



CNA Russia Studies Program

THIS WEEK'S ABSTRACTS

1. THE UKRAINE CRISIS

The continuing crisis between Russia and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) over Ukraine has remained the dominant topic of Russian media coverage for the fourth reporting period in a row, with at least 14 articles on the topic published in the Russian press. The articles can be grouped into three broad areas. The first highlights Western military activity in the region and assistance to Ukraine, and the extent to which these efforts are threatening to Russia; the second focuses on Western statements about how the West would respond to a Russian invasion of Ukraine; and the third addresses the Biden-Putin virtual summit and its potential implications for resolving the crisis.

2. RUSSIA-NATO SECURITY NEGOTIATIONS

Several articles address recent developments in NATO-Russia relations, in particular Russia's calls to discuss its security concerns. One article addresses Putin's December 1 statement that Russia would seek assurances that NATO will not expand eastward, taking a pessimistic stance about whether the West would sign on to any binding document. A second article discusses Biden's announcement that Russia and "at least four of our major NATO allies" would plan a meeting to discuss Moscow's security concerns, following his video meeting with Putin. Finally, a third article highlights a range of Russian opinions on the December 17 security demands published by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

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3. LUKASHENKA OPEN TO RUSSIAN NUKES IN BELARUS

In several articles, Russian commentators discuss Belarusian president Aleksandr Lukashenka's statement that he would be interested in the deployment of Russian nuclear weapons on Belarusian territory if US nuclear weapons currently stationed in Germany were moved to Poland. Lukashenka made the statement in a wide-ranging interview to RIA Novosti published in late November in which he also discussed his delay in the initial withdrawal of nuclear weapons from Belarus in the 1990s. Kirill Ryabov writes of the possible positives and negatives of a Russian deployment of nuclear weapons in Belarus. Dmitry Litovkin offers background on the speculation about a potential re-deployment of nuclear weapons closer to Russia and discusses potential global reactions.

4. GERASIMOV DISCUSSES THREATS TO RUSSIA

An article in *Krasnaya Zvezda* profiles the December 9 wide-ranging briefing by the Russian Chief of the General Staff Valery Gerasimov to foreign military attachés, covering security issues in Europe and in and around Ukraine, extremism in Afghanistan, Russian forces in Syria, efforts in Nagorno-Karabakh, Russia's engagement with partners in the Asia-Pacific, and specific capabilities and readiness of the Russian armed forces. This overview offers quotes from Gerasimov's briefing focused on the security situation in Europe, arms control, and the Ukraine crisis.

5. GEOPOLITICS AND AMERICA'S GLOBAL DECLINE

Two articles argue that America is facing relative decline. The first contends that the American-led world order has clearly come to an end, which will yield a new world order in which China also plays a significant role. Whether the new world order is tri-polar or polycentric, it is one which "Russia needs to continue to actively participate in the competition for." A second article by Konstantin Sivkov discusses what he terms "the intellectual degradation of the American elite," which is reflected in the scientific-technical and, in particular, the military-technical sphere.

6. ADVANCED WEAPONRY AND NEW MILITARY TECHNOLOGY

Several articles look at new weaponry under differing levels of development and deployment by the US military. Overviews of artillery, anti-hypersonic missile projects, naval destroyers, air-to-air missiles, and laser weapons systems underline both the continued appreciation for US advanced military technology but also highlight shortcomings, especially concerning reliable missile defense capabilities and disappointing ship performance.

7. ARCTIC ARMAMENTS AND NEW GEOPOLITICAL CHANGES

Developments in the Arctic continue to be a source for analytical articles in the Russian press. In *Voenno-Promyshlennyi Kur'er (VPK)*, two articles review the Chinese icebreaker program and new Russian cold-weather military technology, respectively. An article in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* frames recent actions by the UK as a means to establish an "Arctic NATO." Finally, *Krasnaya Zvezda* offers a brief overview of the state of the Russian military in the Arctic and how it has changed in recent years, based on a speech by the commander of Russia's Northern Fleet.

8. TENSIONS BETWEEN POLAND AND OTHER EUROPEAN POWERS

A lengthy article in *VPK* highlights the increase in tensions between Poland and major European powers, including France, Germany, and Russia, in the aftermath of the migrant crisis on the Poland-Belarus border. The article notes that for Poland, the only acceptable strategic choice is to seek to integrate into Western military and economic structures under US suzerainty. However, some members of the Polish elite are starting to realize that a close alliance with the US will decrease, rather than increase, Polish security.

9. PRESIDENT PUTIN'S VISIT TO INDIA

Putin's recent trip to India is the subject of discussion in Russian newspapers in December. The results of the meeting between President Putin and Prime Minister Modi are framed as a success for Russian diplomacy, and the Russian press highlights that while India would not be "abandoning" its relationship with the US in the foreseeable future, relations with Russia remain a priority and have not deteriorated.

