



Russia Studies Program

THIS WEEK'S ABSTRACTS

1. [INVASION OF UKRAINE: NATO STRATEGY](#)

Russian analysts are still focusing on the issue of NATO membership for Ukraine. Many point out that the ongoing war, while leading to a de facto defense arrangement between the "collective West" and Ukraine, has also hindered it from formally joining the alliance. Many authors believe that this is a benefit to Russia, although it has come at the cost of NATO unity and an amplification of arms supplies to Ukraine.

2. [INVASION OF UKRAINE: EU STRATEGY](#)

Connected to, although distinct from, the issue of Ukraine's NATO ambitions, is the desire by its political leadership to join the EU. While Russian commentators are broadly pessimistic about how much defense cooperation there now is between Ukraine and the West, they are more optimistic that Ukraine's EU bid will remain stalled for the foreseeable future. Although both sides have made many symbolic gestures to signal an agreement for membership down the road, concrete steps are harder to find, and the internal political machinations of the EU will further slow down integration.

3. [INVASION OF UKRAINE: RESPONSES TO WESTERN SANCTIONS](#)

More than a dozen articles offer responses to international sanctions against Russia, featuring reactions ranging from optimism to pessimism, and including skepticism and determination to wreak economic havoc on the West. Some serve to reassure the Russian public that even though foreign industries are leaving, they will still be able to access certain goods. Others discuss the prospect of more serious sanctions, such as EU bans on Russian oil and gas imports, or a US sea-route trade embargo against Russia. The authors

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argue that such measures would introduce a number of cascading effects that would harm countries “hostile to Russia.”

4. [INVASION OF UKRAINE: RESPONSES TO NATO MILITARY AID](#)

The details and implications of NATO and US military aid and efforts to arm Ukraine are the subject of several articles. It is evident that there is concern for the unified support that Ukraine is getting from the West, but there remains a confidence in the narrative surrounding Russian capabilities against the perceived lackluster quality of provisions going to Ukraine.

5. [INVASION OF UKRAINE: US NUCLEAR WEAPONS](#)

Several articles address US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin’s decision to cancel a Minuteman III missile test following President Putin’s announcement that Russia put its nuclear forces on a “special combat regime duty.” While some experts characterize the test cancellation as an effort to avoid nuclear escalation, one article suspects that it helped avoid drawing attention to the stagnant US nuclear modernization process. An additional article takes issue with the optics and messaging that the US is responsibly conducting nuclear policy, when it has conducted “mock nuclear strikes” in recent exercises and increased the frequency of nuclear-capable aircraft flights near Russia’s border.

6. [INVASION OF UKRAINE: PERCEPTIONS OF A NO-FLY ZONE](#)

As Ukraine’s request for a West-enforced no-fly zone remains unmet, Russian commentators caution against the implementation of anything remotely close to it and highlight the escalatory nature of such potential actions by NATO and the US.

7. [INVASION OF UKRAINE: UKRAINE AND NUCLEAR WEAPONS CONSPIRACY](#)

A recent issue of the Ministry of Defense newspaper posits the conspiracy theory that “Ukraine’s scientific establishment has sufficient competencies to create a nuclear explosive device.” The content of this article appears to be drawn from a TASS report that cites the Russian intelligence agency SVR as a source of claims that Ukraine had an advanced missile and nuclear weapon program.

8. [INVASION OF UKRAINE: THE BIOLABS CONSPIRACY](#)

Coverage of the conspiracy theories about US DTRA reference laboratories in Ukraine continues to proliferate across Russian media sources. It now includes official newspapers as well as MOD and MFA officials. Coverage has also begun to note statements made by Chinese government officials on this issue.

9. [CHINESE-RUSSIAN RELATIONS](#)

A number of articles in the Russian press assess the state of the Russian-Chinese relationship as well as China’s diplomatic and economic relations with the United States and the broader West. Many commentators are quick to point out that China is resistant to following along with the West’s sanctions regime against Russia, although also acknowledging that there remains much to be desired in terms of China’s closeness to Russia itself.

10. SCANDINAVIAN COUNTRIES AND NATO

The ambitions of Scandinavian countries to join NATO continue to be a worry for Russian commentators. Yet given the scale of hostilities in Ukraine, experts are quick to note that parallels with Ukraine—and any potential Russian reaction to new Scandinavian member-states—are improper. Although Russia assesses the membership of Sweden and Finland to NATO in a very negative light, it is clear that this issue is not an existential one compared to Russian perceptions of Ukraine's or Georgia's entrance into the alliance.

11. IRAN AND THE JCPOA

Russian commentators have maintained a close watch over US actions and engagement with other OPEC+ and oil suppliers ever since the US sanctioned Russian oil. Analysts have focused on the US-Iran relationship and the relevance of Iranian oil to the JCPOA negotiations. They remain critical of US moral flexibility and assert that the "special military operation" in Ukraine has had a profound impact on long-term global security, as is evidenced by the changing oil environment around the globe.

12. FOREIGN ACQUISITION OF US ARMS

Several articles focus on and are critical of the proliferation of US weaponry abroad. They include the legal sale of arms to Egypt and the resulting arms capabilities of the Taliban after the US exit from Afghanistan.

13. US STRATEGY IN THE ASIA PACIFIC

Amidst the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the Russian media maintain a close watch on US policy developments in other areas of the world, especially the Indo-Pacific region.

14. INFORMATION WARFARE

Two articles address alleged acts of "information warfare" against Russia, tending to take on a defensive tone about Moscow's leadership and the progress of the "special military operation." The first article responds to recent quotes from US Department of Defense spokesman John Kirby, who noted Russia's history of use and potential future use of chemical and biological weapons. The second article details alleged activities from the 72nd Center for Information and Psychological Operations (CIPO) of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, which the article claims was trained by the UK.

15. US AND EUROPEAN MILITARY CAPABILITIES

Several articles report on developments of US and NATO capabilities and weapons systems. One article reports on funding cuts to the US Air Force's first hypersonic missile, the AGM-183A Air-Launched Rapid Response Weapon (ARRW). A second article reports on a reorganization of the 3rd Marine Littoral Regiment that puts combat groups on the first and second island chains of the Pacific at a moment's notice. A third article reports on Germany's decision to purchase 35 American F-35A fighter jets to replace the Tornado fighter-bombers it uses to carry American B61 nuclear weapons.

1. INVASION OF UKRAINE: NATO STRATEGY

Russian analysts continue to focus on the issue of NATO membership for Ukraine. Many point out that the ongoing war, while leading to a *de facto* defense arrangement between the “collective West” and Ukraine, has also hindered it from formally joining the alliance bloc. According to many authors, this is a benefit to Russia, although it has come at the cost of NATO unity and an amplification of arms supplies to Ukraine.

Aleksandr Khramchikhin, writing in *Nezavisimoe Voennoe Obozrenie*, notes that the “extreme aggravation of the situation in Ukraine” is a direct result of NATO working in overdrive to supply weapons to the country.¹ Yet even given that, he argues that “Ukraine cannot be admitted to NATO. First, because of unresolved territorial problems. Secondly, due to the fact that many NATO member countries are categorically unwilling to assume obligations for the military defense of this country.” This preface begins a wide-ranging discussion that dismisses the chance of partisan activity against Russia, as well as the means by which Russia can manage escalation with a NATO that will be unwilling to fight in the end. He concludes with an optimistic assertion for a future political settlement after Russian victory: “The best option will be direct annexation of the eastern and southern regions to Russia and the transformation of the central part of Ukraine into a neutral demilitarized state.”

