



CNA Russia Studies Program

THIS WEEK'S ABSTRACTS

1. **RUSSIAN PERCEPTIONS OF THE NATO THREAT**

Several articles describe Russian perceptions of NATO and the threat that it poses to Russian security. They focus on the role of the alliance as a weapon of US domination in Europe, the threat posed to Russia by NATO's previous expansion to the east, and the possibility that it could expand further to include Sweden, Finland, or Georgia. These Western actions can be countered either by NATO and the United States providing binding security guarantees to Russia or by Russia extending its security border to the Soviet Union's previous western border in Belarus and Ukraine.

2. **KARAGANOV ARGUES THAT NATO IS A METASTASIZING "CANCER" THAT NEEDS TO BE "LIMITED TERRITORIALY"**

On January 19, the Russian newspaper *Argumenty i Fakty* interviewed Sergey Karaganov, dean of the Faculty of World Economy and International Affairs at Moscow's Higher School of Economics, on the state of Russia's relations with the US and NATO. In the interview, Karaganov also discusses Russia's intentions in Ukraine, contrasts Russia with the Soviet Union, and discusses potential steps that Russia could take in response to the ongoing crisis.

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3. US-RUSSIA DIPLOMATIC ENGAGEMENTS

During this reporting period, recent diplomatic efforts are frequently mentioned. These include US-Russia talks in Geneva, NATO-Russia talks in Brussels, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) talks in Vienna, and a phone conversation between Foreign Minister Lavrov and Secretary Blinken. Several articles discuss Russia's motivation behind the talks, which followed unrealistic demands for security guarantees and largely ended in stalemate. They also discuss what lies ahead.

4. PLANS FOR US SANCTIONS AGAINST RUSSIA

Several articles highlight potential US plans to further strengthen sanctions against Russia. Draft US plans to impose personal sanctions against top Russian officials are dismissed as unlikely. However, the possibility of serious measures to limit interactions with Russian financial institutions and to prohibit the transfer of a wide range of technology to Russia (and the use of that technology by Russia) is taken more seriously. Russia could respond with highly disruptive countermeasures and may see the most severe measures as, in effect, a declaration of war.

5. THE WEST PREPARES FOR CONFLICT

Russian media published extensive discussions of statements being made by Western officials in response to Russia's deployment of forces near Ukraine. These articles focus on the deployment of additional NATO forces to Eastern Europe, reports about the evacuation of Western and Russian embassy personnel from Kyiv, and US efforts to find alternative sources of natural gas for EU member states that would be engaged in a conflict with Russia.

6. NATO, RUSSIA-BELARUS MILITARY EXERCISES

One article discusses NATO's upcoming Cold Response exercise, which will take place in late March and early April and will include 35,000 military personnel from 28 states. The article notes that "such large-scale exercises as Cold Response-2022 have not been held in Norway since the 1980s." Earlier in the year, on February 10–20, Russia and Belarus will hold joint military exercises, titled "Allied Resolve." Two articles discuss the size, scope, and motivation of the maneuvers. A fourth article reports that the head of Poland's National Security Bureau requested that NATO hold military exercises in the region in response to the joint Russian-Belarusian exercises.

7. NUCLEAR RISK REDUCTION AND POTENTIAL WESTERN REACTIONS TO BELARUSIAN NUKES

Several articles cover nuclear issues. *Krasnaya Zvezda* focuses on Russia's views on the importance of the P5 Joint Statement of the Leaders of the Five Nuclear-Weapon States on Preventing Nuclear War and Avoiding Arms Races, and the importance to Russia of the "inadmissibility of any war between nuclear states, whether nuclear or with the use of conventional weapons." Aleksey Poplavskiy in *Gazeta.ru* offers Russian expert commentary on potential Western reactions to the unlikely placement of Russian nuclear weapons in Belarus. (*The December 6–16, 2021, issue of Russian Media Analysis addressed this latter issue.*)

8. OPTIONS FOR NEW RUSSIAN MISSILE BASES AS COMPETITION GROWS

As geopolitical competition increases, Russian authors are suggesting possibilities for new staging points that can counter perceived NATO encroachment. Two articles in Topwar.ru point out the potential for sites in Cuba and Serbia, respectively, as states that may be particularly open to hosting new forward-deployed arms. While Cuba is seen with a glow of Soviet-era nostalgia, the Balkan case represents a more novel vision in any future arms race.

9. WESTERN INFORMATION WARFARE AGAINST RUSSIA

In *Voenno-Promyshlennyi Kur'er (VPK)*, Sergey Korotkov argues that the US (and the West) are leaders in disinformation and have used this in the past to create a justification for wars in Iraq and Yugoslavia. The article posits that "the US views the internet as the main instrument of conducting hybrid warfare to achieve global domination in the global information space" and "aggressive propaganda in the form of disinformation campaigns is conducted at the state level and is a component of the 'systematic deterrence of Russia.'" Separately, an article in Topwar.ru offers perspectives on a January 6 Atlantic Council event that featured retired general Wesley Clark, who argued that Putin is a war criminal and that Russia could use chemical weapons in Ukraine.

10. MILITARY AID TO UKRAINE

Many articles have focused on the crisis between Russia and Ukraine, looking specifically at new plans for military aid being developed by NATO countries to assist Ukraine in light of a potential Russian military action. Several articles focus on aid from the UK, which is stated to be moving faster and with greater qualitative effectiveness than other aid plans at present. Other authors review US military aid being debated in Congress as well. In general, the articles frame UK and US military aid as a means of ratcheting up the local threat against Russia, further destabilizing the regional security environment, and further cementing Ukraine's de facto position as a quasi-member of NATO and the broader Western security architecture.

11. TUMULT AND FRAGMENTATION IN UKRAINIAN DOMESTIC POLITICS

The domestic travails of Ukraine were recently noted by two Russian authors, each arguing that the internal politics of the country were riven by scandal, faction, and dissent. Both articles are provocative: one, in Topwar.ru, asks why Ukrainian statehood had ever even been considered; the other, in *VPK*, drives home the point that Western efforts to aid Ukraine are not always clearly appreciated by Kyiv.

