



Russian Media Analysis

Russian Perspectives on Western Military Activities

November 8 – November 17, 2021

CNA Russia Studies Program

Abstracts

1. [Putin speech discusses Western relations](#)

In a wide-ranging November 18, 2021, speech to the expanded meeting of the Foreign Ministry Board, Russian president Vladimir Putin discusses Russia's relations with the West. He notes the continued importance of the Ukraine situation, Western "indulgence" of Ukraine and "provocations," Western disregard of Russian red lines, and a two-step Russian approach that includes both the continuation of tensions and efforts to secure long-term security guarantees for Russia. He further discusses the situation in Belarus and challenges in Russia's relations with the EU, NATO, and the United States.

2. [NATO activities in Black Sea region threaten Russia](#)

A large percentage of Russian coverage of US and NATO activities during the reporting period concerns NATO's military activities in the Black Sea region. This includes several statements from senior Russian officials expressing concern about rising tensions in the region. Commentators on the situation highlight the role of US and Ukrainian domestic politics, as well as alliance-building and reassurance efforts on the part of the United States.

3. [Tensions in Donbas and Western aid to Ukraine](#)

Russian media continue to focus on Western responses to the situation in the Donbas, generally minimizing the scale and significance of Russian troop movements to the region. Coverage is primarily concerned with Western statements and characterizations of Russian military actions, particularly recent intelligence that suggests Russia could plan to invade Ukraine by early 2022. Other articles argue that Ukrainian president Zelensky is stoking tensions to inflate approval ratings, and discuss Western military aid to Kiev.

CNA Occasional Paper | 1



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[4. Migrant crisis in Belarus brings mixed reaction](#)

The ongoing political crisis on the Belarusian border with Poland has attracted considerable attention from many Russian writers. Many of the articles published in recent weeks have been largely descriptive and seeking to follow the dynamics of the developing situation. Yet some articles have taken an analytical frame, asking what the crisis means for relations with the West, as well as the potential for the crisis to turn into a situation of genuine conflict.

[5. New Polish defense legislation and the migrant crisis](#)

Several Russian commentators touch on military developments in Poland in recent weeks, largely prompted by new Polish legislation on military doctrine. This “Law of the Defense of the Fatherland” is seen as a major statement on the side of Poland towards a military buildup and modernization program aimed at Russia that involves a massive increase in the size of the Polish army. Russian observers also continue to follow the ongoing crisis on the Belarusian-Polish border and the hard line taken by Polish authorities towards border crossings.

[6. Western responses to Russian ASAT test](#)

More than a dozen articles cover Russia’s November 15 test of a direct-ascent antisatellite (ASAT) weapon as well as the subsequent reactions from the West. According to the United States, the test, which targeted Russia’s own “Tselina-D” satellite, created more than 1,500 pieces of space debris that pose risk of severe damage to spacecraft and astronauts. The bulk of the response in the Russian press downplays any potential deleterious effects that the test may have caused, and highlights hypocrisy in the United States’ response, which characterized the test as “dangerous and irresponsible.”

[7. Broad Russian perspectives on Russia-NATO relations](#)

Two articles provide broad Russian analytical community perspectives on NATO-Russian relations. An article in *Nezavisimoe voennoe obozrenie* analyzes Russia’s relations with NATO through the prism of the concept of “sharp power” and argues that one successful example was the shuttering for a time of undetermined duration its mission to NATO and NATO representation in Moscow. An article in *Voенно-promyshlennyy kur'er* discusses future threats to “Russian sovereignty and territorial integrity” from the West.

[8. Karaganov interviewed about great power politics](#)

The November 10 *Voенно-promyshlennyy kur'er* offers its readers a lengthy and wide-ranging interview with Sergey Karaganov—the head of the Council on Foreign and Defense Policy and dean of the Faculty of World Economy and International Affairs at Moscow’s Higher School of Economics—on the ongoing process of the loss of Western global influence, great power politics, and Russia’s emerging ideological foundation.



9. [Speculation about reasons for Burns' Moscow visit](#)

Several articles discuss the possible reasons for the November 2-3 visit to Moscow of CIA director Bill Burns. Aleksandr Staver posits that the visit was primarily to “save the US image” and discusses a long list of potential agenda items. Vladimir Vasilyev argues that Burns is President Biden’s personal emissary on sensitive diplomatic issues during a time when the United States “has been forced toward a strategy and tactic of historical retreat” and discusses diverging narratives in US media concerning reasons for the visit.

10. [Shoigu and Lavrov meet with French counterparts](#)

The November 15 issue of the Ministry of Defense (MOD) newspaper *Krasnaya Zvezda* highlights the November 12 visit of Russian defense minister Sergey Shoigu along with the Russian foreign minister Sergey Lavrov to France for dialogue with their French counterparts in the 2+2 format focused on regional security, strategic stability, and other issues. The paper provides quotes from Shoigu and Lavrov offering concerns about the escalation in the security environment.

11. [Dimensions of Arctic contestation](#)

Russian commentators have focused on military infrastructure in the Arctic in recent weeks. One point of interest is the growing base known as the “Arctic Trefoil,” situated on Alexandra Land in the Franz Josef Land archipelago. One article suggests that this base was becoming a site of increasing concern for the US Arctic planners. Another piece provides a broader overview of the potential for the Arctic to be a region of military competition and contention.

