US accused Iraq of manufacturing and deploying chemical weapons in the past as a pretext for military action.²⁰

5. EUROPEAN REACTION TO RUSSIA'S POSITION

Several articles highlight European reactions to the growing confrontation with Russia. *Novye Izvestiya* highlights a statement by Josep Borrel, the EU high representative for foreign affairs and security policy, in which he notes that Russian demands for no further expansion of NATO and the EU are “a purely Russian agenda item with absolutely unacceptable conditions.”²¹ *The New Times* highlights a statement by Jens Stoltenberg, the NATO general secretary, that NATO is prepared to discuss Russia’s demands but will not compromise on the principle that every country in Europe, including Ukraine, can choose its own path.²² The European Parliament adopted a resolution that any aggression by Moscow against Ukraine would result in Russia paying a high political and economic price, including directed sanctions at key Russian economic sectors and the exclusion of Russia from SWIFT. Presidential press secretary Dmitry Peskov responded by noting that Russia will respond proportionately and has already adapted to economic sanctions and may even benefit from them in terms of domestic economic development.²³ At the same time, Federation Council member Aleksey Pushkov believes that the United States will not adopt “hellish sanctions,” because that would mean it would have no further means to exert pressure on Russia. Russia would therefore have full freedom in conducting its foreign policy, something Biden does not want.²⁴

Finally, an article in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* quotes the German defense minister Kristina Lambrecht as stating that NATO is willing to discuss Russian proposals, but only collectively, not in the form of a bilateral agreement between the United States and Russia. The article suggests that despite official Russian statements to the contrary, Russian officials do not expect their proposals to be accepted as is, but rather they represent a maximal set of demands. According to the analyst Vladimir Vasil’ev, the main goal is to ensure that Russian intermediate-range missiles are not located in Europe.²⁵

Two articles highlight an increase in NATO military activity in response to Russian actions and statements. *The New Times* highlights an increase in readiness in NATO’s rapid-reaction force, which will be prepared to deploy in five days, rather than the previous seven.²⁶ Meanwhile, *Lenta.ru* notes that Sweden has also increased its level of military readiness in response to the threat from Russia.²⁷ These activities have been noted by Russian government officials. A statement by Russian presidential press secretary Dmitry Peskov notes the threat posed to Russia by NATO. In his statement, Peskov describes NATO enlargement to Ukraine and other countries that were formerly part of the Soviet Union as “a question of life or death for Moscow.”²⁸

In a briefing for foreign defense attachés, Deputy Minister Aleksandr Fomin discussed the character of NATO-Russian relations over the past two decades, highlighting NATO’s use of “hybrid methods” to contain Russia, which in his description combine dialog with accelerating military preparation. Russia meanwhile was for many years prepared for a constructive partnership and to this end largely demilitarized its Western borders. In response, NATO not only expanded its membership to the east, but also began military activities such as Baltic air policing, immediately near Russia’s border. NATO and the US also refused to guarantee that new missile defense deployments in Poland and Romania would not be targeted at Russia. He noted that NATO is focused on preparing for a large-scale high-intensity conflict with Russia and has recently started to undertake “direct provocations” that may lead to an armed conflict. As an example, he mentioned the incident with HMS *Defender* approaching Crimea, pointing out that the presence of NATO ships and reconnaissance aviation in the Black Sea region has increased substantially over the last year. He also mentioned that recent NATO documents, including its 2019 military strategy, clearly indicate that Russia presents the greatest threat to security for the alliance.²⁹

6. RUSSIAN REACTIONS TO FINLAND'S MILITARY ROLE

Several articles address developments in Finland's force structure and posture. A December 29 *Armeiskii Standart* article by Oleg Bozhev calls for a realistic assessment of Finland's military aspirations, referencing Helsinki's recent purchase of 64 F-35a fifth-generation fighter-bombers from the US.³⁰ According to Ruslan Pukhov (director of the Moscow Center for the Analysis of Strategies and Technologies, "CAST"), who is interviewed in the article, this deal, which totals \$ 11 billion, can be regarded as an "unfriendly step towards Russia." Speaking more generally, the article continues: "[T]oday the Finnish armed forces are well equipped and trained. The Finns are good fighters, and if mobilized, the Finnish army will be quite large. And given the small number of Russian armed forces in the northwest, it can potentially pose a rather serious military threat, backed up by a long-standing Russophobic motivation." The article concludes, "In the event of a military confrontation between NATO and Russia, Finland is unlikely to refrain from military action against Russia... We can hope that the Russian General Staff is considering such arguments in its plans to repel aggression. I would very much not want the airspace of the same Finland to be used by NATO and US forces to deliver air or missile strikes on [St. Petersburg]. It would be better, of course, to warn the northern neighbors about what awaits them if they choose the wrong line of behavior. And what will be left of them in this case."