12. HOW FUTURE WARS WILL BE FOUGHT

Two articles by noted military specialists address the question of how wars will be fought in the future. Aleksandr Khranchikhin suggests that UAVs are likely to become the most important weapon in future wars, because they would be virtually impossible to eliminate and could be used to eliminate enemy air defense infrastructure. Viktor Murakhovsky is, on the whole, more skeptical about the dominance of technology in future warfare. The ineffectiveness of high-tech warfare in Afghanistan and Yemen suggests that future warfare may not be as technology dependent as visionaries on both sides believe.

13. CONCERNS ABOUT TURKISH GEOPOLITICAL DESIGNS

Multiple articles in Topwar.ru look at the geopolitical place of Turkey as well as ethnic ties across the Turkic peoples of Eurasia. Focusing on the potential for military cooperation along a pan-Turkic basis, as well as the prospects for major military expansion by Turkey in the Black Sea and Mediterranean, the articles add to a growing sense of paranoia about the prospect of alternative regional power blocs based on ethnic relations.

14. US ACCUSED OF STIRRING UP EXTREMIST GROUPS IN THE NORTH CAUCASUS

According to an article by Evgeny Fedorov in Topwar.ru, the United States is seeking to undermine internal Russian stability by way of encouraging extremist movements in the North Caucasus. Fedorov argues that American support in organizing and propagating Islamic extremist movements over the internet has grown in recent years, with the goal of provoking protest and confrontation between the authorities and local radicals. Fedorov highlights a new memorial set up by a local extremist organization, 1ADAT, as a new means of American meddling in internal affairs.

15. ALARM ABOUT NEW KAZAKHSTAN BIOSAFETY-LEVEL-4 LAB

Several articles in the Russian media and on online sites discuss the planned construction of a BSL-4 laboratory in Kazakhstan. Articles in Topwar.ru and *Izvestiya* argue that reference labs and biosafety facilities in Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Kazakhstan are an enormous cause for concern for Russia because they are nontransparent and potentially unaccountable facilities conducting dangerous work close to the Russian border. While both of these articles include disinformation, they also exemplify the perspectives of Russian military analysts about CTR-supported installations in Eurasia.

1. RUSSIAN PERCEPTIONS OF THE NATO THREAT

Several January 2022 articles describe Russian perceptions of NATO and the threat that it poses to Russian security. An article by Igor Khodakov in *VPK* describes NATO's origins, focusing on the relative balance of power and influence between the United States and its European allies.¹ According to the author, rather than guaranteeing Western security, the alliance became a weapon of US domination in Europe as laid out in the Truman Doctrine. By viewing NATO since its formation through the lens of a "suzerain and its vassals," the author highlights the dominant Russian paradigm that all NATO decision-making is controlled by Washington and that the notion of consensus-based decision-making is a fig leaf for this situation.

A long article in *Ekspert* in effect continues this discussion, focusing on how NATO has developed over the last 30 years since the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact and the collapse of the Soviet Union.² It highlights that in 1989 approximately half of NATO's military power belonged to the United States, and that most NATO forces were located in Europe, with Asia-Pacific and the Middle East having a secondary role. The author describes the drawdown in US and NATO forces throughout the 1990s, arguing that it was conditioned on the belief that Russia was defeated and could be controlled through the oligarchs. Suggestions at the time that Russia could join NATO were designed to legally allow the establishment of foreign military bases on Russian soil as a form of military occupation. The subsequent expansion of NATO has greatly enlarged its territory while doing little to enhance its overall military potential. The potential threat to Russia nevertheless increased because of the alliance's shift to the east and the deployment of new rapid-reaction forces in these areas. Russia's reaction to this threat, beginning with Putin's Munich speech in 2007, was logical.

The second half of the article discusses the current correlation of forces between NATO and Russia. The author highlights that although in terms of numbers NATO's strength today is comparable to its strength in 1989, the sixfold decline of Russia's forces since the end of the Cold War means that NATO has an overwhelming advantage overall. Should Russia and Belarus invade Ukraine, NATO could attack Belarus and Kaliningrad through Poland. The author makes five overall conclusions: (1) The collapse of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact, combined with NATO expansion to the east, was the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century. (2) NATO's military potential remains largely unchanged and continues to be aimed primarily at Russia. (3) Since 2014, Russia's military potential has improved. (4) The situation nevertheless remains threatening. Russia's strategic security can only be restored by returning to the Soviet Union's previous western border. (5) The Soviet Union's previous western border is also the best defensive line because it was located at the narrowest point between the Baltic and Black Seas.

Given the perception that NATO expansion has had a serious negative effect on Russian security, it is not surprising that several articles address the potential consequences of future expansion of the alliance. An article in *Krasnaya Zvezda* highlights Russian warnings that further expansion would bring serious consequences.³ It quotes deputy defense minister Aleksandr Fomin, who argues that Russia-NATO relations are at a critically low level despite continuing Russian proposals to deescalate the situation. Fomin also restates Russia's key demands for guarantees that NATO would not expand further east and that it would end its policy of forward basing military forces in Eastern Europe. The article also quotes senior Russian diplomats, such as Aleksandr Grushko, Sergey Ryabkov, and Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov on the indivisibility of Russian demands for security guarantees and the need for the United States and NATO to provide written responses.

The Russian media note that the West has responded by again threatening to further expand NATO. An article in Topwar.ru focuses on a statement by Victoria Nuland that the United States would be happy to see Sweden and Finland apply to become NATO members.⁴ It describes the statement as a return ultimatum to Russia in response to its December 2021 proposals. Including these countries in NATO would establish the northern flank in a potential pincer movement against Russia, with Turkey already established on the southern flank. This move would mean that Russia would be surrounded by NATO on three sides. The author argues that the United States has long sought to bring these two Nordic states into NATO. Their drift in this direction began in 1994, when Sweden first joined NATO's Partnership for Peace program. He concludes by arguing that at this point both countries are already de facto NATO members, given their close military cooperation with the alliance.