12. [Transfer to India of S-400 missiles will not lead to sanctions](#)

Two recent articles discuss the politics surrounding the transfer of Russian S-400 missiles to India. The first notes that the transfer of equipment is proceeding according to the timetable laid out in the 2018 sales agreement, even though the US continues to be unhappy about the deal. The second highlights the likelihood that India would not be subject to punishments typically inflicted on countries that buy Russian arms, arguing that the proposal is the result of a belief in Washington that sanctions would damage the development of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) coalition that the United States is building to counter China.



1. Putin speech discusses Western relations

In a wide-ranging November 18, 2021, speech to the expanded meeting of the Foreign Ministry Board, Russian president Vladimir Putin discusses Russia's relations with the West.¹ He notes the continued importance of the Ukraine situation, Western "indulgence" of Ukraine and "provocations," Western disregard of Russian red lines, and a two-step Russian approach that includes both the continuation of tensions and efforts to secure long-term security guarantees for Russia. He further discusses the challenges in Russia's relations with the EU, NATO, and the United States. Specifically, Putin makes several key points:

- **The situation in Ukraine remains very important to Russia:** "Ukraine's internal crisis is among the most pressing and sensitive issues for us, which has so far remained unresolved." He argues that Ukraine has not fulfilled its commitments under Minsk II or the Normandy format, that Minsk II has now become international law, and that France and Germany are "are indulging the current Kiev leadership's course on dismantling" Minsk II, even though "there is no alternative to implementing the Minsk agreements in full."
- **The West is making the Ukraine situation worse:** "Our Western partners are exacerbating the situation by supplying Kiev with modern lethal weapons, conducting provocative military exercises in the Black Sea and other regions close to our borders." He notes concerns with US strategic bomber flights in the Black Sea area close to Russian borders.
- **The West is disregarding Russian red lines:** "We constantly express our concerns about these matters and talk about red lines, but of course, we understand that our partners are peculiar in the sense that they have a very—how to put it mildly—superficial approach to our warnings about red lines." He notes the past and ongoing concerns about NATO expansions, positing that the missile defense systems in Poland and Romania "can easily be put to offensive use with the Mk-41 launchers there; replacing the software takes only minutes."
- **Proposal of a two-step Russian approach to the Ukraine situation:** (1) "It is important for [relations] to remain in this state [of tensions] for as long as possible, so that it does not occur to them to stage some kind of conflict on our western borders which we do not need, we do not need a new conflict"; and (2) "It is imperative to push for serious long-term guarantees that ensure Russia's security in this area, because Russia cannot constantly be thinking about what could happen there tomorrow."
- **The situation in Belarus:** "It is also impossible to ignore that Western countries are using the migration crisis on Belarus-Poland border as a new reason for tension in a region close to us, for putting pressure on Minsk, while at the same time forgetting their own humanitarian commitments." He notes that, while Belarus has internal challenges, Russia "will undoubtedly continue its policy of strengthening ties and deepening integration" and is committed to the implementation of programs related to the Union State.
- **Russia's relations with the EU:** "The EU continues to push us back with its sanctions, unfriendly actions and unfounded accusations while ignoring the obvious benefits of interaction in politics, the economy and culture." The EU needs to be willing to "establish and maintain equal and respectful cooperation."
- **Russia's relations with NATO:** "A similar, if not more depressing, situation prevails in our relations with NATO which has adopted a markedly confrontational stance and is stubbornly and



demonstratively bringing its military infrastructure closer to our borders.” He notes that while Russia will “provide a proper response to NATO’s military activity along Russia’s borders,” the Alliance needs to behave in ways that assure regional and global security. He points out frustration with the expulsion of Russian diplomats from the Russian Mission to NATO, stating, “If they do not want to cooperate with us, okay, don’t, it is not that we are desperate to cooperate with them.”

- **Russia’s relations with the US:** Putin argues that “Russia-US relations ... to put it mildly, are in an unsatisfactory state” including because of the inability to resolve the crisis around embassies and diplomatic staff. He states that “the summit with President Biden in Geneva last June opened up a few opportunities for a dialogue and gradual alignment, straightening out our relations, and it is important that both sides consistently expand the agreements reached.” He further notes, “Joint work has begun on the strategic stability and information security agenda. True, our interests, assessments, and positions on many bilateral and international issues differ—this is indeed so and everyone is well aware of it—sometimes the difference is dramatic. However, I would like to say this again, we are open to contact and an exchange of views, to a constructive dialogue.”