Several articles report on January 2 statements from both Finnish president Niinisto and prime minister Marin, which reiterate that Finland maintains the right to apply for NATO membership should it ever choose to. A *Gazeta.ru* article interviews Nikolai Mezhevich (president of the Russian Association for Baltic Studies), who warns that if Finland joins NATO, St. Petersburg would be threatened. He argues that Russia should respond to the potential future entry of Finland into NATO by increasing its force structure in the north, specifically by strengthening the Baltic Fleet.³¹ In a *Lenta.ru* article, Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC)'s Ivan Timofeev characterizes the recent statements as "typical rhetoric" that "should not be taken seriously."³² "The minority supports this idea, because, strictly speaking, Finland can solve its problems of security and cooperation with Western countries at the moment without NATO membership." He notes that while Finland's NATO membership could help Finland become a full-fledged part of the security community, this would worsen relations with Russia, leading to security problems. Russia's foreign ministry spokesperson On December 24, Maria Zakharova said, "It is quite obvious that the accession of Finland and Sweden to NATO, which is primarily a military structure and certainly does not put the defense agenda at the forefront, but is just engaged in aggressive activities... would have serious military and political consequences that would require an adequate response from the Russian side."³³

7. RUSSIAN VIEWS OF AUSTRALIAN DEPENDENCE ON THE US AND GROWING CHINESE POWER

Many Russian writers focused on issues in the Asia-Pacific theater, especially in light of the AUKUS deal, the changing US-Chinese naval balance, and new developments in the Russian-Chinese relationship. Although the articles were disparate in their subject matter and approaches, most took a pessimistic and doubtful view regarding the United States and its efforts in the region, noting the increasing dependence of Australia on American military and economic support, as well as confirming that the rise of China is a key point of interest for Russian observers.

On the subject of AUKUS, Russian writers were united regarding its continued threat to perceived regional stability as well as the complications that it inevitably would entail. Writing in *NVO*, military analyst Vladimir

Karnozov argues that the euphoria over the AUKUS arrangement is beginning to wane in Australia, as the general public realizes both the shipbuilding commitment and military dependence that it will cause in the coming decades.³⁴ Karnozov hones in on political infighting in Australia and highlights negative comments from politicians opposed to the new deal, quoting former prime ministers Paul Keating and Malcolm Turnbull especially. He also emphasizes that the deal is perhaps most important for the UK, in terms of industrial production, but that this can only be supported through major economic stimulus—and thus further dependence—on the United States. This line of inquiry was followed in a very similar, if more tongue-in-cheek, vein by Vladimir Yerasosyan in *VPK*, who argued that “the Country of Kangaroos” would soon be in economic war with China due to this very dynamic of ever-tightening military dependence on the United States.³⁵

Elsewhere in *NVO*, Vladimir Lodkin supplied a long article on US submarine deployments in the Pacific, using the recent accident on USS *Connecticut* as a hook to discuss growing military confrontation between the United States and China in the vast region.³⁶ Lodkin argues that the collision of *Connecticut*, although its true cause is still unclear, is emblematic of increased military competition in the South China Sea, and the growing use of submarines on both sides there, and may perhaps even be associated with Chinese efforts to change the undersea topography there as well. Other reports in *NVO* in recent days similarly note the tenor of the US-Chinese clash in the region, putting together a picture of a clear geopolitical pivot on the part of the United States and the observational rise of China.³⁷

Finally, Aleksandr Staver looked to the potential for an even stronger relationship between Russia and China in light of perceived American military and political aggression at *Topwar.ru*.³⁸ He expresses frustration here, noting, “Yes, we conclude mutually beneficial contracts. Yes, we are conducting joint exercises of ours and the Chinese military, but... the matter does not go further than this. And this happens 37 times since 2013.” Staver suggests that the difficulty in reaching a higher level of coordination and cooperation by the two countries was a function of the Chinese side ultimately not being interested in arrangements that would require responsibilities to aid and support Russia. He argues that China already has critical benefits from Russia in terms of natural gas and agricultural exports and sees no reason to further tie the countries together. He states, however, that this may change in the future, given Chinese newness to their rising geopolitical position, but that “at best we are only at the very beginning of this road, and even not on the most favorable terms.”