Finally, an article in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* discusses the possibility of Georgia joining NATO, based on the results of a recent visit to Brussels by Georgia's foreign minister.⁵ The meeting resulted in yet another promise that Georgia would eventually become a member, but no clarity on timelines. As both sides "recited the mantra" that Russia has no right to determine which countries are allowed to join NATO, they also highlighted that the 2008 Bucharest summit decision that Ukraine and Georgia could join NATO remains in effect and will not be reviewed. However, the author believes that Georgia will be far more concerned with NATO's continuing refusal to provide a timeline for membership despite its military being fully compliant with NATO standards. Georgia's territorial disputes with Abkhazia and South Ossetia remain the main roadblocks to membership.

2. KARAGANOV ARGUES NATO IS A METASTASIZING "CANCER" THAT NEEDS TO BE "LIMITED TERRITORIALY"

On January 19, the Russian newspaper *Argumenty i Fakty* interviewed Sergey Karaganov, dean of the Faculty of World Economy and International Affairs at Moscow's Higher School of Economics, on the state of Russia's relations with the US and NATO.⁶ Karaganov makes the following arguments:

- Russia has numerous steps that it could take if the US responds negatively to Moscow's ultimatum. "I can only say that we now have weapons systems that can severely threaten the viability of the United States. We also have in reserve such weapons as deepening military-political cooperation with China, which could become a real nightmare for Washington. And if the Americans threaten us with 'crippling' sanctions, and this is a declaration of war, then let them remember that Russia and China have such an opportunity to break the economy and societies of Western countries as a cyber war."
- Russia is trying to prevent a "hot war" with its current actions, and "not allow the repeat of June 22, 1941 in a new variant."
- NATO is a "cancer" that has "continued to metastasize." "To survive, NATO has to constantly inflate confrontation. A surgical intervention can be deadly for the subcontinent. Therefore, for starters, this disease must be limited territorially—and then we'll see. And certainly, [we] need to stop calling this disease a 'partner.' By 'talking' to it, we've only helped it to spread."
- Russia has a more advantageous position than the Soviet Union because "the Soviet Union fed a significant number of third world countries," it "maintained a colossal war machine that was highly excessive" and "in the late USSR, almost everyone (elites and people) considered themselves morally bankrupt." In contrast, in Russia people and elites "know we are right, and this makes us strong."

- It's possible that "if this current period is relatively peaceful, in 10 years we will have decent relations with a majority of Western countries," which would be "advantageous" because "the disbalance" between Russia and China will continue to grow and a "peaceful, calm Western flank" would be beneficial.
- Ukraine is a "buffer" that "either [is] separating us from potential Western aggressors or is used to put pressure on us. And now the Ukrainian issue is primarily a question of prevention of the spread of a hostile alliance on the territory of this buffer."
- Based on Russia's experience with increasing hostility with the Baltics and Poland after their entry into NATO, Russia doesn't want similar attitudes in Ukraine "because the very existence of an alliance built on the idea of confrontation reinforces the worst elements in political and public sentiment."
- "Yes, there are a lot of pro-Russian people who are close to us spiritually and culturally [in Ukraine]. But there are other dark forces as well. Do we want all this crap to rise to the surface, so that Ukraine becomes, like the Balts and Poles, the main engine of anti-Russian politics in Europe?"
- "But, of course, we absolutely do not need to fight for Ukraine to the last Ukrainian, we certainly do not want to fight there. All this squealing about the fact that we are going to capture Kiev, it is about nothing. Yes, our military is standing at the Ukrainian border, but only so that on the other side it doesn't occur to anyone to rush into the Donbass. And the seizure of Ukraine, I am confident, is not included in our military plans. At least for the reason that capturing a country that is castrated economically, morally and intellectually, a country with a destroyed infrastructure and an embittered population is the worst-case scenario. The worst thing America can do for us is to give us Ukraine in the state to which they brought it."

3. US-RUSSIA DIPLOMATIC ENGAGEMENTS

The recent US-Russia talks in Geneva (January 10), and NATO-Russia talks in Brussels (January 12) were frequently mentioned during this reporting period. These were followed by OSCE talks in Vienna and a recent phone conversation between Foreign Minister Lavrov and Secretary Blinken. Several articles discuss Russia's motivation behind the talks, which followed unrealistic demands for security guarantees and largely ended in stalemate. One article notes that Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov said on the eve of the talks in Geneva, "We are not going there with an outstretched hand, we are going there with a clearly formulated task that must be solved on the conditions that we have formulated. That's all."⁷

A January 20 article in *Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozreniye (NVO)* reports on recent commentary from experts in the US (including Michael Kofman, Samuel Charap, and Sergei Radchenko).⁸ In addition, the article provides commentary from Russian experts Andrey Baklitsky (Institute for International Studies at MGIMO) and Andrei Kortunov (Director of the Russian International Affairs Council), who note that they were not expecting any groundbreaking diplomatic solutions from the talks. According to Baklitsky, it was important for Russia to understand that its demands and conditions are taken seriously by Washington. He states, "Moscow interprets the current situation as unstable and even explosive, and therefore cosmetic measures will not be enough. If the United States agrees that the situation cannot continue to be like this, then dialogue is possible."

In a similar vein, an article in *VPK* argues that there were two likely reasons behind Russia's request for talks and its ultimatum demanding unrealistic security guarantees: (1) to warn the US/NATO of Russia's

unequivocal red lines before it is forced to respond, and/or (2) to try to frame NATO as the aggressor for refusing to respond to its demands.⁹ The author notes, “Obviously, NATO cannot give an honest answer, otherwise it will have to voice its aggressive expansionist aspirations, and refusing to answer or avoiding it means that Russia has some kind of document or official statement from NATO, which can always be referred to as the bloc’s refusal to meet Moscow halfway.”