Some commentators, however, are more worried about NATO’s strategic plan in Ukraine vis-à-vis Russia. Writing in *Topwar.ru*, Evgeny Fedorov states that the alliance’s goal is to turn the country into a “second Afghanistan” for Russia.² He states that Russian victory is assured, and that it will put the US and its “European vassals” in a bind: other states will be very ready to relax sanctions, while in the “third world” a renewed support for China and Russia will undoubtedly emerge. He argues that to counteract this, NATO plans to make sure that Russia’s gain in Ukraine comes at the highest cost through massive arms shipments and the deployment of foreign mercenaries from the Middle East and elsewhere.

In a subsequent essay, Fedorov follows on this framing with an exploration of the sanctions regime that the West has put in place around Russia.³ He notes that while it is “very surprising how the Europeans promptly returned the old fascist galoshes” in their “Russophobia and chauvinism,” it is less so considering the privileges long held by the West against the rest of the world. He uses the Russian term “the golden billion”—referring to the people of the West who consume most of the world’s resources—to describe this phenomenon, noting that these privileges mean that the West is unused to consequences for its actions or to proportionate response.

Elsewhere in *Topwar.ru*, I. Bondarev focuses on the opponent of the Russian “soldier-liberator” in the Ukrainian “special operation.”⁴ He describes Ukrainian warfighters as representative of “the evil of the world” and as being in hock to a variety of foreign powers that were emplaced as the political regime in 2014. In this sense, he argues that “NATO in Ukraine is waging war under a false flag” and that Russia needs to understand this war to be a direct one. This quickly turns into a screed against the “Anglo-Saxon” dominance of Europe, whose “civilization is deceitful, criminal, vile, inhuman and bloody” and whose “democracy is a secret dictatorship of criminals.”

The malign “use” of Ukraine by the United States is front and center in an interview between Aleksandr Frolov and Vladimir Shtol, a professor at the Diplomatic Academy of the Russian Foreign Ministry, published in *Krasnaya Zvezda*.⁵ Shtol argues that Europe and the United States had started to break away from each other under the Trump Administration, given his “America First” policy and Europe’s realization that it

needed to become a military bloc in and of itself. Yet with the Biden Administration, Ukraine has been used as a means to bolster its credentials in Europe, as well as to get around the sense that the US has been faltering in its allied commitments since fleeing Afghanistan. Shtol also suggests, however, that American interest in Ukraine predates this issue, and rather is derived from the immediate post-Soviet years, when US policy-makers began to see Ukraine as a “kind of Anti-Russia” that could be “honed for confrontation with Russia.” He states that “this policy of maintaining an arc of instability along the perimeter of Russia’s western, southwestern, and southern borders has been a favorite topic of the United States.”

In *Nezavisimoe Voennoe Obozrenie*, Vladimir Ivanov reports on US efforts to “train fighters of the nationalist battalions” in Ukraine.⁶ He argues that this is a core mission of NATO, and that “far-right tourists” are being allowed into Ukraine specifically to act as mercenaries and trainers for Ukrainian armed forces, primarily through the Azov Battalion. He relies on a recent report in China’s *Global Times*, asserting that a “study of open federal government documents and reports from Western journalists allowed... experts to find out that American politicians, military and intelligence officials had well-established ties with Azov and used members of the battalion to foment anti-Russian extremism in Eastern Europe.” Ivanov goes through a long history of far-right figures in Eastern Europe and their connections to American immigration, Cold War-era lobbying groups, and Ukraine’s post-Soviet political history.

NATO’s role in training, supplying, and preparing Ukrainian forces is also broached in a March 13 article by Vladimir Mukhin in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*.⁷ He argues that NATO is working to prepare a counteroffensive against Russian forces, using Syrian mercenary fighters as well as professional soldiers from the United States. This grouping, formed alongside Ukrainian nationalist battalions may “soon form an entire army corps” in his view. Mukhin supports this claim in detail with numbers on materiel supplies from Turkey, Britain, the United States, and other NATO countries that have recently arrived in Western Ukraine, as well as the process to stand up a “foreign legion” outfit.

At a more practical matter, some Russian authors have made a point of worrying less about NATO. They have instead underlined Ukraine’s own negative statements about NATO membership, among other things. Writing in *Gazeta.ru* on March 15, Dariya Klester writes up comments by Ukrainian president Zelensky that “Kyiv cannot enter the open doors of NATO,” and underlines the danger of its membership, given the potential for a major war between Russia and NATO as a result.⁸ A follow-on explainer in the same outlet by Viktor Sokirko and Dmitry Mayorov further explores why Ukraine is now “disillusioned with NATO” because of its failure to agree to a no-fly zone over the country or rapid entrance into the alliance.⁹ They argue that “NATO cannot participate in hostilities” beyond its borders and beyond the desires of its member-states. In doing so, they overview the NATO emergency summit scheduled for March 24 and note the vagueness of its agenda and the concern over further escalation already bubbling up among some allies.

Yet NATO clearly remains on the mind of many. In *Argumenty i Fakty*, the head of the Center for Strategic Planning at AiF, Vyachslav Kostikov, writes about recent polling on the Russian population’s perceptions of foreign affairs.¹⁰ He reports that “more than 70 percent of Russians supported the recognition of the LNR and DNR by Russia” and that concerns about NATO trump most other foreign policy considerations.

2. INVASION OF UKRAINE: EU STRATEGY

Connected to, although distinct from, the issue of Ukraine's NATO ambitions are the desires of its political leadership to join the EU. While Russian commentators are broadly pessimistic about how much defense cooperation exists between Ukraine and the West, they are more optimistic that Ukraine's EU bid will remain stalled for the foreseeable future. Although many symbolic gestures have been undertaken on both sides to signal an agreement for membership down the road, concrete steps are harder to find, and the internal political machinations of the EU will further slow down integration.

Writing in *Gazeta.ru* on March 10, Lidiya Misnik reviews reasons why the EU is unlikely to move forward on bringing Ukraine into full membership with the organization.¹¹ Interviewing a number of Russian experts on European politics, she finds that the largest financial donors to the EU project—Germany and the Netherlands, in particular—are opposed to membership, even as some countries are more accepting. She quotes Bogdan Bezpalko, a member of Russia's Council on Interethnic Relations, saying, "Obviously, accepting a country with a ruined economy, with a civil war, into the EU—an economic union, even during a special operation by a neighboring country on its territory—is somewhat strange, because there is no economic or other expediency in this.... It makes no sense for the EU to include such a country in its composition. It will be a bottomless black pit." On the following day, a similar piece by Ivan Polovinin in *Gazeta.ru* furthers this point, also noting procedural difficulties in any accelerated process.¹² He quotes several European leaders, expressing support for Ukraine but clearly reluctant to speed up any process. He also points out treaty problems that inhibit any quick movement from a legal standpoint.

Even so, the EU is making efforts to grow in its foreign policy stature. *Novye Izvestiya* reports that the EU is "sharply increasing" its defense spending as a consequence of the Russo-Ukrainian War.¹³ This has been promoted by NATO officials, with the paper quoting NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg as describing previous levels of EU funding to be "extremely insufficient in the face of possible external threats."