8. JAPANESE MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS

At least three articles addressed Japanese military developments during this reporting period. A *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* article notes that Japan’s draft budget has increased next year’s military spending by 6.5 percent, to a total of \$ 51.5 billion.³⁹ The draft budget has been submitted to the parliament and will be discussed in January. According to a *Krasnaya Zvezda* article, these plans include building two new ships with the Aegis combat information and control system, buying 12 F-35 fighters from the United States, financing the deployment of garrisons on the remote southern islands between Okinawa and Taiwan, and developing a next-generation fighter by the 2030s.⁴⁰ A December 23 *Novye Izvestiya* article reports that Japan is also interested in hosting a US military base on the Ryukyu Islands to prepare for a possible escalation of the Taiwan conflict.⁴¹

The *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* article states that while Japan sees China and North Korea as its main potential adversaries, “Russia is also on the list of threats, albeit subtly.” According to the author, Japan is worried about growing defense cooperation between China and Russia. The article suggests another reason for

Japan's increased military spending, noting, "After the Americans abandoned their allies in Afghanistan to fend for themselves, Japan began to ask the question: would Washington leave them too?"⁴²

9. FALLOUT FROM AFGHANISTAN CONTINUES

The fallout from the US withdrawal from Afghanistan remains a source of interest for Russian foreign policy commentators. Writing in *NVO*, the academic Vladimir Vinokurov asked "what the US defeat in Afghanistan" meant nearly half a year on.⁴³ In a wide-ranging argument, he concluded that the withdrawal represented a significant blow to the hegemon status of the United States and was likely to usher in fully the multipolar world that had been long suggested by commentators. Similarly, Aleksandr Khranchikhin, writing in *NVO* as well, underlines the alliance-disrupting impact of the Afghanistan withdrawal.

Vinokurov argues that "the military-political situation in the world is characterized by instability, dynamism and turbulence, global reach and erosion of international law," and is dominated by two trends: a desire for democracy, as well as fairer economic and international interstate relations by "most states," and the US desire for unipolar hegemony and the imposition of its own view on how the international system should work. He argues that this latter position has grown considerably weaker following the withdrawal, as the "balance of power" has shifted globally, emboldening India and China to chart their own way, as well as voices in Europe to suggest the need to decouple from US dominance. Furthermore, Vinokurov also points to the seemingly desperate effort by the US to "shift the blame" for Afghanistan to Russia, among other points of tension and recrimination in the US-Russia relationship, as clear signs of failing confidence on the American side.

Similarly, he suggests that the next domain of concern is the changing alliance dynamics across the globe. Here, he notes the weakening of NATO and previously solid bilateral alliances between the US and countries such as the United Kingdom, even as new partnerships between Russia and China, among other possibilities, seem quite plausible. The article concludes that the short term is likely to be a time in which most powers are "in a position of waiting" as they assess the full ramifications of this major shift in the international system.

Other authors express reviews of the fallout that are similar to Vinokurov's. In his overview of the year, military analyst Aleksandr Khranchikhin argues that "NATO today not only cannot fight an equal in strength, the alliance cannot fight anyone at all," and says that the alliance itself is unraveling, arguing that "Biden is simply not going to defend Europe. Because there is no one to protect her from, and besides, America is no longer able to do it."⁴⁴ Khranchikhin goes so far as to say that "NATO is being archived. It is replaced by the Anglo-Saxon alliance emerging from the shadows."

10. DEMOCRACY SUMMIT RIDICULED AS DESPERATE ATTEMPT TO BOLSTER AN "OPERETTA DEMOCRACY"

The recent Summit for Democracies was a subject of interest and ridicule by Russian political analysts. An essay in *VPK*, written by Grigori Nikonorov and Igor Rodionov, expresses this framing of the summit in full form. The authors frame the event as a means for the United States to "consolidate the shaky position of the United States as the leader of the Western world," but find it not up to the task given the diffuse troubles of the current world order, the rise of China and Russia to international prominence, and the legitimacy crisis besetting Western democracies in particular.

Nikonorov and Rodionov describe the United States evocatively as a kind of “operetta democracy,” in which “[a] series of failures in domestic and foreign policy, discrediting of the electoral process, expressed in the storming of the Capitol with the use of costumes of operetta villains, accompanied by murders and the introduction of troops into the US capital, increasingly cause skepticism among the allies and make us think about the content of the very concept of democracy.”⁴⁵ In their view, this troublesome American domestic reality impedes the efforts of the Summit of Democracy to strengthen international democratic ties, for no better reason than that the problem of democracy at home remains acute, and not only in the United States.

The authors suggest that “American-style democracy” is in crisis, and that the US is seeking to create an international binary, in which countries are either on the side of the US—and therefore are seen as democracies—or are against it, and therefore are seen as non-democracies. This aggressive framing used the fact that Turkey and Hungary were not invited (due to their traditionalist domestic policies, according to the authors) while Poland was included (due to its “Russophobic” foreign policy). They also argue that “[i]t’s time to think about organizing a summit of states adhering to traditionalist values under the auspices of Russia,” as a counter to their understanding of the American plan to reframe democracy as the key guiding principle of American international influence. The article concludes that Europe may be a critical point of contention in this new battle between “American-style democracy” and “traditionalism,” using the waning influence of Christianity in Europe—and the unease this is causing in local populations—as a potential means to revitalize non-American ties throughout the world.