2. NATO activities in Black Sea region threaten Russia

A large percentage of Russian coverage of US and NATO activities during the reporting period concerned NATO’s military activities in the Black Sea region. This included two official statements by the Ministry of Defense (MOD) and one by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA). On November 10, *Krasnaya Zvezda* published an MOD statement that US military activity was a destabilizing factor in the Black Sea.² The statement highlights the presence of three US Navy ships and overflights by B-1B strategic bombers within 100 km of Russia’s border. The statement notes that while the ships had arrived for a multinational exercise, they had effectively created a multinational naval task force operating close to Russia’s border. The statement claims that one goal of US military activity in the region is military development of Ukraine and that the current exercise is part of an effort to study how to conduct a military operation against Russia in the event that Ukraine chooses to solve the Donbas conflict through military means. The second MOD statement, published in *Krasnaya Zvezda* on November 12, notes that aggressive US and NATO military activity in the Black Sea has continued to increase and presents a threat to regional security and strategic stability.³ It highlights NATO reconnaissance flights, including a British flight that approached Russian territory. The statement also highlights measures that the Russian military is taking to track the NATO military activity. Finally, a statement by an MFA spokesperson, as described in *Izvestiya* on November 17, declares that US exercises in the Black Sea are a provocation designed to test Russian reactions and calls on the US government to stop its efforts to increase tension in the region.⁴

Two *Izvestiya* articles also mention Vladimir Putin’s reactions to these NATO military activities. The first mentions an interview on Russian television in which Putin called the “unplanned” exercise a serious challenge to Russia, especially because it involves a combination of ships and strategic aviation.⁵ The article also discusses statements of concern by other Russian officials and the actions the Russian military is undertaking in response. In the second statement, made during talks with French president Macron, Putin called the exercises provocative and liable to raise tensions in Russia-NATO relations, also connecting them to the worsening crisis in the Donbas.⁶ An article in *Topwar.ru* mentions reactions by a number of other senior officials, including Foreign Minister Lavrov and Defense Minister Shoigu.⁷ The former highlighted the negative impact of the activities on regional stability, while the latter noted that the Russian military is constantly monitoring the situation.



Russian officials have further expanded on what they argue is the provocative nature of US activities. Viktor Vodolatskiy, a senior State Duma deputy, points to a US desire to provoke a conflict between Russia and Ukraine.⁸ “All US actions are aimed at encouraging Ukraine to act provocatively.... For the United States, it is necessary for conflicts to take place on the territory of another state and distract from the problems that exist in the States themselves.” Former deputy foreign minister Sergey Ordzhonikidze suggests that “the actions are coordinated.” He continues, “Political statements are accompanied by military demonstrations, and vice versa. The US wants us to be nervous. But NATO countries are not ready for serious actions or provocations—they know the strength of the Russian army. Although they can push their Ukrainian ally to take action in Donbas. Anything can be expected from the Kiev regime.”⁹

Russian commentators express particular concern about the role played by US and NATO aircraft during the exercise. Retired air force commander Lt. General Valery Gorbenko describes the purpose of these activities as follows: “Actual maps of the area have long been made with the help of satellites. Now NATO pilots are trying to find the Russian air defense—to find and clarify the coordinates of important military facilities. For example, they are looking for where and at what frequencies radar stations operate.”¹⁰

Several analytic articles focus on the reasons for the US to send ships to the Black Sea. An article in *Krasnaya Zvezda* suggests that Washington believes that whoever dominates the Black Sea can control the South Caucasus and from there regions farther east.¹¹ It also notes that the sea is significant for the US because it provides direct access to Russian territory. It notes a recent CEPA report that recommends that NATO shift from periodic patrols of the Black Sea to a permanent Black Sea maritime policing mission and highlights the existing frequency of NATO exercises in the region. It also suggests that Secretary Austin’s recent visit to the region was an inspection tour of a potential military operations theater, highlighting his efforts to get Georgia, Ukraine, and Romania to build up their military forces and cooperate more closely with NATO and the United States. The article concludes by noting the possibility of the establishment of an analog to the Australia–United Kingdom–United States (AUKUS) alliance in the region, which would further increase tensions in the region and could spark a war. Viktor Krestyaninov, writing in *Argumenty Nedeli*, suggests that as part of this effort the US military is preparing to deploy naval strike missiles in Romania by 2024, with the potential for subsequent deployment in Bulgaria and Turkey.¹² He argues that these plans would lead to a new arms race in the Black Sea and potentially a situation similar to the Cuban Missile Crisis.

In an interview with *Izvestiya*, military expert Dmitry Boltenkov argued that the NATO exercise in the Black Sea is primarily a public relations move, rather than a real effort to improve military preparedness.¹³ “This can be seen both in the duration and in the list of tasks that were trained.... The US command ship USS Mount Whitney regularly visits the Black Sea, albeit not annually, so this, too, was nothing extraordinary. Another thing is that every visit there by a large American military unit causes exaggerated joy among our Ukrainian neighbors, which is absolutely not based on anything.” Viktor Murakhovsky, the editor of the *Arsenal Otechestva* journal, said that Russia’s strong reaction was understandable, because the exercise was an unscheduled event which has not happened before with such maneuvers, the involvement of non-NATO countries—Ukraine and Georgia, and the participation of strategic aviation.¹⁴ Igor Korotchenko, the chief editor of *Natsionalnaya Oborona*, suggests that the main threat results from the possibility that this is a prelude to the creation of a multinational NATO naval grouping in the Black Sea which could “play a support role in the event of a possible Ukrainian invasion of Donbas.”¹⁵

Vladimir Yevseyev, writing in *Izvestiya*, lists three reasons why he believes the United States is increasing tensions in the Black Sea: “First, Joe Biden is under serious pressure from the Republican Party and the US Congress as a whole, who are not interested in fundamentally improving relations with Moscow. Second, the United States cannot but support its NATO allies—Great Britain and Turkey, which are increasing the



supply of arms to Ukraine.... Third, the Americans are concerned about the deployment of Russian troops allegedly along the borders of Ukraine.”¹⁶ He argues that even in such conditions, it is highly important to continue bilateral discussions at the highest level.