3. INVASION OF UKRAINE: RESPONSES TO WESTERN SANCTIONS

More than a dozen articles respond to international sanctions against Russia. The articles vary greatly on their estimation of the success of these campaigns. Speaking about sanctions generally, Igor Yushkov (expert at the Russian Financial University) argues as follows in a *Gazeta.ru* article: "So far, we've seen that the sanctions do not lead to a significant drop in the level of trust in authorities. The deterioration of the economic situation does not guarantee conversion into political instability. There are many such examples: North Korea, Iran, Venezuela...."¹⁴ And two *Gazeta.ru* articles note that while many foreign businesses are leaving Russia, it does not mean that Russians will be unable to access certain goods, such as SUVs or beer.¹⁵ Articles frame it as though this is a time of opportunity for Russian businesses. For example, an article titled "The departure of foreign automakers will save UAZ" states: "[Russian car-manufacturer] UAZ will be able to win back 10% of the market after the withdrawal of Western companies."¹⁶

Another *Gazeta* article states: "It is clear that Western countries have completely exhausted the sanctions limit; only radical measures remain."¹⁷ This article discusses prospects of the US initiating a trade route embargo against Russia. Vladislav Inozemtsev, director of the Center for Post-Industrial Society Research, states, "According to the UN statute, this [would be] an act of aggression: not an economic sanction, but

actually an aggressive step. I don't think they will go for it, because they are afraid of an open clash with Russia directly. Here they will stop. Otherwise, a real war will begin." Political scientist Malek Dudakov adds, "Even if the embargo is introduced, this will not apply to all countries of the world. Obviously, other parts of the world will continue to trade with Russia."

On the other hand, some articles acknowledge that sanctions do seem to be taking effect. In *Voenna-Promyshlennyi Kurier* (VPK), Konstantin Sivkov speaks about sanctions targeting Russian oligarchs, arguing, "Some figures from the highest echelons have already openly begun to advocate stopping the special operation, that is, actually calling for Russia's capitulation to the Nazi regime in Ukraine."¹⁸ He continues that the West

delivered a blow to our economy and industrial production by imposing economic sanctions unprecedented in scale and depth, essentially setting up an economic blockade. Strictly speaking, according to international law, the very fact of imposing such a blockade, Russia has the right to consider as an act of aggression by the West and its allies....That is, all approaches to interaction with [the West], primarily economic, which were built on the principles of peacetime, are no longer acceptable. And this means that Russia must use all available levers in the economic and information spheres in order to inflict maximum damage on the enemy and at the same time minimize the consequences of his strikes for itself."

Other articles also call for a reciprocal response from Moscow. A March 7 *Topwar.ru* article argues that "if the world wants a sanctions war, it must get it. But—it goes both ways."¹⁹ The author, Roman Skomorokhov, argues that Russia must "hit the enemy in response, no less hard than the enemy hits us" and notes that Russia has already begun to do this. This reciprocal response will affect, and already is affecting, several areas of industry. As just one example, the author discusses Russian assistance in launching Western satellites; Roscosmos canceled the launch of almost four dozen British OneWeb satellites, noting that "it's no secret that OneWeb satellites are used by the Pentagon for their own purposes." He continues, "Now the rocket has been removed from the launch, the satellites will be placed somewhere. And then what? We cannot return them. Britain closed its air and sea space to Russian ships and aircraft.... The fact is that the British will not be able to get their satellites back soon....Of course, in a couple of years you can find an alternative way to launch OneWeb satellites into orbit, but something tells me that this will take more than one year." The author also claims that anti-Russian sanctions will affect microchip production. "Even in this area, Russia has something to hit the enemy with. Surprisingly, Russia accounts for 40% of the market for artificial sapphires and 80% of the market for sapphire substrates, which are used in every processor. No processors for us—no processors for everyone."

Energy-related sanctions bring even more potential to hurt the West. In a March 9 *Gazeta.ru* article, Stanislav Mittrakhovich (expert at the National Energy Security Fund) states: "With sanctions against Russia, Biden is not punishing Putin, but ordinary Americans."²⁰ He notes that there are few viable replacements for Russian oil. "US refineries are focused on the production of 'heavy' oil, almost all American 'light' raw materials are exported. It will be possible to replace Russian oil only with the help of Venezuela or Iran, which have long been under sanctions."

Discussing the European Union, which is still internally formulating its strategy for energy sector sanctions against Russia, Sivkov notes in VPK that: "Western countries slyly do not include our energy resources in the sanctions, and even soften financial sanctions to a certain extent, concerning this area. This indicates that they want to buy time to reduce their dependence on us until the moment when our response becomes

ineffective.”²¹ A *Gazeta.ru* article notes that if the EU does decide to cut off Russian oil and gas, there could be a number of cascading effects.²² “Accordingly, a hole will appear in the global gas balance. Last year, Russia supplied 150 billion cubic meters to Europe (175 billion cubic meters with Turkey). Where can you get this volume? Switching to coal will fail again, because Russia is also the largest supplier to the European market there.” The article continues, “For Europeans, this will be a painful measure, since they are heavily dependent on Russian raw materials. They must understand: if Brussels imposes sanctions against one type of energy resource, Russia in response can cut off the supply of other raw materials.” Another *Gazeta.ru* article notes that Russia is also a major supplier of wood pellets.²³ In the same vein, the *VPK* article adds: “Given the financial sanctions, Russian grain producers are becoming less interested in supplying grain to the EU countries and the UK. But Russia occupies a leading position among the producers of this product in the world. In addition, it becomes obvious that the second largest grain producer, Ukraine, will also, for obvious reasons, not be able to supply wheat and other grains for export. As a result, a severe food crisis will arise, which will take a toll on social stability in countries hostile to Russia.”

In a March 10 *Gazeta.ru* article, Sergey Kondratyev, senior expert at the Institute of Energy and Finance discusses what Gazprom should do if Germany decides to pump fuel through Nord Stream-1.²⁴ He argues that there are three options: “Among them are the sale of the pipeline, the dismantling of equipment for scrap metal and the conservation of the project until ‘better times.’” The article notes that before the conflict began, the pipeline could have sold for 8-10 billion euros.

4. INVASION OF UKRAINE: RESPONSES TO NATO MILITARY AID

Numerous articles focus on the details and implications of NATO and US military aid and efforts to arm Ukraine. It is evident there is concern for the unified support that Ukraine is getting from the West, but the narrative continues to have confidence in Russian capabilities against the perceived lackluster quality of armaments going to Ukraine.