A *Gazeta Slovo* article authored by Dmitry Linnik argues that it is natural for Russia to demand such security guarantees, because of the relative decline of the United States and gradual increases in Russia’s military and economic might.¹⁰ The article states:

Yes, America is still an economic and military giant, but there is no longer talk of global hegemony.... [As] the very recent example of Afghanistan shows, the United States is far from all right in this regard. It can be added that they are also leaving Iraq, and remember that in recent years all other US operations abroad—in Syria, Libya, Venezuela, Africa—have not brought dividends to the Americans. America is losing ground, curtailing its presence in one region after another. And the Russian ultimatum, by and large, raises the question that the United States should begin evacuating Europe as well.

Referencing the recent talks, the author continues:

NATO’s argument about the free right of Eastern European countries to join NATO is sly: they began to join [NATO] not in response to some supposedly aggressive actions of Russia. On the contrary, all the military actions of Moscow since the collapse of the USSR were taken as a response, as a reaction to unfavorable and dangerous events on Russian borders. And in this series, Transnistria, and Georgia, and Crimea. And the response of the CSTO to the current events in Kazakhstan shows that Russia and other countries of the bloc are ready to act quickly and accurately.

However, while Linnik acknowledges Moscow’s confidence in demanding security guarantees, he doubts that Moscow will go so far as to initiate a military provocation. He notes that “by putting forward its ultimatum to the collective West, Russia actually assumes obligations itself—not to deploy, not to threaten, not to advance. Evaluating the instructive experience of both the Soviet Union and the United States, Moscow does not appear to be eager to ‘bite off more than it can chew.’”

4. PLANS FOR US SANCTIONS AGAINST RUSSIA

Several articles highlight potential US plans to further strengthen sanctions against Russia. A short article in the *New Times* describes possible additional sanctions that the United States could levy against Russia in the event of an invasion of Ukraine.¹¹ A draft Senate bill would include asset freezes and travel bans on top Russian officials including President Putin and Prime Minister Mishustin, as well as the defense and foreign ministers. Major Russian banks such as Alfa-Bank and Sber could also be subject to sanctions, as could the Nordstream 2 pipeline. Finally, the proposal would require the SWIFT financial system to implement restrictions against Russian banks. The bill would also require the Treasury to produce a report on the assets of Vladimir Putin and his relatives and associated business partners, who might also be subject to sanctions.

An article in *Novye Izvestiya* suggests that Moscow is not planning to respond to these plans for the moment.¹² It quotes the German pro-Russian analyst Alexander Rahr as saying that he does not believe that the United States would implement personal sanctions against top Russian leaders. A similar point of view is expressed by the prominent Russian political analyst Fyodor Lukyanov, who calls this “cheap populism.” He thinks that the proposal is meant to encourage Russia to engage in negotiations and to strengthen the

position of the United States. The article also quotes the Russian analyst Konstantin Eggert, who suggests that the mention of sanctions against Russian financial institutions is meant as a signal to Russia that the US is willing to implement measures that would cause problems for Western investors.

Finally, an article in *Topwar.ru* discusses potential US limits on the export to Russia of various consumer-oriented products that use technologies developed in the United States, including smartphones, refrigerators, and washing machines.¹³ The impact of such sanctions would lead not to the elimination of such items from Russian lives, but to a decrease in their quality and an increase in prices. More concerning is that the sanctions could result in computer operating systems no longer functioning on Russian territory. This would seriously impact the functioning not just of Russian society but also of the Russian government, which has increasingly shifted to electronic platforms in its interactions with Russian citizens. The article argues that Russia would respond by nationalizing US businesses in Russia and cutting off oil and gas to Europe. Furthermore, the Russian government could interpret such far-reaching sanctions as a declaration of war, with all possible consequences.

5. THE WEST PREPARES FOR CONFLICT

Russian media published extensive discussions of statements being made by Western officials in response to Russia's deployment of forces near Ukraine. An article in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* highlights a statement by Viktoria Nuland that the US government has developed 18 scenarios for how it might act in the event of an escalation around Ukraine and that these actions would be very painful to Russia.¹⁴ The article also briefly discusses the European Union's 10 key principles for structuring its relations with Russia, as laid out by Josep Borrell. These principles include a rejection of Russian efforts to create spheres of influence in Europe, an expression of solidarity with Ukraine, and calls for de-escalation and dialog.

The media also highlighted President Biden's statement that the US might deploy up to 5,000 additional troops, together with aviation and naval assets, to the Baltics and Eastern Europe, with the possibility of a tenfold increase in US presence should the situation worsen. This declaration has been interpreted as an effort to deter Russian military action against Ukraine.¹⁵ *Novye Izvestiya* similarly reports on British plans to increase its military presence in the Baltic states and Poland by several hundred soldiers, also in the context of deterring Russian aggression.¹⁶ The same article, however, mentions a statement by jailed opposition politician Alexey Navalny that the Russian operation is just another effort to distract the world from its domestic problems, following a scheme that Vladimir Putin has previously used: threat of escalation—bargaining—de-escalation.

The Russian media have also addressed Western actions, including recent announcements about the evacuation of Russian and Western embassies in Ukraine in preparation for a possible conflict. A *Topwar.ru* article notes that Western reports that Russia was in the process of evacuating its embassy in Kyiv were fake information, and confirms a Russian foreign ministry statement that the embassy was continuing normal operations.¹⁷ The article suggests that this type of disinformation is aimed at a Western audience, in order to frighten them into believing that the situation is continuing to get worse and that Russia really is preparing to attack Ukraine. It argues that the US and its allies are seeking to damage relations between Russia and Ukraine to the greatest extent possible in order to gain popular support to increase NATO's military presence in Eastern Europe.

An article in *Lenta.ru* focuses on the decision by the US, UK, Australia, and Germany to partially evacuate personnel from their embassies in Kyiv.¹⁸ It highlights a statement by Russian foreign ministry spokesperson

Mariya Zakharova that this decision was strange and not smart. Russian State Duma deputy Dmitry Novikov suggests that it is part of a deal between NATO and Kyiv to support Ukrainian aggression against Donetsk and Luhansk: "It is necessary that the citizens of a particular country see concrete evidence that they are about to be invaded by the enemy. And in this case, with the help of the evacuation, the State Department confirms the information that Russia intends to send troops into Ukrainian territory."