The political scientist Maksim Zharov highlights the role of Ukraine’s domestic situation: “The internal situation in Ukraine is now such that Zelensky will very soon have to choose between a military operation in Donbas and early resignation from the presidency.”¹⁷ Retired Vice-Admiral Viktor Patrushev, writing in *VPK*, suggests that NATO is planning to construct military bases in southern Ukraine as part of a planned escalation of tensions in the region.¹⁸ He warns that the US could use its naval dominance to attack Russian territory with a cruise missile barrage, in part because many of the US ships and weapons systems are reaching the end of their lifespan. He suggests that the US would rather use the equipment in battle than just retire it.

3. Tensions in Donbas and Western aid to Ukraine

A large share of Russian media continue to focus on Western responses to the situation in the Donbas. Coverage is primarily concerned with reactions to Western statements on increased tension in the region, as well as Western military aid to Kiev.

As noted in the previous issue of *Russia Media Monitoring*, coverage generally minimizes the scale and significance of Russian troop movements to the region. According to *Izvestiya*, sources from the Russian Defense Ministry noted: “Parts of the Western and Southern military districts are engaged in routine combat training. There are no large-scale maneuvers in the border area.”¹⁹ Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov is quoted, suggesting that Russians “shouldn’t waste your time” with unsubstantiated Western allegations of increased Russian deployments. He continues to say that the Kremlin had characterized recent US intelligence suggesting that Russia could plan to invade Ukraine in early 2022 as targeted disinformation. On Sunday, November 21, he stated that “this hysteria is being whipped up artificially.”²⁰ *Izvestiya* also notes that recent satellite imagery posted by Western sources, which purportedly shows armored vehicles and artillery on the Russian border with Ukraine, actually depicts the Russian town Yelnya on the Russian border of Belarus.²¹ The same article quotes Peskov, who stresses that the movement of troops on Russian territory is “exclusively our business,” and does not threaten anyone.

A Topwar.ru article claims that recent tensions in the Donbas, as well as those that occurred in spring 2021, are results of Ukrainian president Zelensky’s efforts to increase his approval rating.²² The article continues to say that, while Zelensky campaigned on restoring peace to the country,

[he] quickly learned that without the support of the United States, whose main goal was to create an anti-Russian foothold out of Ukraine and continue the war in the Donbas, his presidency is not worth a pittance. From a peacemaker, he turned into someone more ardent than Poroshenko, a champion of the continuation of the war, supporting gangster nationalists, avoiding the implementation of the Minsk agreements and asserting accusations of Russia’s aggression.

Four articles address US and UK military aid to Ukraine. A Gazeta.ru article reports that the United States delivered around 80 tons of ammunition to Ukraine on November 14, noting that this was the fourth delivery within the \$60 million of additional security assistance which President Biden approved in August.²³ An *Izvestiya* article reports that Kiev has also asked Washington for Harpoon anti-ship missiles, in addition to the Javelin missiles it already received.²⁴ A BMPD article reports that on November 12, the



United Kingdom signed an agreement to provide 1.7 billion pounds in loans for the development of the Ukrainian Navy over the next 10 years.²⁵ This agreement increases the total amount of a previous version of the loan signed October 2020 by roughly 500 million pounds. According to the BMPD article, the loans will help fund the construction of two bases for the Ukrainian Navy (in Ochakov and Berdyansk), the construction of eight large 50-meter missile P50-U class ships, and Ukraine’s acquisition of two Sandown-class minesweepers from the British navy. A VPK article on the same topic notes that the Ukrainian Constitution prohibits the deployment of foreign military bases on its territory, and states, “This is why President Zelenskyy calls the de-facto US-British naval bases Ukrainian.” It adds that “the escalation of the war in the Donbass will increase the incomes of the arms dealers in Britain and the United States.”

One Gazeta.ru article highlights a recent piece in the US publication *19FortyFive*, in which the author, Senior Fellow for Defense Priorities Daniel Davis, explores the likelihood of a US-Russia war over Ukraine.²⁶ Davis argues that the United States should aim to avoid an unnecessary war with Russia and preserve peace in Europe, adding, “The cold, hard fact is that Ukraine is not a member of NATO and thus does not have Article 5 security guarantees. We should not extend such guarantees.”²⁷ Davis notes that the worst-case scenario if tensions escalate could include a “spiral out of control into a catastrophic nuclear exchange.”