- A March 10 *Gazeta.ru* article scrutinizes the quality of weapons that NATO is sending to Ukraine.²⁵ Journalist Victor Sokirko acknowledges that some weaponry, such as the Stinger, can be quite formidable but he then disparages the overall NATO effort by focusing on the older weapons that certain NATO countries are handing over to Ukraine. For example, he states that Germany is sending Ukraine Soviet-era weapons, originally belonging to the German Democratic Republic. The quality of these weapons greatly depends on storage maintenance and are long outdated in comparison to modern military capacity. The journalist analyzes these actions with the rationale that NATO countries are exporting the older weapons in their warehouse so that they can make room for modern weaponry. In parallel with this curiosity, Sokirko believes that these weapons have no ultimate utility, because “Russia controls a significant part of the territory of Ukraine. All these weapons, as soon as they are unloaded from cars or trains to warehouses, will be destroyed.”
- In *Topwar.ru*, Roman Ivanov criticizes NATO military aid and states that the aid packages are incomplete and impractical.²⁶ The article asserts that NATO, when sending provisions to Ukraine, either sends out-of-date Soviet weapons, or sends incomplete packages, such as planes that Ukrainians don’t know how to fly. He believes that, in a total tally of the available Soviet-era equipment, “Ukraine can get 20–30 MiG-29s, 8 Su-25s, 40 helicopters and 10–12 S-300 air defense

systems” but warns of the repercussions of such a large-scale aid transfer. He warns that “massive deliveries and large-scale intervention of third countries in this conflict are hardly possible and will only lead to its protraction and the risk of spreading to an even larger territory. And I think the West is also taking this into account, groping for a red line, which will be followed by a reaction from Moscow.”

- Numerous articles focus on Ukraine’s use of various drones against Russia throughout the “special military operation.” Some share significant concern for their role thus far but negate the long-term utility of the technology in this specific threat environment.²⁷ Irina Alshaeva reports on the rumored US plans to provide Switchblade, or “Kamikaze” drones to Ukraine. She depicts the varying capabilities of the Switchblade 300 and 600 and the difficulty of destroying them in the air. However, despite these concessions, the article concludes by stating that Russia will simply destroy the warehouses holding these drones before any of them begin their flight. Alshaeva believes that no actual value can be attributed to the potential sale. She states, “American kamikaze drones will not help Ukraine. This is not a weapon that can change the balance of power. But these supplies can be considered successful PR.”
- A March 17 article in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* analyzes the effectiveness of Turkish drones in the Ukrainian conflict.²⁸ The article sites experts claiming that the Nagorno-Karabakh footage of drone usage is largely a marketing technique. According to the article, these drones would fail to be as effective in real war and past footage is brilliant marketing technique. However, Ukraine has been using Bayraktar TB2 UAVs since the beginning of the “special military operation” and Turkey has taken careful efforts to clarify that Ukraine’s purchase of them is specifically a business venture. The Bayraktars were used extensively in the first days of the war and, after a small hiatus in early March, they are back in action. The article closely monitors Turkey’s role in production and transport of these drones. It holds that the most effective Russian response will come from loitering ammunition and asks, “And since these munitions were previously successfully tested in Syria, what prevents their combat use in the Ukrainian theater?” The article increasingly questions the reliability and effectiveness of drone usage by explaining that a Ukrainian reconnaissance UAV flew into NATO airspace and crashed outside of Zagreb and detonated an aerial bomb of 120 kg underground.
- In a March 10 *Gazeta.ru* article, Irina Alshaeva reports on the refusal of the United States to deploy Poland’s MiG-29 fighters from the US airbase (Ramstein) to Ukraine.²⁹ She cites some hypotheses for this denial, mentioning the danger of flying into Ukraine, the need for US MiG repairs, and Poland’s desire for American trained pilots. Alshaeva remains officially uncertain as to why Poland would not directly transfer MiGs to Ukraine, but the article posits that Poland wanted to profit from this deal by sending its MiG-29s to a US airbase in order to have the United States service and repair them and earn money in return for this deal. The emphasis that this article puts on Poland’s financial gain attempts to distract from the collaboration between NATO countries and legitimate interest in Ukrainian support.
- In another March 11 article, Irina Alshaeva goes into detail about the history of arms support to Ukraine by Western nations.³⁰ She contextualizes the current influx of weaponry by describing the limited and nonlethal Western support in Ukraine in 2014 and 2015. Throughout the years, the military aid has increased in worth and lethality. There is grave concern in Russia about the potential for escalation that this causes, as well as the long-term consequences of arming civilians. She reports on the strong goal and intention of capturing and destroying these weapon supplies, and

assures readers that the effort will be successful by citing evidence that a Chechen security forces already did so to a lot of foreign military aid. In the future, Russia anticipates deliveries in secret, but the article reflects confidence in their abilities to destroy any such deliveries with airborne strikes.

- In a March 14 article, a Russian commentator describe NATO's extensive efforts and operations to support Ukraine's military growth and training since 2014.³¹ He sites Yavorovsky as the most extensive such operation; there, a growing educational center has served as an in-depth military training site for Ukrainian geopolitical confrontation with Russia. The training is supported by American and Canadian instructors from NATO. The article explains that the leading military education facility follows NATO standards and practices; it continues to train hundreds of instructors and thousands of Ukrainian soldiers, with the help of Western experts. After the analytical review of NATO's achievements in Ukraine, the article concludes by mentioning that high-precision Russian weapons hit Yavorovsky and the training centers in Starichy on March 13.
- In *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, Igor Subbotin reports on the status of the US-Turkey discussion on sending Russian-made S-400 air defense systems into Ukraine.³² There is support in the US for Turkey's supply of the S-400s to Ukraine and discussions of a potential lend-lease plan to provide S-300s to Ukraine, as there is consensus within NATO that Ukraine needs a new air defense more than an increased aircraft supply. Despite such discussions, Subottin assures readers that Turkey would prefer to serve as mediator in this conflict and would likely hesitate to send S-400s to Ukraine because it would anger Russia. Turkey has taken no action in either direction, and all military technical projects with both Moscow and Kiev remain "in a frozen state."

5. INVASION OF UKRAINE: US NUCLEAR WEAPONS

Several articles address the decision of US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin to cancel a Minuteman III missile test following President Putin's announcement that Russia put its nuclear forces on a "special combat regime duty." A *Gazeta.ru* article interviews several experts who all concur that while the cancellation of the missile test could not exactly be characterized as "a sign of goodwill" towards Russia, it was a clear effort to avoid nuclear escalation.³³ Alexey Arbatov, head of the IMEMO Center for International Security, adds, "The United States understands that if both sides begin to gradually and simultaneously increase the levels of combat readiness of their strategic forces, then it is not far to reach an exchange of nuclear strikes. Nobody wants this—neither Russia, nor the United States, nor any other country in the world."

However, a different *Gazeta.ru* article offers a more skeptical rationale for the test cancellation: Alexei Leonkov (editor of the magazine *Arsenal of the Fatherland*) argues that the test was canceled to avoid drawing attention to stagnation in the US nuclear modernization process.³⁴ "The Pentagon hasn't dealt with ballistic missiles for thirty years. It has not modernized—neither the warheads, nor the Minuteman III missiles. Now, during the events in Ukraine, the US has raised hysteria about nuclear weapons and canceled a test launch of a supposedly upgraded Minuteman III missile scheduled for March 5 to show that they are not putting their strategic forces on high alert. In fact, there was just nothing new [to show]." The article continues by reiterating issues with the land-based component of the US nuclear triad. Konstantin Bogdanov, senior researcher at the Center for International Security at IMEMO RAS, states, "At the moment, the United States has only deployed the Minuteman III intercontinental ballistic missile which was developed

in the 1970s. Now they are developing a new generation of ICBMs, but, apparently, they won't be deployed for 8-10 years. At the best."