1. THE UKRAINE CRISIS

The continuing crisis between Russia and NATO over Ukraine has remained the dominant topic of Russian media coverage for the fourth reporting period in a row, with at least 14 articles on the topic published in the Russian press. The articles can be grouped into three broad areas. The first highlights Western military activity in the region and assistance to Ukraine, and the extent to which these efforts are threatening to Russia; the second focuses on Western statements about how the West would respond to a Russian invasion of Ukraine; and the third addresses the Biden-Putin virtual summit and its potential implications for resolving the crisis.

WESTERN MILITARY ASSISTANCE TO UKRAINE

Seven articles discuss Western efforts to bolster the Ukrainian military. An article in *Gazeta.ru* highlights a statement by NATO general secretary Jens Stoltenberg that the alliance's new strategic concept, to be adopted in 2022, would focus on developing a close partnership with Ukraine. In that context, he noted that NATO had recently provided Ukraine with systems to counter unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) and winter clothing. The article also highlights recent announcements that the US had given Ukraine \$20 million to strengthen its border with Belarus, and that some US senators had proposed providing an additional \$450 million in military assistance to Ukraine in 2022.¹ At the same time, several articles in the Russian media note that the Biden administration has deferred the question of whether to provide Ukraine with a separate set of military assistance worth \$200 million in order to give time for diplomatic efforts to resolve the crisis. According to Russian reporting, this package was expected to be approved in early December and to include anti-ship missiles, Javelins, electronic countermeasures systems, radars, modernized artillery rounds, and medical supplies. The reports suggest that delivery of these supplies is intended as a form of pressure by the US on Russia should the latter try to enter Ukrainian territory.²

An article in *Gazeta.ru* discusses the reasons for Germany's refusal to provide military assistance to Ukraine throughout the period of Angela Merkel's leadership. She had personally blocked NATO from providing Ukraine with rifles and anti-drone systems. The author argues that the new German government is likely to continue this policy, while making occasional exceptions for arms that would be considered defensive in nature. He quotes the German expert Alexander Rahr, who suggests that "Germany does not want to create an environment in which Ukraine could be at war with Russia for real," because German officials believe that the conflict can be solved only through political means. Given Germany's ability to block NATO military assistance, Ukraine is expected to focus on bilateral channels, including primarily with the US, UK, France, and Lithuania.³

An article in *VPK* discusses the extent of Western military assistance to Ukraine, describing specific weapons and systems being provided by the US, Great Britain, Canada, Bulgaria, and Romania. It then warns about the extent of NATO military presence in Ukraine. It highlights the presence of US and NATO military personnel in nine locations in Ukraine and furthermore notes plans for the development of new military bases on Ukrainian soil, implying (although not directly stating) that these bases could be used to house troops from NATO member states rather than (or in addition to) the Ukrainian military. According to the article, graduates of the International Center for Peacekeeping and Security, located near Lviv and staffed by 300 US instructors, are "now creating 'peace' in the Donbas, killing innocent people." This center has become a de facto forward presence base for NATO. Similarly, the US military has built a naval control

center in Ochakov, which is a de facto US naval base. Meanwhile, the British military is planning to build two naval bases, one near Odesa and the other on the Azov Sea. Other training centers are being used to train the Ukrainian military for its future war with Russia. These centers can be used to place in Ukraine any kind of weapons or military personnel, thus highlighting Ukraine's activities as an enemy of Russia. The article concludes by noting that Ukraine has given itself over fully to NATO, becoming a de facto military training range for the alliance while seeking to increase tensions in the conflict zone near Russia's borders. The article cites this action as the cause for Russia's recent efforts to mobilize its forces near Ukraine.⁴

Other articles highlight other NATO and Ukrainian military reconnaissance activities that are increasing tensions in the region. Two articles in *Gazeta.ru* note cases where Russian 30 fighter aircraft have recently escorted US and French reconnaissance aircraft flying over the Black Sea toward Russia.⁵ A separate article highlights a Ukrainian navy ship that moved toward the Kerch strait without proper notification. It suggests that the ship's movement was designed to test how Russia would react in such a situation, as the ship is primarily a concern because of its sensor capabilities, rather than as a combat ship. Other means of reconnaissance that have been introduced recently to the region include RC-135W aircraft and Global Hawk UAVs. The article concludes by highlighting the threat that Javelins could pose to Donetsk in an armed conflict.⁶

POTENTIAL WESTERN RESPONSES TO A RUSSIAN INVASION OF UKRAINE

Several articles highlight recent statements by Western officials about consequences for Russia if it engages in military aggression toward Ukraine. These include the G7 statement that Russia should not doubt that further military aggression against Ukraine would have serious and costly consequences for Russia. An article in *Gazeta.ru* suggests that Russian leaders believe that Russia would be financially isolated in the event of a military conflict in the region. It reaffirms the Russian position that Western assessments that Russia is planning to invade Ukraine in early 2022 are fake news and similar to previous warnings of this type that did not come to pass.⁷ Similarly, the head of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyden, announced that the European Union (EU) would consider any armed conflict on the border between Russia and Ukraine to be Russia's fault and would enact additional sanctions and other unprecedented measures against Russia in response to Russian aggression, according to an article in *Lenta.ru*. At the same time, some countries, including France and Germany, are for the moment opposed to further sanctions and would like to engage in talks with Moscow.⁸