4. Migrant crisis in Belarus brings mixed reaction

Several articles in *Novye Izvestiya* review the migration situation in Belarus as of early November. Amid largely descriptive statements, the newspaper tends to highlight more extreme interpretations of NATO and US stated reactions. For example, one article suggests that “the US is convinced that the real goal of the migration crisis is to create an information cover for the situation with the advancement of Russian troops to the border with Ukraine,” while the EU “is concerned about the invasion of aggressive illegal migrants who are trying to storm the border by force and declare the need to introduce NATO troops to protect the EU borders from the illegal army.”²⁸

In *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, Vladimir Mukhin raises the potential for peacekeeping troops being needed to be deployed to Belarus in order to solve the crisis.²⁹ He notes that CSTO troops, currently training in Tatarstan, Russia, at “Indestructible Brotherhood-2021,” are training for migration and refugee control situations there and could readily be brought into the crisis zone if needed. Mukhin focuses on the potential for armed conflict due to tensions, with Polish border guards possibly firing on migrants—and in doing so leading to reaction by Belarusian counterparts.

Several articles in *Topwar.ru* review the crisis from the perspective of Belarus, as well from broader regional security dimensions. Roman Skomorokhov asks whether “Russia or Europe” should be more concerned with the conflict, immediately presuming that any turn to violence would immediately draw in Russia directly—given the uselessness of the Belarusian armed forces.³⁰ He expresses reluctance at Russia being obligated to defend Belarus, given the heavily one-sided nature of their strategic relationship and the maverick approach to decision-making taken by Belarusian president Lukashenka.

Another long article in *Topwar.ru* by Skomorokhov expresses glee at the shortsightedness of the EU’s migration policy, especially as developed by Germany, which has created incentives for mass migration that are now becoming politically toxic, not least for their blowback into other member-states’ very different priorities.³¹ A similar article by Sergei Osipov uses the Belarusian side’s effort to push migrants across the border as an analogy for Lukashenka as “an experienced swordsman” making a “light ‘prick’ [or ‘injection]” to test the reaction.³² Both Skomorokhov and Osipov, although enjoying the crisis on the Western side, are



united in their cynical belief that the entire migrant flow is fully controlled and directed by Belarusian authorities for maximum foreign policy impact. Osipov notes that the fact that the crisis is on the Grodno border crossings, rather than the main crossing at Brest, further underlines the intentionality of the Belarusian position, along with the vast increase in Belavia flights from Iraq and Turkey direct to Minsk.

Finally, two articles in *Voenno-promyshlennyyi kur'er* look at the crisis in very different ways. An article by Stanislav Ivanov on November 15 asks exactly why Kurds from both Syria and Iraq are arriving in Belarus, given the very different conditions between the two groups.³³ Ivanov argues that “the situation in Iraq is more favorable,” which leads to a puzzle as to why this group in particular has such a strong showing. He concludes that it must be due to an external force enticing them: “The families of Iraqi Kurds trapped in the forests of Belarus can hardly be classified as refugees fleeing armed conflicts or starvation. Most likely, they succumbed to the agitation of some intermediaries and, in search of a better life in Europe, decided on illegal migration.”

A second article, also appearing in the November 15 issue of *Voenno-promyshlennyyi kur'er*, looks at the crisis through the lens of regional security guarantees of the Russian-Belarusian Union-State.³⁴ Vladimir Yeranosian argues that recent new agreements signed in the Supreme State Council of Russia and Belarus—a Union-State plenary institution—create a joint military doctrine that extends Russia’s nuclear umbrella as well as the necessity for regional air supremacy that is going to result in considerable further integration of militaries and Russian capabilities in Belarus. Yeranosian notes that while airpower and missile defense are likely to approach acceptable levels soon, the imbalance in special forces outfits is quite noticeable, not only compared to those of the United States but even compared to those of regional neighbors such as Poland.

5. New Polish defense legislation and the migrant crisis

Several Russian commentators touch on the military developments in Poland in recent weeks, largely prompted by new Polish legislation on military doctrine. This “Law of the Defense of the Fatherland” is seen as a major statement on the side of Poland towards a military buildup and modernization program aimed against Russia that involves a massive increase in the size of the Polish army. Russian observers also continue to follow the ongoing crisis on the Belarusian-Polish border and the hard line taken by Polish authorities towards border crossings.

Novye Izvestiya briefly reviews the new law on November 8, focusing on Deputy Prime Minister Jaroslaw Kaczynski’s speech presenting the bill.³⁵ It notes that if fully implemented, the Polish army will become the largest in Europe. The law acts as a major update to the long-unmodified defense law of 1967—which still contains many elements appropriate to the Communist era but now long out of date. The article also ties the new defense initiative with the threats of “hybrid war” with Russia and Belarus via the current migrant crisis on the interstate border.

Writing on November 15 in *Topwar.ru*, Evgeny Fedorov characterizes the new legislation as a sign that Poland is turning into a “dangerous neighbor” for Russia, with general remarks about how this is in line with the Law and Justice Party’s government’s “Russophobic hysteria.”³⁶ Fedorov emphasizes new sales of M1A2 SEPv3 tanks from the United States to Poland, as well as a variety of other equipment modernization plans, including the purchase of Bayraktar TB2 drones from Turkey. He notes that the Polish defense minister has partially justified the tank expenses by comparing them to Russia’s T-14 Armata tanks—despite the fact that the latter are still being fine-tuned and are in very low numbers. Fedorov also



highlighted a quantitative change in the Polish military’s staffing—a doubling of the size of the army and an increase in the territorial army’s size as well, which he suggested would likely involve an increase in the number of female servicemembers.