A *Krasnaya Zvezda* article takes issue with the public messaging associated with the Minuteman test cancellation.³⁵ It notes that the cancellation was "accompanied by words from American officials that the United States was thereby conscientiously conducting nuclear policy, while Russia's order to transfer the deterrence forces to a special mode of carrying out combat duty is, they say, 'dangerous and irresponsible.' These statements are nothing more than deliberate misinformation designed to mislead the world community and reassure them about the true American intentions." Moreover, the article highlights broad "evidence of preparations for a nuclear confrontation" including US and NATO military exercises which have simulated "mock nuclear strikes," as well as the increase in deployment of nuclear-capable aircraft near Russian borders in recent years.

6. INVASION OF UKRAINE: PERCEPTIONS OF A NO-FLY ZONE

As Ukraine's request for a West-enforced no-fly zone remains unmet, Russian commentators caution against the implementation of anything remotely close to it and highlight the escalatory nature of any such action by NATO and the US. A March 18 *Gazeta.ru* article by Nikita Folomov responds to Western media suggestions of an unmanned zone in the six to eight western regions of Ukraine for humanitarian purposes.³⁶ Folomov argues against its utility and interviews Russian academics who are sure that Russia's control over the airspace would guarantee a full-scale continental war. Russian academic Alexei Arbatov is quoted as stating, "It must be understood that an armed clash between NATO and the Russian Federation, if it starts, will go beyond the theater, and there will be nothing left of Ukraine. You can't extinguish a fire with kerosene." The intensity of this statement and Arbatov's confidence in the cascading result of an RF Armed Forces and NATO bloc collision are matched by other sources throughout the article.

7. INVASION OF UKRAINE: UKRAINE AND NUCLEAR WEAPONS CONSPIRACY

The March 11, 2022, issue of *Krasnaya Zvezda* takes up the conspiracy theory that Ukraine was developing nuclear weapons. It posits that "Ukraine's scientific establishment has sufficient competencies to create a nuclear explosive device."³⁷ The content of this article appears to be drawn from a March 6 TASS report that cites the Russian intelligence agency SVR as a source for claims that Ukraine had an advanced missile and nuclear weapon program.³⁸ The *Krasnaya Zvezda* piece parrots the disinformation that Ukraine was conducting extensive research and development into nuclear weapons that began in earnest in 2014 and implicated all of Ukraine's nuclear research institutes, engineering universities, uranium mines, and nuclear power plants. It also claims that "authorities in Kyiv could also have covertly purchased in the West technologies for the centrifuge enrichment of uranium and isotope laser separation" and were in the process of receiving plutonium from the US. It further argues that, as part of cooperation with Turkey and Saudi Arabia, Ukraine was hiding a budding ballistic missile development program.

8. INVASION OF UKRAINE: THE BIOLABS CONSPIRACY

Coverage of the conspiracy theories about US DTRA reference laboratories in Ukraine continues to proliferate across the Russian government and Russian media sources, now including official newspapers such as *Krasnaya Zvezda* and *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*. In numerous articles, MOD and MFA officials express concerns concerned about “ethic” nature of research. Coverage has also begun to note statements made by Chinese government officials on this issue. Below is a snapshot of this spread:

- A March 9 *Krasnaya Zvezda* article quotes the head of Russian NBC troops Lieutenant General Igor Kirillov’s concerns about the labs on Ukrainian territory. Kirillov discusses the direction of work at these facilities and its potentially nefarious purposes. He points to one of the projects involving the transfer to Germany of samples of blood serum of Ukrainians belonging exclusively to the Slavic ethnic group. He further reiterates the claims that since the US began assisting Ukraine in the reform of its healthcare system, the number of infections in Ukraine has significantly increased. He also posits that the Ukrainian and US authorities have sought to destroy evidence of any biological program before the invasion and destroyed disease agents so as to prevent them from falling into Russian hands and “confirm that Ukraine and the US were acting contrary to the BWC [Biological Weapons Convention].”³⁹
- A March 10 *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* article argues that the testimony of Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Victoria Nuland confirms that the US “intends to hide the results of bioexperiments in Ukraine.”⁴⁰ Nuland is quoted as saying, “There are biological research facilities in Ukraine. We are now very concerned that the Russian military may try to take them under control. Therefore, we are working with the Ukrainians to ensure that they can prevent any of these research materials from falling into the hands of Russian forces.” The article notes that MFA spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said that Nuland’s remarks confirm Moscow’s concerns about the US development of military biological materials on Ukrainian territory. It further quotes Deputy Director of the Foreign Ministry Information Department of China Zhao Lijian as expressing China’s concerns about the US “control of 336 laboratories” in several dozen countries. The article concludes on a note that China’s MFA is “urging the United States to provide comprehensive information about their military biological programs, as well as to accept international verification.”
- A March 11 *Krasnaya Zvezda* article claims that Russia’s “special operation” prevented the US from “completing in Ukraine work on perfecting biological weapons.”⁴¹ It further argues that “an analysis of documents on the secret military biological activities of the United States on the territory of Ukraine testifies to the monstrous plans of the United States for the covert use of biological weapons, in the affected area of which could be not only Russia, Ukraine and Belarus, but also any other country in Europe and Asia.” It quotes Major General Igor Konashenkov as saying that “the purpose of this and other Pentagon-funded biological research in Ukraine was to create a mechanism for the covert spread of deadly pathogens.” A supplemental March 11 *Krasnaya Zvezda* article discusses specific projects conducted in the labs, including project UP-4 that focused on the ability of migratory birds to spread infections such as H5N1, project P-781 that examines bats as potential carriers, and project UP-8 that allegedly examines Crimean-Congo hemorrhagic fever virus and hantaviruses in Ukraine (and a similarly focused German project).⁴²
- A March 11 article in *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* similarly covers Konashenkov’s statements and states that he “promised that in the near future the next package of documents received from Ukrainian

employees of biological laboratories would be published. The results of their expertise will be presented to the Russian and world public."⁴³

- A March 11 *Topwar.ru* article offers a background on the reference labs across the world and notes that China, like Russia, is concerned about US intentions.⁴⁴ It posits that, because of increased US biosecurity/safety standards, "Ukraine figures in this story as a third-fourth tier country that one would be unashamed to dump biological trash." The article features some of the documents, including culture manifests and research article abstracts.
- A March 12 article in *Gazeta.ru* posits that the issue has proven divisive in US society, with some in the Republican party as well as conservative talk show hosts disagreeing with the White House.⁴⁵ The article also focuses on the UN special meeting on "US military-biological activities in Ukraine" and the common Russo-Chinese position on the issue. It further quotes Dmitry Suslov from the Higher School of Economics as saying that the US will make the issue out to be Russian disinformation and information warfare and that Russia could use this as an argument to gain support for its actions in Ukraine outside of the Western world.
- A March 15 article in *Voenno-Promyshlennyy Kur'er* carries an interview with NCB Forces Chief Kirillov.⁴⁶ In it, he reiterates the claim that the "Defense Threat Reduction Agency was financing and conducting military-biological research on Ukrainian territory." He enumerates some of the projects conducted and expresses concern that much of this work was done so close to Russian borders. He states, "Of all the methods of destabilization of the epidemiological situation developed in the United States, this is one of the most reckless and irresponsible ones, because it does not allow control of the development of the situation. This is confirmed by the course of the pandemic of the novel coronavirus infection, the emergence and features of which raise many questions." The article goes on to state that the "Americans have already managed to evacuate from laboratories in Kiev, Kharkov and Odessa most of the documentation, including databases, biomaterials, and equipment to the Lviv Research Institute of Epidemiology and Hygiene and the American Consulate in Lviv. The probability is not ruled out that a part of the [pathogen] collection would be moved to Poland."
- A March 15 article in *Sankt-Peterburgskie Vedomosti* focuses on the reference labs in Georgia, Armenia, and Kazakstan.⁴⁷ The article sites a variety of "experts" from those countries as discussing various mysterious outbreaks and positing that the US was experimenting on humans in those labs. It also argues that the US is "actively working on the creation of bacteriological weapons (BW) of the third "genomic" and fourth "proteomic" generation. USA is the flagship in proteomics, and BW, whose components are molecular pathogens, do not have equals."
- A March 16 *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* article quotes Kirillov and states, "Kirillov is sure that the curators from the Pentagon understand that if these materials get to Russian experts, then [there is] a high degree of probability that a violation by Ukraine and the United States of the Convention on the Prohibition of Biological and Toxin Weapons will be confirmed. Namely: carrying out work to enhance the pathogenic properties of microorganisms using synthetic biology methods. Only this, Kirillov believes, can explain the haste with which the liquidation was carried out."⁴⁸
- A March 17 article in *Topwar.ru* discusses the common Russo-Chinese position on the issue, calls for inspections of the labs around the world, and states that there is a chance that because the issue was "raised by two permanent members of the UN Security Council, this issue could transition to a higher level, and Washington will be unable to ignore it."⁴⁹