An article in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* suggests that NATO leaders would like to renew talks in the Normandy format to reduce tension and normalize relations with Russia. The article discusses the possibility of a compromise on some issues but not others.⁹ While NATO leadership would like to normalize relations with Russia, it will not compromise on the right of Ukraine and Georgia to join the alliance in the future. An article in *NVO* suggests that this is an effort on the part of Stoltenberg to join the chorus of Western leaders calling for measures to prevent Russian aggression against Ukraine. The article notes that tensions are so high that one US Republican senator has called for a preventive nuclear strike against Russia. The article then discusses the frequency of NATO exercises near Russia's borders, the frequency of "provocative" NATO ship deployments to the Black Sea, and the use of Javelin missiles and Bayraktar UAVs in the Donbas, following Gerasimov in suggesting that these activities are the main cause of tension in the region.¹⁰

RUSSIAN REACTIONS TO BIDEN-PUTIN MEETING ON UKRAINE

Three articles in this report discuss the virtual meeting between presidents Biden and Putin and the potential

consequences. A review in *Krasnaya Zvezda* highlights the reasons that President Putin believes that current Ukrainian policy is destructive and provocative. Both sides are described as focusing on the dangerous actions of the other as the primary cause of increasing tensions in the region. Presidential advisor Yuri Ushakov characterizes the meeting as a “normal conversation between two serious leaders.” He also notes that Russia does not need to withdraw its forces because they are located on Russian territory and do not threaten anyone. He describes Putin as having told Biden, “You Americans are worried about our battalions on Russian territory, thousands of kilometers from the United States. And we are really worried about our security, the security of Russia in a global sense, on a global scale.”¹¹

An editorial in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* suggests that, “the main principle that was important for Moscow to convey to its American counterparts is the unacceptability of expanding [NATO] military infrastructure [in Ukraine], because it creates the potential for filling the territory with weapons dangerous for the Russian side. Of course, Russia has no real opportunity to veto Ukraine's accession to NATO. But that doesn't mean the Kremlin's fears should be ignored.” The article then suggests that Russia's shadow agreement with Israel preventing supplies of certain kinds of military equipment to Ukraine in exchange for similar restrictions on Russian arms sales to Iran could be a model for an agreement between Russia and the US. It concludes by noting that for Moscow it is most important to demonstrate the need to restore symmetry in security issues.¹²

An article in *Novye Izvestiya* suggests that the meeting was productive in that Biden seemed predisposed to engage in talks and afterward sought to push both Ukraine and Russia to carry out the Minsk agreement. It quotes former Putin advisor Andrei Illarionov, who was struck by the Biden administration's transition from a position of an ally of Ukraine to a position of an intermediary between the two sides of the conflict. “Now Biden has not only adopted Putin's argumentation, not only concerned himself with the security of Russia, but also begun to call the Minsk agreements ‘an instrument for ensuring the security of NATO and the United States.’ In other words, the blackmailing of Ukraine to fulfill the Minsk agreements will now be carried out by Biden under the slogan of ensuring the security of Russia, NATO and the United States.”¹³

2. RUSSIA-NATO SECURITY NEGOTIATIONS

Several articles address Russia's recent calls for talks with NATO to discuss its security concerns. Putin's December 1 statement that Russia would seek assurances that NATO will not expand eastward is addressed in a December 6 TopWar.ru opinion piece.¹⁴ The author, Roman Skomorokhov, describes this effort in one word—“late.” Referencing the alleged “gentlemen's agreement” that NATO would not expand further, which Russians believe Gorbachev secured from Western leaders in 1990, the author states, “And not trusting oral promises, so as not to repeat the mistakes of one too gullible predecessor, [Moscow is seeking to] formalize all this in a written agreement.” But, while the author is supportive of these efforts, he questions Moscow's sway. “[T]oday the level of Russia's influence is somewhat different from what it was, say, 30 years ago. Here, it is definitely possible to ignore [Russia's] opinion, which NATO is doing.” The article concludes that even if such a NATO non-expansion pact was signed, it would likely be treated the same way the Minsk Accords have been treated, with no sincere follow-through and no consequences/sanctions for failure to comply.

A December 9 *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* article responds to President Biden's announcement that Russia and “at least four of our major NATO allies” would plan a meeting to discuss Moscow's security concerns, following his video meeting with President Putin.¹⁵ The article questions the format in which the meeting will take place, noting that NATO secretary general Stoltenberg has called for the resumption of the work of the Russia-NATO Council, which was suspended in 2014. The article states, “But this is clearly not what

the Kremlin is counting on. In any case, it is impossible to reach the conclusion of a legally binding document on the non-expansion of NATO on the basis of this format of interaction.”