Two articles highlight the deployment of additional NATO forces to Eastern Europe. An article in *Gazeta.ru* describes the range of deployments, including Denmark sending a frigate to the Baltic Sea and four F-16 jets to Lithuania, Spain deploying ships into the Mediterranean and fighter jets to Bulgaria, and the Netherlands sending F-35 jets to Bulgaria and contributing a ship to NATO's rapid-reaction force.¹⁹ An article in *VPK* uses the deployment of USS *Arleigh Burke* to the Black Sea as a starting point to discuss the negative impact that the presence of US destroyers in the region could have on Russia's ability to defend its southern border.²⁰ The article discusses the capabilities of the four-ship US destroyer squadron based in Rota, highlighting their AEGIS and cruise missile capabilities. Particular concern is expressed about the possibility of a future deployment of SLCM-N nuclear-tipped cruise missiles on board these ships. The combination of a mass launch of nuclear-tipped Tomahawk missiles from US destroyers and LRASM missiles from B-1B bomber aircraft would potentially overwhelm Russian air defenses, with catastrophic consequences.

Finally, an article in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* highlights preparations by the United States to engage in an energy war with Russia.²¹ It notes US discussions with Qatar to provide the EU with replacement gas supplies in the event of an escalation of the situation around Ukraine. It notes that the US is discussing backup supplies with other countries as well. It then quotes Russian energy experts who suggest that LNG from Qatar and other sources would not be sufficient to fully replace Russian supplies in the short term. Although weaning Europe off Russian gas would be possible in the long term, this would greatly increase the EU's energy supply costs.

6. NATO, RUSSIA-BELARUS MILITARY EXERCISES

A January 20 *Novye Izvestiya* article discusses NATO's upcoming Cold Response exercise, which will take place in late March and early April and will include 35,000 military personnel from 28 states.²² The article notes that the exercise, which will be held in the Norwegian Sea as well as northern and central Norway, will break the record as the largest exercise north of the Arctic Circle. The article adds, "The peculiarity of the upcoming NATO military operation is that it will be the largest maneuver of the Alliance in 2022. Such large-scale exercises as Cold Response-2022 have not been held in Norway since the 1980s."

Meanwhile, Russia and Belarus will be holding joint military exercises titled "Allied Resolve" on February 10–20. Russia has been moving troops in preparation for the exercises. According to a January 23 *BMPD* article, this includes moving forces from the Eastern Military District westward.²³ "And this event is really extraordinary. For the first time in the post-Soviet history of Russia, such a large-scale transfer of forces over gigantic distances is being carried out." A January 20 *Topwar.ru* article argues that in addition to practicing military maneuvers, the exercise positions troops in the necessary location to defend Russia in the event of a NATO provocation.²⁴ "Such a fist at the nose of NATO will perfectly cool any militaristic aspirations of the West....In general, the Allied Resolve-2022 exercise is another chance for the West to think before uncovering machine guns on their armored vehicles. And solve the problem by negotiations, not by blood." The article concludes in a more threatening tone, saying, "The desire to fight quickly disappears when the understanding of the fact comes that you will have to fight at home, in your own yard. And the losses will

be, to a greater extent, in their yard, in their families. Not in Russia or Belarus, as was the case in all previous wars, but in Europe and the USA....”

While the Topwar.ru article predicts that the exercise will comprise fewer than the 13,000 personnel (the limit which triggers OSCE observation, per the Vienna Treaty), others have doubts. The *BMPD* article states, “In 7 days, more than 33 military echelons with military equipment and military personnel of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation have already arrived at Federation ‘Allied Resolve.’ The trains keep coming. According to the Schedule for the Movement of Military Echelons (VESH), the total number of trains that will arrive in Belarus—200 military echelons—is an outrageous figure (there has never been such a number)...the average number of wagons in military echelons is 50.”²⁵ A January 18 *Novye Izvestiya* article also reports that the head of Poland’s National Security Bureau, Pavel Solokh, requested that NATO hold military exercises in the region in response to the joint Russian-Belarusian maneuvers.²⁶

7. NUCLEAR RISK REDUCTION, POTENTIAL WESTERN REACTIONS TO BELARUSIAN NUKES

Several articles cover nuclear issues. *Krasnaya Zvezda* focuses on Russia’s views on the importance of the P5 Joint Statement of the Leaders of the Five Nuclear-Weapon States on Preventing Nuclear War and Avoiding Arms Races, and the importance to Russia of the “inadmissibility of any war between nuclear states, whether nuclear or with the use of conventional weapons.” An article by Aleksey Poplavskiy in *Gazeta.ru* offers Russian expert commentary on potential Western reactions to the unlikely placement of Russian nuclear weapons in Belarus.

The January 10 issue of *Krasnaya Zvezda* carries in full the text of the P5 Joint Statement of the Leaders of the Five Nuclear-Weapon States on Preventing Nuclear War and Avoiding Arms Races, issued on January 3, 2022.²⁷ The article also includes commentary by MFA spokesperson M. Zakharova, who stated that Russia has been a leader on this issue among the P5, who aimed to release the statement ahead of the 10th Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), which was delayed by the new wave of COVID infections. She states, “The Statement reflects the idea, which is important for us, of the inadmissibility of any war between nuclear states, whether nuclear or with the use of conventional weapons. It also reaffirms the commitments made by the P5 countries not to target nuclear weapons at each other or at third countries. The principle of dialogue between our countries based on mutual respect and recognition of each other’s interests and concerns in the field of security was also confirmed in the multilateral format.”