- A March 18 top line in *Nezavisimoe Voennoe Obozrenie* claims that the “bioweapons developed by Kyiv were intended to combat the Russians and the Chinese.”⁵⁰ Citing Chinese claims that there are 336 sites around the world “under US control,” the article goes on to describe the work of the Ukrainian facilities as follows: “First of all, they monitored the biological situation in the proposed areas for the deployment of military contingents of NATO member states. As part of the second direction, strain-dangerous microorganisms were collected and exported to the USA. The third direction of their activity was devoted to the study of potential agents of biological weapons, specific to this region, which have natural foci and are capable of being transmitted to humans.” It quotes the head of the Nonproliferation and Arms Control Department in the MFA, Vladimir Ermakov, as discussing measures that could strengthen the BWC and “create an effective verification mechanism that has been blocked by the US since 2001,” even though he “expressed significant doubts that Washington would be ready” for such agreements.
- A March 18 article in *Krasnaya Zvezda* extensively quotes NCB Chief Kirillov, who reiterates many of the points made earlier about the documents and notes that it is possible that Ukrainian experts may have been “in the dark” about the nature of the research conducted and rehashes Russian suspicions that the efforts contributed to a rise in diseases in Ukraine.⁵¹

Separate from the articles above is a March 12 article in *Kommersant* that focuses on the UN session conducted at Russia’s initiative. The article states that the “UN has no information that Ukraine or NATO have been in noncompliance with the BWC.”⁵² It further traces the arc of Russian MOD and MFA allegations of US bioweapons work in Ukraine. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov is quoted as saying, “We are concerned about the revealed information that the Pentagon has created several dozen military biological laboratories on Ukrainian territory as part of its program to create such facilities around the world in violation of the relevant Convention on the Prohibition of Biological and Toxin Weapons.” He continues, “We will demand explanations. There is practically no doubt that these were absolutely not peaceful experiments, but aimed at the creation of biological weapons, moreover, ethnically oriented ones.” The article explains the history and the current status of initiatives in the BWC and quotes numerous US officials as well as Ukraine’s president Zelensky as denying Russian allegations and explaining the situation.

9. CHINESE-RUSSIAN RELATIONS

A number of articles in the Russian press assess the state of the Russian-Chinese relationship as well as China’s diplomatic and economic relations with the United States and the broader West. Many commentators are quick to point out that China is resistant to follow along with the West’s sanctions regime against Russia, although also acknowledging that there remains much to be desired in terms of China’s closeness to Russia itself.

An article by Roman Kildyushkin in the March 10 issue of *Gazeta.ru* looks to trade and economic interchanges between Russia and China considering heavy Western sanctions at both the state and corporate levels.⁵³ The author focuses on smartphone imports from China, arguing that “Russia is not threatened by a shortage of Chinese smartphones” despite sanctions and pressure to cut off electronics goods to the country. Kildyushkin frames the argument as a question of assertions printed in the *Financial Times*: Is it true that there is a “two-fold drop in the flow of Chinese devices” to Russia or not? Using data from Citilink and talking with Russian importers, he argues that this is not the case and that FT’s reporting is “propaganda manipulation” of data whose fluctuations are explainable not by sanctions but by other

basic elements of the international payment system undergoing changes due to financial restrictions—points that will be overcome in quick succession, according to the piece.

A companion piece that appeared a week later in *Gazeta.ru* is more negative about car imports from China.⁵⁴ Denis Budenkov reports that “Chinese factories have stopped” due to coronavirus delays and that “Russia may run out of cars.” He notes that this problem is exacerbated by exchange rate fluctuations due to sanctions, but the real issue is China’s restrictive quarantine measures to deal with new COVID waves, which are leading to factory shutdowns, production difficulties, and shipping delays. This is particularly unfortunate, as he reports that there is an ongoing boom in Russian demand for Chinese-brand cars.

China’s diplomatic position has also come under scrutiny. Dariya Klester, writing in *Gazeta.ru*, states that rumors about Russia asking China for military assistance in the Russo-Ukrainian War are false, according to a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman.⁵⁵ This contrasts with reports from the *Financial Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and CNN, all of which had made such claims. She quotes the Chinese spokesman as saying, “At this time, it is imperative that all parties show restraint, help to defuse the situation rather than add fuel to the fire, and promote a diplomatic settlement of the issue rather than its escalation.” The rest of the piece lays into Western media for seeking to raise tensions and discusses the importance that Beijing holds in remaining neutral in the conflict.

Several articles in *Republic (Slon)* also discuss Russian-Chinese relations. Writing on March 9, the European MP Bernard Guetta argues in a provocative manner that if the West intends to defeat Russia, it will have to cozy up to China in a very real way.⁵⁶ In his words, “In the fight against the Russian Nero, the Europeans will need a Chinese tyrant. It will be rather unpleasant, and not cheap, but the democratic countries, of course, were right to conclude an alliance with Stalin to defeat Hitler.” Guetta, a French MEP, writes with flourish about how “Putin has already lost” in a political sense, but that military disasters may occur for Europe in the future unless Russia is held to account now.

He writes, “If the West sits idly by for the long weeks it will take Putin to crush Ukraine, the world’s democracies will lose all credibility. Then the Chinese regime will feel at ease and will begin to dictate its will to all of Asia, especially Taiwan. Nothing will then stop jihadist movements from attacking the Arab world, Europe and the United States, and a triumphant Putin will move on to reclaim Moldova, Georgia and the entire lost empire.” To that end he proposes an alliance with China, although without detailing this in any concrete way.