On December 17, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs published a list of security guarantees that it is seeking from NATO.¹⁶ The numerous, ambitious demands include prohibiting any other post-Soviet states from joining NATO, abandoning any NATO military activities in Ukraine, Eastern Europe, Transcaucasia, and Central Asia, and not deploying weapons and forces in areas where it would be perceived by the other side as a national security threat. A Gazeta.ru article interviews a number of Russian experts who, while having differing opinions about the demands, all agree that the US is unlikely to accept them.¹⁷ The author interviews Ruslan Pukhov (director of the Center for Analysis of Strategies and Technologies), who states: “The United States cannot agree to these agreements, because the demands are very ambitious. In their eyes, Russia is a country in decline, so meeting it, unlike the USSR, which had the appearance of a powerful state, is of no interest to Washington.” He adds that, “Moreover, by and large, Russia does not threaten the United States, and in the event of a negative development of events, it is unlikely to fight with the American side.”

Other experts quoted in the article anticipate a stronger Russian response. Fyodor Lukyanov (editor-in-chief of *Russia in Global Affairs*) states:

“We can assume that this is an attempt to reach out to [NATO and the US] who otherwise do not hear anything. The main question is what will happen next, since such statements often presuppose a plan ‘B’ if this [list of demands] is not adopted. And the adoption of this initiative in its current form is extremely unlikely. If this ultimatum is not accepted, Moscow will follow up with some actions to bring the seriousness of the situation to the attention of [NATO and the US], which can be considered a milestone and a step towards an attempt to deploy a new system of European security.”

The author also interviews Vasily Kashin (director of the Center for Comprehensive European and International Studies of the Higher School of Economics), who sees the demands more as a starting point to initiate negotiations. “These demands from Russia, in their original form, will look unrealistic, completely wild and outrageous. It is normal at the beginning of negotiations for the proposed positions to be overestimated. Most likely, Moscow will by no means insist on everything from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ list.” The article concludes by noting, “Moscow has declared its readiness to discuss all aspects of the proposals at virtually any time, while Washington and NATO have taken a wait-and-see attitude, in fact without giving a clear answer to the Russian proposals.”

3. LUKASHENKA OPEN TO RUSSIAN NUKES IN BELARUS

In several articles, Russian commentators discuss Belarusian president Aleksandr Lukashenka’s statement that he would be interested in the deployment of Russian nuclear weapons on Belarusian territory if US nuclear weapons currently stationed in Germany were moved to Poland. Lukashenka made the statement in a wide-ranging interview to RIA Novosti published in late November where he also discussed his delay in the initial withdrawal of nuclear weapons from Belarus in the 1990s. The exchange went as follows:

RIA: Aleksandr Grigor’yevich, NATO Secretary General Stoltenberg stated that, if Germany declined US...

Lukashenka: They would move them to Poland

RIA: They would move “eastward,” but understandable that it would be Poland

Lukashenka: Yes. Then I will offer Putin to return nuclear weapons to Belarus

RIA: Which nuclear weapons?

Lukashenka: We will agree, which. The nuclear weapons that would be most effective in this context. We on the territory of Belarus are ready for this... I, as the [...] owner haven't destroyed anything. All the "sheds" are still there.¹⁸

In a December 7 TopWar.ru article, Kirill Ryabov writes of the possible positives and negatives of a Russian deployment of nuclear weapons in Belarus.¹⁹ He initially discusses the timeline surrounding Lukashenka's statement: on November 30, the Collective Security Treaty Organization (a Moscow-led security pact of Belarus and Central Asian states) asked members of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) not to move nuclear warheads outside of their territories and develop related infrastructure. He further states that the NATO secretary general made a new statement that the alliance has no intention to deploy nuclear weapons in new countries. Ryabov then discusses the tactics and strategy of a possible Russian deployment should circumstances ever warrant it. He posits that both strategic and nonstrategic nuclear weapons could be deployed, including mobile ICBMs ("as argued, some related infrastructure has been retained and could be restored"), strategic aviation, and nonstrategic nuclear weapons carried by frontal aviation and missile and artillery troops (though these would require "certain special objects, but the movement and deployment of launchers shouldn't be complicated"). Ryabov then refocuses on the big picture, stating that the deployment of Russian strategic nuclear forces (mobile ICBMs and strategic aviation) would make no sense because they will be able to perform their tasks just as well in Russia, and in some cases deployments could carry risks. He also notes that there would be potential complications with the deployment of nonstrategic nuclear weapons, including that only Russian forces would be able to operate them, and that it could have negative political consequences that could trump any potential benefits, including NATO "reciprocity" in moving nuclear weapons closer to Russian borders. Ryabov concludes, however, that despite serious downsides, one should not dismiss Lukashenka's offer offhand because "it's better to have an opportunity and to not use it than not having an opportunity in the first place."²⁰