Finally, Anton Khodasevich, writing at *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, reviews new measures being undertaken to deal with the migrant crisis on the Belarusian-Polish border and the general state of tensions between the countries.³⁷ He highlights the unanimity among Polish political and state officials against allowing the migrants to cross, even including figures in opposition to the sitting government. The author also provides illustrations of clever arguments by Belarusian “propagandists” on state TV, which have been framing the situation as a humanitarian crisis for which international tribunals need to be assembled. Khodasevich’s narrative suggested that tensions were likely to get worse, given the hard reaction by Poland and Lithuania—and the one expected from NATO should the crisis intensify.

6. Western responses to Russian ASAT test

More than a dozen articles cover Russia’s November 15 test of a direct-ascent antisatellite (ASAT) weapon as well as the subsequent reactions from the West. According to the United States, the test, which targeted Russia’s own “Kosmos-1408” 11F619 series “Tselina-D” satellite, created more than 1,500 pieces of space debris that pose risk of severe damage to spacecraft and astronauts. According to BMPD, this is Russia’s 10th test of the Nudol antisatellite weapon, though it is the first to kinetically destroy a target.³⁸ The bulk of the response in the Russian press downplays any potential deleterious effects that the test may have caused and highlights hypocrisy in the United States’ reactions.

According to a *Gazeta.ru* article, Russian officials note that this scheduled test was carried out in accordance with international law, including the 1967 Outer Space Treaty.³⁹ Officials also note that the United States, China, and India have all previously conducted their own kinetic ASAT tests. A RIA Novosti article recalls that “in 1985, the United States, using an ASM-135 ASAT antisatellite missile launched from an F-15 fighter, shot down its scientific satellite Solwind at an altitude of 555 kilometers. And in 2008, the American ship-borne antimissile SM-3 at an altitude of 247 kilometers destroyed the military spacecraft USA-193.”⁴⁰ According to *Krasnaya Zvezda*, the Russian Ministry of Defense characterized US concerns as “hypocritical,” given these and a number of other recent actions.⁴¹ The Ministry’s statement reads as follows:

[T]he United States created a space command in 2020 and officially adopted a new space strategy. One of its main goals is “to create a comprehensive military advantage in space.” The Pentagon [is] actively developing and, without any notifications, testing in orbit the latest types of various strike-combat weapons, including the latest modifications of the X-37 unmanned spacecraft. The actions of America are assessed as a threat and are incompatible with the declared goals of the peaceful use of outer space.

According to *Gazeta.ru*, Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Zakharova argues that Moscow, unlike Washington, did not enshrine the goal of achieving military superiority in space in its doctrines, and since the beginning of space exploration has been consistently striving to prevent an arms race and preserve space for peaceful purposes.⁴² According to Zakharova, the international community needs to adopt a strategy to prevent the deployment of weapons in space as soon as possible, noting, “There is a basis for such work—the Russian-Chinese draft treaty on the prevention of the placement of weapons in outer space and the use of force or the threat of force against space objects.” Both the Foreign Ministry and Ministry of Defense have stated that Russia is ready to discuss the issue with all interested parties, “however, the United States and its allies are blocking its adoption.”



A number of articles and statements minimize any potential adverse effects caused by Russia's test. Responding to US claims that the Russian test put International Space Station astronauts at risk, the Ministry of Defense statement reads: "The United States knows for certain that the resulting fragments, in terms of test time and orbital parameters, did not and will not pose a threat to orbital stations, spacecraft and space activities. Fragments are included in the main catalog of the domestic space control system and immediately tracked until they cease to exist."⁴³ An *RBC* article reports that while the ISS crew had to seek shelter from the cloud of space debris twice on the morning of November 15, "The station and the crew did not suffer: cosmonauts and astronauts took refuge in Soyuz MS-19 and Crew Dragon for safety reasons. NASA stated that the risk of collision with space debris is 'very small.'"⁴⁴

7. Broad Russian perspectives on Russia-NATO relations

In a November 11 article in *Nezavisimoe voennoe obozrenie*, Vladimir Vinokurov, professor at the Diplomatic Academy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, analyzes Russia's relations with NATO through the prism of the concept of "sharp power" proposed by the National Endowment for Democracy in the context of analyzing the actions of authoritarian regimes. He argues that this concept has become popular among experts and analytics, and that even Joseph Nye wrote that sharp power is the combination of smart power and soft power. Vinokurov argues that Moscow successfully employed sharp power by shuttering for a time of undetermined duration its Mission to NATO and NATO representation in Moscow. He argues that this break in NATO-Russian relations "was not the fault of the Russian authorities, who waited, but were unable to achieve an equal dialogue and desire to jointly work from NATO" and thus all the blame is on NATO's decision to expel eight Russian representatives. Vinokurov notes that NATO policy is becoming increasingly aggressive and the Alliance seems to be inflating the "Russian threat" to improve internal cohesion and "create the visibility of its importance in the current geopolitical environment." The key cause for Russia's employment of sharp power, he states, is the "NATO efforts to integrate Ukraine and Georgia," and in this situation the maintenance of Russian presence in NATO would dilute Moscow's efforts to defend its red lines. As a next step, Vinokurov proposes the establishment of a list of international organizations unfriendly toward Russia and the inclusion of NATO on that list.⁴⁵