Dmitry Goncharov also writes in *Republic (Slon)* about the potential for pulling China away from its partnership with Russia.⁵⁷ He reviews a recent trilateral meeting between China, Germany, and France, arguing that Beijing has realized that the war in Ukraine is counter to their economic interests and that this represents a new stage in their relationship not only with Russia but with the US and the EU. A week later, Goncharov pens a follow-up piece, in which he argues that Russia’s attempt to “Pivot to the East” has “stalled” because of China’s reluctance to further cooperate in the wake of the war. This is despite Russia’s desperation to shore up its ailing economy and geopolitical status through a Chinese alliance, which Goncharov calls “almost a matter of life and death.” He notes that this desire—and, so far, failure—extends beyond China, to other countries in East and Southeast Asia as well.

10. SCANDINAVIAN COUNTRIES AND NATO

The ambitions of Scandinavian countries to join NATO continues to be a worry for Russian commentators. Yet, given the scale of hostilities in Ukraine, experts are quick to note that parallels with Ukraine—and any potential Russian reaction to new Scandinavian member-states—are improper. Although Russia assesses the membership of Sweden and Finland to NATO in a very negative light, it is clear that this issue is not an existential one compared to Russian perceptions of Ukraine's or Georgia's entrance into the alliance.

A recent article in *Gazeta.ru* by Lidiya Misnik interviews policy experts on the potential for Sweden and Finland to join NATO, and the way in which Russia may react to such news.⁵⁸ She cites polling that shows support for joining NATO in the two countries is as high as it has ever been, even if political leaders remain cautious in their approach to a final determination. Interviewing several experts, she makes clear that this is a different stage in Russian-Scandinavian relations. She quotes Fyodor Lukyanov, head of the Council on Foreign and Defense Policy, noting that the Ukrainian crisis has jumpstarted “large-scale militarization... in Europe, which was not there before the recent events.” Oleg Barabanov, an academic at the Higher School of Economics, states that while “a final decision has not yet been made, this will be on the real agenda” rather than an impracticable pipedream.

Misnik's article suggests that Russia will not react to Scandinavian countries' entrance into NATO in the same way that it reacts to the threat of Ukrainian membership. In an interview with Aleksey Chepa, the First Deputy Chairman of the State Duma Committee on International Affairs, he says that this would be a “wrong decision” after so many decades of resistance to the idea, but that “Russia, of course, will not respond to these countries if they start the procedure for joining NATO, by analogy with Ukraine. But Russia has repeatedly noted that such a decision will not contribute to security and peace in Europe.”

11. IRAN AND THE JCPOA

Russian commentators maintain a close watch over US actions and engagement with other OPEC+ and oil suppliers ever since the US sanctioned Russian oil. Numerous media outlets have focused on the US-Iran relationship and the relevance of Iranian oil to the JCPOA negotiations. They remain critical of US moral flexibility and assert that the “special military operation” in Ukraine has had a profound impact on long-term global security, as is evidenced by the changing oil environment around the globe.

On March 14, Nikita Folomov writes in *Gazeta.ru* about the recent Iranian provocation and attack on US targets in Erbil, Iraq, and their significance in the midst of JCPOA nuclear negotiations.⁵⁹ He makes sure to clarify that it is unclear whether the provocation was a unified decision by Tehran or was made up of individual Iranian or Israeli forces attempting to derail the negotiations. The article focused specifically on the lack of response from the United States after the attack. Folomov rationalizes that the US was prioritizing the larger rivalries of Russia and China, to normalize relations with Iran and begin to facilitate Iran's entry into the US oil market. The United States does not need to concern itself with “hotspots” when its access to oil and its desire for progress are so important.

On March 19, in *Topwar.ru*, Evgeny Fedorov draws conclusions about the effect of the “Russian Special Military Operation” on world processes.⁶⁰ Specifically, he focuses on the US-Iranian relationship and asserts that the Ukraine campaign has greatly increased the chances of signature of the JCPOA as an attempt by Washington to replace Russia's oil market shares. Despite the new motivations, it cannot be forgotten that

the signing of the JCPOA greatly hinges on Russia's participation in the nuclear disarmament of Iran's enriched uranium, and Fedorov asserts that "Moscow's services can seriously drag out the signing story." With negotiations already halted on March 11, the author points to the US confiscation of \$38 billion worth of Iranian oil from Greek ships. In a particularly critical section, Fedorov writes, "Let's try to figure out why the United States is once again shooting itself in the foot by aggravating relations with Tehran when the deal is so important." After this criticism, the US actions are explained as temporary and unreliable due to the transitory nature of the four-year presidential term. Despite the current US efforts to normalize US-Iranian relations and fortify the JCPOA, Fedorov cautions that the economic benefit is not worth the hassle: it will take years for Iran to replace Russian oil, and the elimination of Iran's centrifuges leave it open and unprotected against any Israeli nuclear offense. Furthermore, the development of a US-Iranian oil relationship will further turn other OPEC countries into China's arms, as is apparently evidenced by their requests to trade in yuan.

12. FOREIGN ACQUISITION OF US ARMS

Several articles focus on, and are critical of, the proliferation of US weaponry abroad. Their discussions include the legal sale of arms to Egypt and the resulting arms capabilities of the Taliban after the US exit from Afghanistan.

Larisa Shashok, in a March 10 article in *Nezavisimoe Voennoe Obozrenie*, highlights the proliferation of US arms in Afghanistan after the evacuation of NATO and US troops.⁶¹ She reviews the known types of military equipment abandoned in Afghanistan and highlights the overall value of the supplies, \$85 billion. She connects this value to the Taliban's new capability to counterbalance the international economic campaign against them by selling supplies, parts, and machines to China, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and other interested parties. Beyond economic gain, these supplies have further enabled the Taliban to advance their military capacity and have already been able to use UAVs for military gain. Larisa ultimately affirms that the US rearmament of the Taliban has greatly destabilized and changed the international security environment and enabled the Taliban and other more fringe terrorist networks to increase their capacity and effectiveness.

In a March 16 article, Igor Subottin reviews for *Nezavisimoe Voennoe Obozrenie* the recent US debate to sell Egypt U.S. F-13 fighters.⁶² He highlights US Central Command's General Kenneth Mackenzie's strong advocacy for this sale and contextualizes his argument by explaining Egypt's trade relationship as balanced between Russia and the United States. The article elaborates on the intricacies of this relationship, as the sale continues to cause a strong debate in Congress due to US disapproval of Egypt's human rights abuses. The article states that despite Egypt's terrible human rights record, the US continues to financially support Egypt and Egypt remains one of the largest recipients of US aid, amounting to \$1.3 billion yearly. He rationalizes that US plans to sell the F-15s are strongly motivated by the US desire to move Egypt further away from Russia and Russian arms support, which makes up about 41 percent of Egyptian military aid. Subottin is critical of American hypocrisy but assures readers that even with the successful sale of American F-15s to Egypt, the Russia-Egypt relationship will remain strong.

13. US STRATEGY IN THE ASIA PACIFIC

Amidst a Russian invasion in Ukraine, the Russian media maintains close focus on US policy developments in other areas of the world and especially the Indo-Pacific region. In a March 10 article in *Nezavisimoe Voennoe Obozrenie*, Vasily Ivanov reports on the new US strategy in the Indo-Pacific Region.⁶³ The article remains descriptive, while reflecting a tone of respect regarding US adaptation and renovation of its regional policy. It goes into detail of U.S. plans and outlined steps to cement itself in the region as a counterweight to the PRC's expansive and dominating influence in the region. It pays significant attention to detail regarding the US response to China's increased attempts to sell submarine technology and offers to train and equip countries with submarine capabilities. China's geographically aggressive moves to leverage its resources over weaker countries through the Belt and Road Initiative is yet another example of supporting increased US involvement in the IPR. The article concludes by describing the implications of this policy for Russia, and quotes the statement made by US officials assuring that this policy shift does not concern Russia and solely wants to promote US values of freedom of choice and close partnership with the EU and other US allies in the region.