In a December 10 *Nezavisimoe Voennoe Obozrenie* article, Dmitry Litovkin offers background on the speculation about a potential re-deployment of nuclear weapons closer to Russia and discusses potential global reactions.²¹ He first recounts the 1990s history of Belarus' repatriation of nuclear weapons to Russia and its accession to the NPT as a non-nuclear weapons state. He writes that Lukashenka appears to have "revealed an important military secret" in the interview when he said that Belarus allegedly retains storage and some other infrastructure that could be useful for hosting nuclear weapons despite US pressure to the contrary (though neither Lukashenka nor Litovkin notes the condition of this infrastructure). Litovkin then highlights a May 2020 statement by then-US Ambassador to Warsaw Georgette Mosbacher about a potential move of US nuclear weapons from Germany to Poland and suggests that "at that moment, this was a public statement coordinated with the State Department." He then notes that the US B61-12's "maximum yield is 50 kt" and that the US is "allowing limited nuclear war" at the same time that the US allies are significantly opposed to a US shift to a no first use posture as the result of its Nuclear Posture Review Process. He then offers a quote from former Russian Strategic Nuclear Forces general Vladimir Dvorkin that Belarus would be a pariah if it formally requested "its weapons" from Russia and that any storage of Russian warheads on Belarusian territory would make no sense and be costly. Litovkin notes that the Zapad-2021 exercises showcased how the Russian and Belarusian military could fight together and that Lukashenka has in the past requested Russian nuclear-capable Iskander missile systems. He concludes with a discussion of a heated nuclear environment in Europe, with the US preparing NATO non-nuclear host

countries to potentially host US nuclear weapons, hosting exercises that simulate a nuclear strike on Russia, and conducting flights close to Russian borders.²²

4. GERASIMOV DISCUSSES THREATS TO RUSSIA

A December 10 article by Viktor Khudoleev in *Krasnaya Zvezda* profiles the December 9 briefing by the Russian Chief of the General Staff Gerasimov to foreign military attachés.²³ The writeup highlights the following topics from Gerasimov's remarks: "increase in problems of global and regional security," "New equation' for ensuring strategic stability," "NATO military activity on Russian borders," "Provocations by Ukrainian leadership will be countered," "CSTO will halt potential incursions of extremists" from Afghanistan, "humanitarian tasks in Nagorno-Karabakh," Russia's "active cooperation with partners in the Asia-Pacific region," "US strategic aviation flights on Russia's Western borders," and joint Russo-Chinese air patrols in the Asia-Pacific region. It also discusses the specific capabilities of the Russian armed forces: strategic nuclear forces, aerospace defense forces, ground forces, Tsirkon cruise missile, airborne, and space issues. Gerasimov also discussed Russian military efforts to counter COVID. This overview offers relevant quotes from Gerasimov's briefing.²⁴

- **Global and regional instability trends** such as "the destructive foreign policy of a number of states, the expansion of the scale of terrorism and radical extremism, as well as the ongoing global economic downturn amid the spread of coronavirus infection contribute to the growing tension in the world."
- **The decay of the arms control system** because of "the desire of the United States to remove restrictions on its development of weapons" and the threats to global and regional security from a possible US deployment of intermediate-range systems. "Therefore, our proposal for a mutual moratorium on the deployment of such missiles remains valid."
 - **Space security issues** or "the shift of the military standoff into space" because "Washington is not ready to assume international obligations to prevent an arms race in outer space."
 - **Need for a "new security equation**, "which covers all types of offensive and defensive weapons affecting strategic stability, as well as new areas of confrontation—cyberspace, space, artificial intelligence."
- **The security environment in the European region and increase in NATO military activity.**
 - **NATO military exercises.** "About 40 major NATO military exercises are held annually in close proximity to Russian borders," including the 2021 Defender Europe, which included non-NATO states such as Sweden, Finland, and Austria. "In their course, significant contingents of troops were redeployed to Russian borders. The exercises have been completed, but at the same time, some of the US equipment has not been withdrawn from Europe to date."
 - **US strategic aviation flights** that include "launches of cruise missiles at targets on the territory of the Russian Federation. In the last month alone, about 30 flights were flown, which is 2.5 times more than in the same period last year."
 - **Black and Baltic seas activity.** "This year, 26 warships of the non-Black Sea countries of the alliance—Great Britain, Greece, Spain, Italy and the United States—made 29 calls into the Black Sea. Last year, there were 23 such calls. At the same time, the actions of NATO ships are often provocative."

- **Russia offers proposals and discussions to lessen tensions.** “Our initiatives to withdraw exercise areas from the NATO-Russia contact line, as well as those aimed at increasing the predictability of actions and reducing dangerous military activity, remain relevant. The Russian Defense Ministry confirms its readiness to discuss the problems of European and global security in order to create the necessary conditions for developing concrete measures to de-escalate tensions and increase the level of mutual trust.”
- **The situation around Ukraine.**
 - **NATO is overly focused on movement of forces inside Russia.** “The redeployment of units during combat training is a routine practice for the armed forces of any state. Military activity takes place on national territory and does not require notification. The information disseminated in the media about the allegedly impending Russian invasion of Ukraine is a lie.”
 - **Deliveries of weapons to Ukraine,** which is “not fulfilling its Minsk agreement obligations” “are pushing the Ukrainian authorities to take drastic and dangerous steps.”
 - **Russia stands ready to counter Ukrainian actions.** “Any provocations of the Ukrainian authorities to resolve the problems of Donbass by force will be suppressed.”