11. US AND NATO WEAPONS AND THREATS TO RUSSIA

Numerous Russian articles discuss Western weapons technologies, including missile defense, unmanned aircraft, and hypersonic systems. This writeup offers a quick digest.

A December 16 article by NVO’s Vadim Kozuylin discusses future US and NATO missile defense systems (a continuation of articles covered in our previous issue).⁴⁶ He analyzes MBDA’s Twister system, the DARC radar, US and UK thinking about hypersonic tracking and left-of-launch programs and concepts, and potential future US space-based missile defense technologies to argue that, while the “existing European missile defense system is insufficiently effective to defend against a missile attack from Russia [,] NATO militaries are striving to get rid of this deficiency” with the “obvious end goal” of “ensuring the security of Europe by neutralizing the potential of Russia’s strategic nuclear forces.” He states that the “mere existence of left of launch” could be understood as a “factor that undermines strategic stability.” A 22 December article on Topwar.ru by Kirill Ryabov also focuses on this issue to analyze the same systems.⁴⁷ Ryabov concludes that the US is in the lead among NATO states in terms of development of missile defense technologies and that indigenous European missile defense systems are unlikely to have a significant impact on their own.

A December 26 article by Aleksandr Sychev in *Novye Izvestiia* focuses on unmanned systems that could potentially accompany the B-21 Raider bomber.⁴⁸ The article extensively quotes US defense media coverage of this issue, concluding that similar programs intended to “protect pilots to the maximum level” are under development in other countries, “including Russia and China.”

A December 28 article by Kirill Ryabov on Topwar.ru discusses US missile systems, including those deployed in Europe.⁴⁹ Ryabov analyzes MLRS and HIMARS systems and also notes that Aegis Ashore is “not without foundation suspected” of being able to launch Tomahawk cruise missiles. In terms of future systems, he focuses on the Precision Strike Missile (PrSM), LRHW Dark Eagle, and Typhon programs. The article

concludes that any qualitative changes in capabilities are likely to be observed after 2023-2024, but nevertheless the threat to Russia is “multi-component, each component which must be taken into account in planning.” A January 1 article on Topwar.ru by Ryabov focuses on the challenges of the US LRHW Dark Eagle and the AGM-183A Air-Launched Rapid Response Weapon, noting that the “development [of both systems] has been faced with serious problems” while US “geopolitical opponents are already creating analogous or other systems and have put them on combat duty.”⁵⁰ A December 27 article by Vitaliy Orlov in *VPK* analyzes the development of the aforementioned systems as well as Intermediate-Range Conventional Prompt Strike Weapon and discusses possible Russian responses.⁵¹ Among such responses, he notes possible combat duty of Russian vessels capable of carrying the Tsirkon missile system, shifts in targeting approaches, and an acceleration in the development of systems intended to destroy hypersonic missiles.

A December 28 article on Topwar.ru by Andrey Voskresenskiy discusses the NATO approach to military innovation, noting, “This is an advanced system for the accumulation of scientific and engineering personnel, as well as their projects—a system that needs to be taken into account, studied and from which [we] need to learn.”⁵²

Another article in *Novye Izvestiia* discusses potential US concerns about the Chinese railgun program given the US decision to give up on its own development of railgun systems.⁵³

12. RESTRICTIONS ON EXPORT OF US SPACE TECHNOLOGIES

In a December 23 article on Topwar.ru, Evgeniy Fedorov discusses interest in the US legislative branch to restrict the export of space technologies to Russia.⁵⁴ Fedorov focuses in particular on a bill introduced in December 2021 by Senator Marco Rubio called the Space Protection of American Command and Enterprise (SPACE) Act. He notes that the bill seeks to reduce risks of industrial espionage to the US space industrial base and restrict the export of space technologies to Russia and China. He posits that “experts from *Russia Today*” claim that the bill was introduced because the US technological leadership in the space sector is in decline, and argues that this assessment is not entirely correct because US private companies hold a substantial lead in the space tourism sector. Fedorov notes also that the bill has “concrete destructive goals, not aimed at the defense of [US] technologies” such as the “call to ‘torpedo’ the Russo-Chinese International Lunar Research Station project” because the US, faced with challenges in its lunar program, is pinning its hopes to the SpaceX Starship lunar lander. He argues that there is a danger in Western efforts to lead Russia into a “technological isolation, which can in many ways be more dangerous than financial isolation” and that the success of private space in the US calls for urgent action and reforms by Roscosmos.

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