In a November 8 article in *Voенно-promyshlennyy kur'er*, Yuriy Zverev, a geographer from the Immanuel Kant Baltic Federal University presents his research for an Army-2021 conference roundtable on the future threats to "Russian sovereignty and territorial integrity" from the West. The article puts forward an assessment of military might (according to the Global Firepower index), military size, and defense spending of Russia's immediate neighbors. Zverev notes that five out of eight of Russia's immediate Western neighbors have NATO military contingents on their territory, that Finland also participates in NATO exercises, and that Ukraine has allowed foreign military exercises and the use of its airspace by US B-52 bombers. He then discusses second-order neighbors, noting that they also have US presence on their territories and that some even have missile defense installations whose "universal launchers allow the employment of missile defense rockets as well as Tomahawk cruise missiles." He notes concern about the numbers of NATO forces, the growth of "institutional and infrastructure conditions" for mobility, the EU creation of infrastructure for NATO needs, and the possibility of the eventual emergence of divisions and corps in Western Europe. He concludes with a discussion of how the Baltic states, Poland, and the Czech Republic have become "centers of anti-Russian information-psychological warfare" and the "consolidation and coordination of Russian nonsystemic opposition aimed at ... an attack against Russia and its reshaping from the inside."⁴⁶



8. Karaganov interviewed about great power politics

The November 10 *Voенно-promyshlennyy kur'er* offers its readers a lengthy and wide-ranging interview with Sergey Karaganov, the head of Council on Foreign and Defense Policy and dean of the Faculty of World Economy and International Affairs at Moscow's Higher School of Economics. In the interview, Karaganov discusses the state of the international environment and prospective dynamics among great powers and argues that “the main process taking place currently in the world” is the loss of Western global dominance—which the West is strongly resisting, including through “information warfare.” He notes that China, while currently “not aiming toward global hegemony,” may eventually change its mind, though that will inspire regional pushback. Argues Karaganov, “China, at present currently wants to return to global positions that it considers appropriate for itself. This doesn't counter Russia's interests at this point. Close relations with Beijing are our largest external strategic asset.” He further posits that the West made several mistakes: rejection in the 1990s of “Russian elites' efforts to become allied with the West,” wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the facilitation of China's economic growth in hopes that it would become more democratic. At the same time, he maintains that the US will maintain its leading global positions over the long term even though it will be unable to push China out of the race.

The interview then transitions to a discussion of Russia's current “search of its long terms policies and its ideological foundation after the very difficult 1990s.” Karaganov posits that Russia should be an “independent great power, friendly toward China, but playing out its politics in a triangle that includes the United States” and that it should also “actively participate in the construction of a Greater Eurasia.” He notes that Putin's 2021 Valdai conference speech focused on “smart conservatism” was an important start to the discussion of a Russian ideology and suggests support for greater Russian investment into the economic development of Siberia.⁴⁷

9. Speculation about reasons for Burns' Moscow visit

In a November 14 article in *Topwar.ru*, commentator Aleksandr Staver speculates about the possible reasons for the visit of CIA director Bill Burns to Moscow on November 2-3, positing that the visit was primarily to “save the US image.” Writes Staver: “Internal instability, the standoff between President and Congress, the exit of the US military from Afghanistan and others, have significantly undermined the power of the presidency as well as the image of the US as a leader of the Western world.” In this environment, he notes that Burns “perfectly understands” that the current trajectory of the relationship, particularly “the provocations by US warships on Russian borders,” could result in the destruction of these vessels. Staver then lists the issues that he believes were discussed: (1) “restoration of diplomatic contact”; (2) arms control and strategic stability; (3) cybersecurity; (4) terrorism, particularly in Syria, in the context of changing Turkish policy that could pit Washington against Ankara; (5) nonproliferation issues, particularly concerning Iran and North Korea; and (6) Afghanistan. Most importantly, he posits that the talks were aimed at (7) stabilizing the NATO-Russian relationship and European security; and (8) US attempts to insert a wedge in the relationship between Russia and China.⁴⁸

In a November 16 article in *Voенно-Promyshlennyy Kur'er*, Vladimir Vasil'yev of the Russian Academy of Sciences' Institute of USA and Canada Studies recounts Burns' biography, including his role in the negotiations with Iran during the administration of President Obama, and notes that he is President Biden's personal emissary on sensitive diplomatic issues during a time when the United States “has been forced



toward a strategy and tactic of historical retreat” to prevent “the Afghan syndrome” from spreading to other regions in the world. Vasi’yev summarizes CNN (“the bullhorn of the Biden administration”) and *New York Times* coverage of the Burns visit, concluding that the diplomat “brought to Moscow elements of a roadmap of the stabilization and potential improvement of Russo-US relations” ahead of a potential meeting between Putin and Biden. He argues that the CNN story claiming that Burns’ intent was to warn Moscow against further escalation may be a domestic political cover for an effort to improve relations described in the *New York Times* and posits that it is possible that the Biden administration is doing both things at the same time. He concludes that coverage in the US media about Russia’s role in the European gas crisis suggests the importance of the Biden administration developing approaches to improve predictability in the relationship.⁴⁹