5. GEOPOLITICS AND AMERICA’S GLOBAL DECLINE

Two articles, both published in *VPK*, discuss America’s relative decline. The first, published December 13 by Colonel General Leonty Shevtsov (vice president of the Military Leaders’ Club) argues that American unipolarity has clearly come to an end.²⁵ This will yield a new world order, and whether it is tri-polar or polycentric, it is a world order that “Russia needs to continue to actively participate in the competition for.” Shevtsov notes that, “Prominent analysts and political scientists agree on the awakening of Asia and the onset of the ‘Asian century’ in world politics; the ‘shift of the world center of power’ from West to East.” He argues that these experts consider the main global trend of the future “Asianization,” as opposed to “Europeanization,” of the 19th and “Americanization” of the 20th centuries. The article concludes by stating, “Russia’s political, diplomatic, military, economic and other efforts have historically been turned to the West. Of course, we must continue to do this, but it is time to seriously turn to the East.” Shevtsov notes that Russia has already made progress in this effort; he argues that the US and the EU “simultaneously pushed Russia away, thereby making it an ally of China.” Meanwhile, “China behaves respectfully with Russia, with an understanding of our problems. Russia officially emphasizes its independent foreign policy, but assessing the improving relations with Beijing, they are beginning to take an allied form.”

A second December 13 *VPK* article, by Konstantin Sivkov, discusses what he terms “the intellectual degradation of the American elite,” which is reflected in the scientific-technical and, in particular, the military-technical sphere.²⁶ According to Sivkov, “There are many examples of the fact that, in a number of areas, the United States lagged behind its own achievements from the second half of the 20th century.” Specifically, he points to America’s (1) lack of progress with the lunar project; (2) lack of progress in hypersonics weapons development, despite robust advancements in both Russian and Chinese programs; and (3) shortcomings with newer models of systems and “other expensive and highly questionable projects,” including the Zumwalt-class of destroyers, the *Gerald Ford* aircraft carrier, and the F-35. He argues that one of the key reasons for this state of affairs in the US military-industrial complex is “the fact that the US elite has put shareholder income instead of product efficiency as the main priority in the development and production of weapons.”

6. ADVANCED WEAPONRY AND NEW MILITARY TECHNOLOGY

Several articles look at new weaponry under differing levels of development and deployment by the US military. Overviews of artillery, anti-hypersonic missile projects, naval destroyers, air-to-air missiles, and laser weapons systems underline continued Russian appreciation for US advanced military technology but also highlighted shortcomings, especially concerning reliable missile defense capabilities and disappointing ship performance.

An article in *VPK* by Aleksandr Khramchikhin reviews the history of artillery in the US military, arguing that it has been relegated largely to a sideline relative to airpower and naval dominance during the Cold War.²⁷ Yet the author suggests that this may be beginning to reverse, including growing numbers of the 155-mm M777 howitzer, the M142 High Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS), and the potential found in the Strategic Long Range Cannon (SLRC) project. Much of the article discusses the previous importance of howitzers and other field artillery for the US military, as well as their diminution after WWII and survival as export weapons.

Multiple articles note concerns in the US military establishment over Russian hypersonic missile weapons. One article in *Lenta.ru* points out that the US “has no way of intercepting nuclear missiles after withdrawing from missile defense treaties,” according to Russian military experts interviewed.²⁸ The experts suggested that while the current US missile defense system can repel a missile attack from North Korea or Iran, Russian and Chinese threats are in a league of their own.

Meanwhile, writing in *Novye Izvestiya*, Aleksander Sychev reports that, “the US Missile Defense Agency signed a contract to create an operational target laboratory capable of simulating the flight of hypersonic missiles,” as a first step in resolving this new strategic problem.²⁹ This simulation program, he argues, is the only way to begin figuring out a way to deal with the issue of real-time missile tracking, which is currently very difficult for new hypersonic missiles. The contract is with Stratolaunch, which has previously developed a large space launch vehicle. Sychev argues that it is likely that the new program will rely on the new Talon-A supersonic aircraft, which includes a modular cargo compartment that can be used as a “flying laboratory simulating the flight of the Russian Avangard or the Chinese DF-17.”

The success and disappointment of other weapons remains a major focus, relying on American military writers to provide initial assessments of quality. *Lenta.ru* notes three conflicting developments on this front. First, the successful test of a new F3R version of the AIM-120 Advanced Medium-Range Air-to-Air Missile (AMRAAM) is reported on by way of a detailed article at *The Drive*.³⁰ The author notes that this “latest version is the ‘perfect weapon of domination,’” because of its refined guidance systems.