The January 19 article by Aleksey Poplavskiy discusses speculations that Russia may consider the placement of nuclear weapons in Belarus.²⁸ (*The December 6–16, 2021, issue of Russian Media Analysis addressed this issue.*) He notes that State Department has expressed concerns over a potential move such as this and provides a discussion of potential Western reactions to such a Russian move. He quotes IMEMO RAS’s Alexey Arbatov as saying that he doesn’t expect a significant military response, maybe just a “wave of propaganda.” Vladimir Brutov from the International Institute of Humanitarian and Political Studies argues that Western countries would not allow this to come to pass and will probably “continue to pressure Russia, promising very little positive and much negative.”

8. OPTIONS FOR NEW RUSSIAN MISSILE BASES AS COMPETITION GROWS

As geopolitical competition increases, Russian authors are suggesting possibilities for new staging points that can counter perceived NATO encroachment. Two articles in *Topwar.ru* point out the potential for sites in Cuba and Serbia, respectively, as states that may be particularly open to hosting new forward-deployed arms. While Cuba is seen with a glow of Soviet-era nostalgia, the Balkan case represents a more novel vision in any future arms race.

Aleksei Chichkin and Aleksei Podymov write that the recent degradation of relations between Russia and the West could lead to new military deployments in the Caribbean, with a special interest in Cuba, and, to a lesser extent, Venezuela.²⁹ The authors argue that closer relations between Russia and Cuba—interestingly enough, through potential membership in the CSTO—are likely, given continued tensions with the United States. They take unconfirmed reports that Cuban president Miguel Díaz-Canel had raised the issue of joining the CSTO as their launching point to discuss the merits of bringing missiles “back” to the island, as well as previous rounds of discussion that occurred in 2015 on the issue. They note that the situation might not work out as a stabilizer, due to effects such as inducing greater US paranoia and the possibility that tax-free international offshore businesses located formally in the Caribbean region might flee.

Meanwhile, a short piece by Evgeny Lyushilin considers the prospect of a missile bastion in southeastern Europe.³⁰ He argues that deploying Iskander-M ballistic missiles would be an appropriate response to “aggression” by NATO towards Russia through the inclusion of Ukraine and Georgia into the organization. He states that should NATO forces be deployed to Ukraine, missiles would be able to reach Moscow within 10 minutes—the closest analog in response would be retaliatory deployments along NATO’s southeastern flank. The article, while speculative and motivated by a fit of pique, continues a genre of seeking to work around what Russian military analysts and contributors clearly see as an open geopolitical landscape for new thinking and countermeasures.

9. WESTERN INFORMATION WARFARE AGAINST RUSSIA

In the January 18 issue of *VPK*, Sergey Korotkov argues that the US (and the West) is a leader in disinformation and has used this in the past to create a justification for wars in Iraq and Yugoslavia.³¹ The article posits that “the US views the internet as the main instrument of conducting hybrid warfare to achieve global domination in the global information space” and that “aggressive propaganda in the form of disinformation campaigns is conducted at the state level and is a component of the ‘systematic deterrence of Russia.’” The article defines the goals of US information warfare against Russia as follows:

- “Demonization of Russia, destabilization of society and regime change”
- “Promotion by the United States and its satellites of economic interests, including access to Russian natural resources, on terms that meet the needs of multinational companies”
- “Substantiation of the deterioration of the domestic political and socio-economic situation in Western democracies as ‘various malicious and malicious activities’ by the Russian Federation”
- “Infliction of damage to the national interests of Russia in various areas”

Korotkov alleges that the cyberattack and hacking charges levied against Russia, including the NotPetya virus and the interference in the US 2016 elections, are unproven and are parts of the US disinformation

campaign against Russia. In turn, he notes that Russia could potentially argue that the US was behind a November 2021 cyberattack on a Russian government services web portal and is complicit in “daily cyber attacks with terrorist threats against educational institutions and trade centers,” even though he ascribes these attacks to hackers on Ukrainian territory that have been prepared by “NATO specialists.” He alleges that a “systematic analysis” by information security firms suggests that “the majority of computer attacks are conducted with the use of US-based infrastructure.” He further claims that ongoing US and NATO claims that Russia is getting ready to attack Ukraine are a disinformation campaign, and that Russia needs to take domestic steps and engage in international actions to defend itself against cyberattacks and information warfare.

Separately, writing in *Topwar.ru* on January 10, Aleksandr Timokhin offers his perspectives on a January 6 Atlantic Council event that featured retired general Wesley Clark. According to Timokhin, Clark argues that “Putin is an international criminal” and that the US needs to conduct an information campaign against him that could result in international criminal proceedings, akin to Slobodan Milošević. In this way, Clark is allegedly softening up Western opinion toward this prospect. Timokhin also posits that Clark’s further statements that Russia could use chemical weapons in Ukraine are a potential way for the US to create grounds for an intervention in the conflict.³²

10. MILITARY AID TO UKRAINE

Many articles have focused on the crisis between Russia and Ukraine, looking specifically at new plans for military aid being developed by NATO countries to assist Ukraine in light of a potential Russian military action. Several articles focus on aid from the UK, which is stated to be moving faster and with greater qualitative effectiveness than other aid plans at present. Other authors review US military aid being debated in Congress as well. In general, the articles frame UK and US military aid as a means of ratcheting up the local threat against Russia, further destabilizing the regional security environment, and further cementing Ukraine’s de facto position as a quasi-member of NATO and the broader Western security architecture.

Two articles in *Novye Izvestiya* reiterate concern through their reporting about a major arms bill making its way quickly through Congress, calling it a wartime-style “lend-lease” bill that would accelerate the process of military coordination between the US and Ukraine while also getting around existing American legal hurdles to such arms deals.³³ The second report focuses on ongoing US supplies to Ukraine, including a package of radar systems and marine equipment valued at \$200 million and announced in the fall.³⁴

Several authors note concerns about large shipments of armaments from the United Kingdom. These supplies include major new antitank weapons, and there are rumors of British advisers.³⁵ A commentary by Aleksandr Staver in *Topwar.ru* early in January expressed a theory that “Washington had handed Ukraine over to London,” suggesting that the UK had been subcontracted out by the United States to take the lead on security guarantees and support for Ukraine, up to and including providing official military advisers and training (Operation ORBITAL), given concerns about US involvement upsetting the situation.³⁶ Staver argues that military cooperation with Ukraine is also underwritten and supported by strong British business interests in Ukraine and relations with its oligarchs.