10. Shoigu and Lavrov meet with French counterparts

The November 15 issue of the MOD newspaper *Krasnaya Zvezda* highlights the November 12 visit of Russian defense minister Sergey Shoigu along with the Russian foreign minister Sergey Lavrov to France for dialogue with their French counterparts in the 2+2 format. The paper notes that the discussions were wide ranging and focused, inter alia, on international and regional security issues, strategic stability, nonproliferation, prevention of an arms race in outer space, and the development of Russia-EU and Russia-NATO relations. It quotes Shoigu as saying that it was “important to jointly analyze the present problems in the security area to be able to determine future steps in de-escalating the environment in Europe and avoiding military incidents.” Lavrov reportedly notes that the tensions in the international environment were due to US and Western efforts to maintain global dominance and to destroy the UN-based architecture created after the end of World War II in favor of a “rules-based order.” Lavrov states that he proposed to reverse the dead end in relations between Russia and the EU by invoking French president Macron’s one-time idea of “forming a European security architecture with Russia, and not counter to it.” He said that Russia would “react to unfriendly steps taken by the West by mirroring them, or through asymmetric responses.”⁵⁰

11. Dimensions of Arctic contestation

Russian commentators focus on the military infrastructure in the Arctic in recent weeks. One point of interest is the growing base known as the “Arctic Trefoil,” situated on Alexandra Land in the Franz Josef Land archipelago. One article suggests that this base is becoming a site of increasing concern for the United States’ Arctic planners. Another recently published piece gives a broader overview of the potential for the Arctic to be a region of military competition and contention.

In an article in *Voenno-promyshlennyi kur’er*, Vitaly Orlov discusses the “Arctic Trefoil” (or “Arctic Shamrock”) Military Base—the northernmost military base in the world and a major infrastructure project for the Russian armed forces in the Arctic region.⁵¹ He argues that American experts are growing increasingly concerned about the base, especially given the newly commissioned Nagurskoye Airfield, which will be able to host aircraft as large as strategic bombers. Orlov states, “The Russian military base... can turn into an object from which key elements of the American missile attack warning system can be suddenly and powerfully attacked.”



Orlov relies on comments from Tyler Rogoway, writing in *The Drive*, to underline this increasing concern in detail.⁵² In this reading, not only does the US find itself with a new strategic bomber threat, but the Northern Sea Route is further brought under the Russian aerospace umbrella. He also notes that the new Russian infrastructure will come to rival the longstanding Thule Air Base, which may allow for the region to be host to a potential conflict between fifth-generation fighter aircraft.

Another article in *Nezavisimoe voennoe obozrenie*, by Aleksandr Khramchikhin, reviews the state of claimants and potential lines of conflict in the Arctic region.⁵³ The author focuses on the new position stated by the EU, which he believes has a particular approach to the problem set: “From the point of view of Brussels, the main problem in the Arctic, of course, is the presence of Russia there. But the overall swing is even wider: the European Union wants to ban all countries from extracting hydrocarbons in the Arctic in general, and if they do it, no one should buy this oil and gas.” Khramchikhin also discusses territorial divisions in the Antarctic, which he views as a location for resources in the long term but not a concern for the immediate or medium term. Yet he notes that territorial friction is likely to increase there as well.

12. Transfer to India of S-400 missiles will not lead to sanctions

Two recent articles discuss the politics surrounding the transfer of Russian S-400 missiles to India. An article in *Gazeta.ru* notes that the transfer of equipment is proceeding according to the timetable laid out in the 2018 sales agreement, despite continuing unhappiness about the deal in the United States.⁵⁴ Delivery of the first regiment of missiles will be complete by the end of 2021, with four more to follow in 2022. India is the third country to buy these missiles, after China and Turkey. The article notes that unlike Turkey, India is unlikely to be sanctioned by the United States for this purchase, as US officials believe that sanctions would damage a wide spectrum of bilateral relations without changing India’s desire to purchase Russian weapons.

A slightly earlier article in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* expands on the debate over US sanctions, highlighting a proposal by three Republican senators to exclude India from punishments typically inflicted on countries that buy Russian arms.⁵⁵ It argues that the proposal is the result of a belief in Washington that sanctions would derail US-Indian cooperation and damage the development of the QUAD coalition that the United States is building to counter China, of which India is an important member. According to Sergey Lunev, a MGIMO professor, “India will not refuse to purchase the S-400 under any circumstances. It is pursuing a policy of balancing and is not going to become an unambiguous ally of the United States. In India, they understand that this is possible only in the position of the younger brother of the Americans.” He further notes that while Russia’s share of Indian weapons procurement has decreased over the last five years, it remains the main supplier across all sectors. Furthermore, he notes that the QUAD is not a military alliance and that India would not join such an alliance because it goes against decades of Indian foreign policy.



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