Yet other US military materiel is reported on much more negatively, including the Zumwalt destroyer, which had rusted while on deployment and was heading to San Diego for refitting and maintenance.³¹ Reports from *The Drive* are also the primary source. Finally, the new test of the Laser Weapons System Demonstrator (LWSD) Mark 2 Mod 0 by the USS *Portland* in the Gulf of Aden is based on reportage at *Defense Blog*.³² This development is compared to recent statements by Russian military analyst Dmitry Kornev, who notes that the Russian “Peresvet” laser complex should be able to play a similar role in missile, aircraft, and satellite defense.

7. ARCTIC ARMAMENTS AND NEW GEOPOLITICAL CHANGES

Developments in the Arctic continue to be a source for analytical articles in the Russian press. In *VPK*, two articles review the Chinese icebreaker program and new Russian cold-weather military technology, respectively. An article in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* frames recent actions by the UK as a means to establish an “Arctic NATO.” Finally, *Krasnaya Zvezda* overviews the state of the Russian military in the arctic and how it has changed in recent years.

Vladimir Yeranosyan writes about the growing Chinese icebreaker program “Snow Dragon” for *VPK*, a development increasingly prioritized because of projected economic returns from the Northern Sea Route (NSR) in the near future.³³ Yeranosyan notes that the importance of the NSR is particularly compelling not because of its ease but because of the “absence of hot spots” relative to standard trade routes that have to run by places like Yemen, Iran, and Eritrea. He points out that one reason for the Chinese icebreaker program is exactly to avoid reliance on any other Arctic power, including Russia. This is treated with an extra degree of suspicion, given a recent, failed attempt by a Chinese research institute to purchase a small airstrip in Finnish Lapland. Yeranosyan frames this as a potential for Chinese-Western rapprochement directed against Russia (“a situational tactical alliance”), but one that was unsuccessful. Coupled with the negative result of a summit between US Secretary of State Blinken and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, Yeranosyan sees China remaining fairly independent in its approach to the Arctic. This will present a different kind of threat to Russia than the hypothesized US-Chinese cooperation that he argues was possible earlier this year before American diplomacy overreached itself.

Elsewhere in *VPK*, Yeranosyan has an article on new American military technology being deployed in the Arctic and its more developed and Arctic-specific Russian counterparts.³⁴ The author focuses first on new Stryker armored personnel carriers and Apache AH-64 attack helicopters that are being added to US forces in Alaska. He presents an overview of these new battalion-tactical brigades that will increase readiness and speed of reaction in the region considerably. He also describes a new ground forces doctrine for Alaska, which “includes the development of multi-domain forces, as well as the construction of defensive emplacements and training grounds.” Yeranosyan compares these new expected deployments somewhat unfavorably compared to the long-standing Russian rearmament in the Arctic, which he describes in detail, including the loadouts of Berkut-2 snowmobiles, Toros fire support combat vehicles, and a variety of tanks and other vehicles such as the new “Knight” armored personnel carrier. He argues that the Russian state has been both working on the modernization of equipment, but also the production of armaments and materiel specific to the Arctic theater. He adds that the US so far lacks the same depth of modernization and production of these armaments and materiel.

An article by Vladimir Mukhin in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* accuses the UK of “seeking the militarization of the Northern Sea Route and the creation of a northern analogue to AUKUS.”³⁵ Mukhin relies on an argument made on the website *InfoBrics* by Lucas Leiros, which suggests that a recent announcement to expand cooperation among Western states along the NSR is actually a declaration of “Arctic war” on Russia. The argument suggests that this Arctic AUKUS-like agreement was being justified by the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian crisis. The author reviews a number of recent UK military exercises, including those with NATO, and notes that UK naval capabilities are likely to be of particular importance as the Arctic becomes a zone of contention. Mukhin quotes several Russian military and economic officials to round out the article, while also stressing the recent sale of the UK icebreaker the RRS *James Clark Ross* to Ukraine as a sign that an adversarial position will continue for the foreseeable future.

Although noting that “Russia is significantly inferior to the United States and NATO in terms of the number of military facilities in the Arctic,” an article in *Krasnaya Zvezda* takes an optimistic approach, noting Russian official statements on policy toward the Arctic as well as aspirations for the short- and medium-term, in light of growing geopolitical competition and perceived threats.³⁶ The article extensively quotes the commander of Russia’s Northern Fleet, Admiral Aleksander Moiseev, who recently gave a speech at the XI International Forum, “Arctic: Present & Future.” He noted that in addition to Russia’s legal and international role in the Arctic, the country also seeks to “take steps to restore its positions in the region lost during the collapse of the USSR.” Moiseev also lists various threats by the US and other NATO countries to stability in the Arctic, arguing that, “a permanent military presence in the Arctic and the possibility of protecting state interests by means of armed struggle is considered by the leadership of the United States and NATO countries as an integral part of the overall policy of ensuring national security. Such actions are provocative and have a negative impact on the regional security system as a whole.”