Later in the month, another commentary in *Topwar.ru*, by Sergei Yuferev, follows up on these reports of new arms transfers.³⁷ He goes into greater detail about the Next Generation Light Anti-tank Weapon (NLAW) models that have been supplied, including a set of “pros and cons” about these simpler antitank weapons compared with Javelin systems and other RPG alternatives.

11. TUMULT AND FRAGMENTATION IN UKRAINIAN DOMESTIC POLITICS

The domestic travails of Ukraine were recently noted by two Russian authors, each arguing that the internal politics of the country were riven by scandal, faction, and dissent. Both articles are provocative: one, in *Topwar.ru*, asks why Ukrainian statehood had ever even been considered, and another, in *VPK*, drives home the point that Western efforts to aid Ukraine are not always clearly appreciated by Kyiv.

Writing in *Topwar.ru*, Yuri Apukhtin argues that Ukrainian statehood can only exist insofar as it is “allied or neutral” vis-à-vis Russia.³⁸ Any other configuration goes against any coherency between a state and the ethnonational grouping to which it claims authority, in his view. His framing question is striking: “How did one of the three branches of the Russian superethnos break away from Russian civilization and build the most Russophobic state in the post-Soviet space?”

By way of answering this, Apukhtin supplies a theory of elite state-building, arguing that the “gift” of Ukraine’s formal sovereignty with the collapse of the Soviet Union left it with limited state capacity, an economy ripe for plunder, and few incentives to improve the situation over the long term. In Marxian terms, he also argues that Ukrainian nationhood is a contrivance made to ease the pain of the state’s plunder by a “comprador elite.” His primary point is to play up a theory of artificiality, corruption, failure, and falseness that typify the Ukrainian statehood experience, thus justifying a future reconnection to a natural, Russian “superethnic” imperium. “The presence on the Russian borders of a Russophobic state, controlled by a geostrategic enemy and ready to resort to any provocation, is unacceptable for Russia. Such statehood should be reformatted within the framework of the Russian civilizational space or disappear from the political map of the world.”

The article in *VPK* also looks at Ukrainian domestic politics, although through the lens of Western offers of aid to the embattled state.³⁹ In the article, Valery Gromak claims that American and other Western powers are planning to “start a war” over Ukraine, and in doing so are seeking to force the addition of military personnel and materiel to the country—which has not always been well received by Ukraine itself. Titling the article “Inflatable Horror” (*Надувной ужас*), Gromak uses the farcical appearance of rubber, inflatable tanks designed for counter-intel purposes that were recently displayed in Kyiv to frame what he views as an absurd jingoism for armament support from the West for Ukraine. He juxtaposes this with the unwillingness of interviewees in Mariupol and Kyiv, who in this reportage are far less eager for warfare.

12. HOW FUTURE WARS WILL BE FOUGHT

Two articles by noted military specialists address the question of how wars will be fought in the future. Aleksandr Khrumchikhin, writing in *VPK*, suggests that UAVs are likely to become the most important weapon in future wars.⁴⁰ The author goes through some of the early history of the development of UAVs by the US and Israeli militaries. He then discusses the current situation, which is rapidly transitioning from an initial focus on reconnaissance drones to the current effort to develop strike UAVs that can match the capabilities of piloted aircraft, such as the US QF-16, an autonomous version of the F-16. In the future, swarms of small and inexpensive UAVs may be launched from larger aircraft. Such UAVs would be virtually impossible to eliminate as a group, and could be used to eliminate enemy air defense infrastructure through kamikaze-style attacks.

Writing in *NVO*, Viktor Murakhovsky is, on the whole, more skeptical about the dominance of technology

in future warfare.⁴¹ He believes that by 2035, the world's great powers will be those countries that are able to achieve "a high level of biological stability and adaptation of the population in comparison with their competitors." These tasks will be carried out through genetic and metabolic control of the population and strategic communications through human-machine interfaces at a continental scale. This will force both liberal and authoritarian regimes to centralize their authority. Murakhovsky suggests that the form of future warfare remains uncertain for now. Advanced military equipment remains expensive and limited. In an intense global conflict, stocks of precision-guided weapons may quickly run out, with little chance to replace them in time. Today, not a single country in the world has practical experience in countering high-tech defensive and offensive systems. At the same time, in the fight against an "asymmetric," dispersed enemy, high-precision weapons turn out to be an extremely expensive tool, and therefore impractical. Murakhovsky notes that despite having absolute dominance in the air, in firepower on the ground, in cyberspace, and in other domains, the United States and its coalition partners lost to the Taliban and were forced to evacuate their troops from Afghanistan. Similarly, the technologically superior Saudi and UAE forces are losing to their weaker opponents in Yemen. And in Syria, despite Russian air superiority, half of all targets were struck with artillery. All of this implies that future warfare may not be as technology dependent as visionaries on both sides believe.

13. CONCERNS ABOUT TURKISH GEOPOLITICAL DESIGNS

Multiple articles in Topwar.ru look at the geopolitical place of Turkey as well as ethnic ties across the Turkic peoples of Eurasia. Focusing on the potential for military cooperation along a pan-Turkic basis, as well as the prospects for major military expansion by Turkey in the Black Sea and Mediterranean, the articles add to a growing sense of paranoia about the prospect of alternative regional power blocs based on ethnic relations.

One article, by Evgeny Fedorov, argues that the ongoing political crisis in Kazakhstan demonstrated the medium- and long-term potential for a "Turkic NATO" to form.⁴² He argues that there is a kind of neo-Ottoman project already underway through intellectual efforts in Turkey to build a narrative of a "Great Turan" progenitor state that unites territories now populated by Turkic-speaking peoples. He notes that recent agreements on military cooperation have been signed between Turkey, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan, and that there are plans to include Kyrgyzstan, Azerbaijan, and Turkmenistan in future cooperative agreements as well.

He also notes that the Organization of Turkic States (OTS), an intergovernmental organization, is another "prototype for a military alliance." Fedorov argues that while the Kazakhstan crisis showed the far more important connections between the country and the Russian-led CSTO over any still-forming Turkic cooperative bloc, it remains a point of strategic concern for Russian observers to keep an eye on any future "Army of Turan."

A second article in Topwar.ru also addresses issues of Turkish influence in the Eurasian region, focusing instead on plans for a considerable increase in the size of the Turkish navy.⁴³ Roman Skomorokhov writes that Erdogan's Turkey is a "toothy beast with ambitions" which seeks to dominate the Eurasian landmass over the long term in the form of a "New Ottoman Empire...from the Red Sea to the Arctic Ocean."

He argues that the Turkish military-industrial complex is being brought into line with this vision, growing in combat capabilities through actions against Kurds in Iraq and Syria, as well as sending advisers to Libya, Kazakhstan, and Azerbaijan. He reviews the size of the Turkish navy, which totals 165 warships, including—

to the author's concern—an especially large number of landing craft (33 in total). He compares this navy favorably to the German navy as well as to the Russian Black Sea Fleet, and notes that Turkey is on a building surge across all ship types, especially in its growing submarine fleet, which is based on German models.

Skomorokhov argues that the ambition of the building project, including the aforementioned submarine fleet as well as the new and “frankly non-defensive” landing helicopter dock (LHD) amphibious assault ship class Anadolu, which can also be configured as a light aircraft carrier, means that Turkey intends to throw its maritime weight beyond the confines of “its straits and coasts” to a greater level of regional naval power.

14. US ACCUSED OF STIRRING UP EXTREMIST GROUPS IN NORTH CAUCASUS

According to an article in Topwar.ru by Evgeny Fedorov, the United States is seeking to undermine internal Russian stability by way of encouraging extremist movements in the North Caucasus.⁴⁴ Fedorov argues that American support in organizing and propagating Islamic extremist movements over the internet has grown in recent years, with the goal of provoking protests and confrontation between the authorities and local radicals. He highlights a new memorial set up by a foreign-based organization, 1ADAT, as a new means of American meddling in internal affairs.

The 1ADAT organization, which is considered an extremist organization by Russian law, is based in Norway and is seen as a form of opposition in exile. Fedorov argues that recent online commentary by 1ADAT-affiliated internet users has been increasingly effective in seeking to glorify resistance fighters against Russian rule from the 1990s. He uses several examples, such as the story of a MiG-29 combat fighter, which was recently included in a museum collection in Chechnya and which online commentators quickly sought to brand as a “weapon of the invaders.” He also notes that recent kidnappings over New Year's in the region were immediately broadcast and sensationalized, in his view, by 1ADAT, the NGO “Committee Against Torture,” and several liberal Russian news sources, such as the radio station Echo of Moscow and *Novaya Gazeta*. Fedorov argues that these oppositional Chechen organizations are fronts for US- and Western-funded entities, which seek to discredit regional authorities and to “legitimize terrorist groups” in the country.

15. ALARM ABOUT NEW KAZAKHSTAN BIOSAFETY-LEVEL-4 LAB

In a January 19 article in Topwar.ru, Evgeny Fedorov alleges that a planned biosafety-level-4 laboratory in Kazakhstan, reportedly set to be built by 2025 with the support of the Nunn-Lugar Cooperative Threat Reduction (CTR) program, is part of a covert US program for “military biologists to find third world countries for their experiments” because biosafety/security standards in the US are too high.⁴⁵ He asks why such a facility, located “less than a 1,000km from the Russian border,” is needed in Kazakhstan and notes that, while “the facility initially focuses on veterinary cases and is not directly linked to diseases causing human infections,” the step between the two is small. He alleges that the facility is an agreement between the American military and Kazakh officials: “The first will receive an object where you can do the boldest experiments, and the second—generous investments, jobs and the conditional favor of the Americans.” Fedorov argues that reference labs and biosafety facilities in Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Kazakhstan cause concern because they are nontransparent facilities where “Pentagon specialists work” that

do not allow Russian inspections. He wonders why Russia did not include the closure of such facilities in the former Soviet space on the list of its demands toward the United States and NATO because “biological weapons present an existential threat to the whole of” Russia. He calls for the CSTO to pay attention to the facility and maybe consider even “taking reference labs” under its control.

Similar arguments are on display in a January 21 article in *Izvestiya* by Vladislav Shurygin, who, like Fedorov, also expresses concerns about the alleged break-in into the Masgut Aikimbaev Kazakh Scientific Center of Quarantine and Zoonotic Diseases during the recent unrest in Kazakhstan.⁴⁶ Shurygin posits that, while the United States has blamed China for creating COVID, it has conducted research with “much more dangerous pathogens” in numerous facilities “around Russian borders” that are “unaccountable to the public or international organizations.” While both of these articles include disinformation, they also exemplify the perspectives of Russian military analysts about CTR-supported installations in Eurasia.

LIST OF SOURCES

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- *Ekspert*, a Russian weekly business magazine that covers economics and finance, Russian business, international business, politics, science and technology, culture and arts.
- *Gazeta.ru*, a pro-government publication currently owned by the Rambler Media Group.
- *Izvestiia*, one of Russia's oldest and most respected newspapers, noted for its quality military coverage.
- *Krasnaya Zvezda*, official publication of the Russian Ministry of Defense.
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- *New Times*, an opposition online news magazine, which publishes on politics, economics, and social life and conducts investigations.
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- *Novye Izvestiia*, an online-only publication that until 2016 was oppositional toward the Russian government but is now classified as patriotic in orientation.
- *Slovo*, a biweekly newspaper published in Moscow that bills itself as a serious newspaper for serious readers.
- *Topwar.ru*, a website focused on providing quality coverage for military developments in Russia and worldwide.
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