8. TENSIONS BETWEEN POLAND AND OTHER EUROPEAN POWERS

A lengthy article in *VPK* highlights the increase in tensions between Poland and major European powers, including France, Germany, and Russia, in the aftermath of the migrant crisis on the Poland-Belarus border. The author begins by reflecting on the history of Polish military participation in the second Iraq war, a situation that first cast Warsaw as a strong supporter of the US at a time when France and Germany were in opposition to US policy in the Middle East. He then focuses on what he describes as the Polish tendency to do whatever the US asks of it, while at the same time seeking the status of a regional superpower, as demonstrated by its effort to take a leading role in the Visegrad group.³⁷

The article notes that for Poland, the only acceptable strategic choice is to seek to integrate into Western military and economic structures under US suzerainty. He believes that the US has asked Poland for tribute in blood in exchange for inclusion, which Poland has willingly paid. The US, in turn, has rearmed Poland with NATO standard weapons and equipment. But having been incorporated into the Western system, Poland is not willing to remain in a secondary roles and is seeking leadership positions in European institutions. It cannot accept its geostrategic weakness and understand that it is acting as a US Trojan horse in Europe, rather than an independent player.

However, some members of the Polish elite are starting to realize that a close alliance with the US will decrease, rather than increase, Polish security. They see that in the event of a war between NATO and Russia, military action will take place on Polish soil. And close cooperation with the US will only increase tensions not only with Moscow but also with Berlin and Paris. Meanwhile, the US pivot to Asia may decrease US willingness to support Polish ambitions in Europe. Russian-Polish relations, thus, will continue to depend on how active the US wants to be in Europe. If it retains Poland as its chief satellite in opposition to France and Germany, then bilateral relations will remain poor. If the US is less active in Europe or seeks to find common ground with France and Germany, then Poland will have no choice but to normalize its relationship with Russia.

9. PRESIDENT PUTIN'S VISIT TO INDIA

Putin's recent trip to India is the subject of discussion in Russian newspapers in December. The results of the meeting between President Putin and Prime Minister Modi are framed as a success of Russian diplomacy, and the Russian press highlighted that while India would not be "abandoning" its relationship with the United States in the foreseeable future, relations with Russia remain a priority and have not deteriorated.

An article in *Novye Izvestia* emphasizes the "special format of relations" between the two leaders is, suggesting an ability to "freely discuss" all major issues in world politics.³⁸ The article focuses on issues such as "the growing enmity between Russia and the United States," as well as worsening relations between India and China—which the author sees as a natural cause for India's continued geopolitical movement towards the US. In this vein, the article baldly states that, "Delhi clearly does not like Moscow's military-political contacts with Beijing," and pointed out with frustration India's participation in the QUAD alliance format.

The article reviews areas for growth and relationship-strengthening, including investment, technology cooperation, space, and environmental concerns. It also notes that military-technical cooperation will continue, including a new Kalashnikov automatic rifle modification, the Sprut-SD self-propelled cannon, and new ka-226T light helicopters. The article quotes several Russian political analysts, who provide support for a nuanced and hopeful view of the Russian-Indian bilateral relationship, underlining that India is undoubtedly moving toward the US, in part because of major changes in the US-China and Russia-China diplomatic relationships.

ADDITIONAL MATERIALS OF POTENTIAL INTEREST

The December issue of the monthly periodical *Zarubezhnoe Voennoe Obozrenie* has several articles on Western military issues, including on network-centric control systems in foreign armies, US programs to deter aggression in Europe, the 2022 US defense budget, and the views of US military leadership on the use of space in warfare. The full text of all articles in the issue may be found at <https://zvo.ric.mil.ru/upload/site230/u51BIAyF9d.pdf>

LIST OF SOURCES

- *Gazeta.ru*, a pro-government publication currently owned by the Rambler Media Group.
- *Krasnaya Zvezda*, official publication of the Russian Ministry of Defense.
- *Lenta.ru*, an online newspaper currently owned by the Rambler Media Group.
- *Nezavisimaia Gazeta*, a privately owned political and business daily known for quality reporting.
- *Nezavisimoe voennoe obozrenie*, a weekly military affairs supplement to *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, a privately owned political and business daily known for quality reporting.
- *Novye Izvestiia*, an online-only publication that until 2016 was oppositional toward the Russian government but is now classified as patriotic in orientation.
- RIA Novosti, a state-owned Russian news agency that formerly had editorial independence and quality reporting but is currently part of the *Russia Today* brand.
- Topwar.ru, a website focused on providing quality coverage for military developments in Russia and worldwide.
- *Voенно-Promyshlennyi Kur'er*, a publication informing on developments in the military-industrial complex (funded by the defense industry).
- *Zarubezhnoe Voennoe Obozrenie*, a monthly journal on foreign military capabilities, published by the Russian Ministry of Defense.

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