14. INFORMATION WARFARE

Two articles address alleged acts of "information warfare" against Russia, both tending to take on a defensive tone about Moscow leadership and the progress of the "special military operation." The first article is from *Topwar.ru*, and states: "Two wars are being waged in Ukraine today. One is real, with real dead and wounded, with real destruction, tragedies of people. And the other—invented, passing on the pages of newspapers and magazines, on the pages of social networks. Here, there are also casualties."⁶⁴ According to the article, the West is spreading false claims that Russia would use a weapon of mass destruction in Ukraine. Referring to recent quotes from US Department of Defense spokesman Kirby, which noted Russia's history of using and potential future use of such weapons, the author states:

You may have noticed two features of John Kirby's thinking. He does not need proof of his words. All of these international organizations, treaties, and inspections are just zilch compared to his word. Everyone says that the Russians do not have such weapons? The US doesn't believe it. And will not believe it... And the second. Are we "a country known for using these types of weapons against people"? Oh really? And where was this? In Syria, as I understand it? And the fact that Russia provided evidence of its own innocence and even named those who organized these fakes is no longer important?

The article continues by discussing previous instances of alleged American-led disinformation regarding Russian military operations in Syria.

The second is a *Krasnaya Zvezda* article that details alleged activities from the 72nd Center for Information and Psychological Operations (CIPO) of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, "whose employees were trained with the assistance of a brigade of information troops from Great Britain."⁶⁵ The article claims that since 2021, the employees of the 72nd CIPO have carried out at least four special operations against Russia and three against the republics of the Donbas. It describes the various tactics allegedly used, which include "discrediting the Russian state authorities in the regions adjacent to Ukraine," "reducing the psychological stability of the military personnel of the RF Armed Forces and their families," and "organizing interference in the work of the Border Service of the FSB of Russia." The article notes that one of the "most notorious"

methods that the Ukrainian CIPO uses to affect Russian citizens is reporting false news about heavy losses of the Russian army in Ukraine which “mention thousands of dead and hundreds of captured soldiers of the RF Armed Forces. The Russian Defense Ministry has repeatedly denied such reports.” The article notes that on March 1, Russian aviation launched precision strikes on targets in Ukraine, including on the headquarters of the 72nd CIPO, located near Kiev. “What is noteworthy,” the article states, “[is that] the frequency of information attacks on the Russian Internet has significantly decreased.”

15. US AND EUROPEAN MILITARY CAPABILITIES

Several articles report on developments of US and NATO capabilities and weapons systems.

A March 11 *Gazeta.ru* article reports on the US Air Force’s quest to acquire its first hypersonic missile.⁶⁶ The article notes that in FY 2022, Congress decided to allocate only \$80 million for the AGM-183A Air-Launched Rapid Response Weapon (ARRW) development program, which is only about half of what the Air Force requested. Igor Korotchenko (director of the Center for Analysis of the World Arms Trade) suggested a rationale for the cut in funding: “The United States has had problems with the creation of this class of weapons, so it is obvious that timelines and budgetary allocations will be shifted. The AGM-183A hypersonic missile is not ready for combat use, and it has not passed the test cycle—this remains to be done.” Specifically, the article notes that three tests of the rocket booster prototype were held in 2021, but all ended in failure. Military expert Dmitry Litovkin notes that the US is falling behind peer competitors in its nuclear modernization programs and hypersonic acquisition process. “For the past 30 years, the United States has not paid any attention to Russia at all. Therefore, its strategic forces are failing, while Russia is putting into service the ‘Bulava’, ‘Yars’, and ‘Sarmat’ strategic ballistic missiles, and has developed a maneuverable hypersonic ‘Zircon.’”

A *Novye Izvestiya* article reports on the 3rd Marine Littoral Regiment reorganization as part of the “Marine Corps Force Design 2030” project.⁶⁷ The reorganization will base small, mobile groups of marines in Hawaii, who, within a few hours, can deploy to a variety of locations in the first and second island chains in the Asia Pacific. The article takes a skeptical tone, identifying a number of potential obstacles to this plan, and arguing that it will be hard for Washington to negotiate with the countries that own the islands and archipelagos about the storage of equipment for the marines. It concludes: “The fact is that the ‘universal liberal values’ by which Washington justifies its hegemony in the world are less important for the states of the Indo-Pacific region today than the practical benefit from bilateral relations with China.”

A *BMPD* article reports on Germany’s decision to purchase 35 American F-35A fighter jets to replace the Tornado fighter-bombers it uses to carry American B61 nuclear weapons.⁶⁸ The article notes that when the deal was first initiated in 2020, it created controversy and criticism of Angela Merkel’s government, and was shelved. However, the alternative of modifying and certifying Eurofighter jets to carry American nuclear weapons would have required significant R&D and met “politically motivated resistance” from the US. The author notes, “Now, in light of the Russian military operation in Ukraine, which politically led to a sharp consolidation of NATO and the return of ‘American leadership’, as well as to the decision of the German government to dramatically increase military spending, political and economic objections to the purchase of the F-35A were withdrawn, and Germany finally opted for the F-35A. It can be assumed that in the future, Germany’s purchases of the F-35A will expand.”

LIST OF SOURCES

- *Argumenty i Fakty*, a weekly newspaper based in Moscow and a publishing house in Russia and worldwide. It is owned by the Moscow city government.
- *BMPD*, the official blog of the Moscow-based Centre for the Analysis of Strategies and Technologies (CAST), an independent for-profit think tank focused on analysis of Russian defense issues.
- *Gazeta.ru*, a pro-government publication currently owned by the Rambler Media Group.
- *Izvestiya*, one of Russia's oldest and most respected newspapers, noted for its quality military coverage.
- *Kommersant*, a privately owned political and business daily known for quality reporting.
- *Krasnaya Zvezda*, official publication of the Russian Ministry of Defense.
- *Nezavisimaia Gazeta*, a privately owned political and business daily known for quality reporting.
- *Nezavisimoe voennoe obozrenie*, a weekly military affairs supplement to *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, a privately owned political and business daily known for quality reporting.
- *Novaya Gazeta*, a Russian newspaper known for its critical and investigative coverage of Russian political and social affairs. Its editor was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2021.
- *Novye Izvestiya*, an online-only publication that until 2016 was oppositional toward the Russian government but is now classified as patriotic in orientation.
- *Republic* (formerly *Slon*), a private Russian-language online magazine covering business, domestic politics, economy, and culture.
- *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, official daily of the government of Russia, the only one to publish texts of new laws, etc.
- *Sankt-Peterburgskie Vedomosti*, billed as the oldest newspaper in Russia, from the 1700s; primarily covers city/regional issues in St. Petersburg.
- TASS, the largest Russian news agency and one of the largest news agencies worldwide. It is operated by the Russian government.
- Topwar.ru, a website focused on providing quality coverage for military developments in Russia and worldwide.
- *Voенно-Promyshlennyi Kur'er*, a publication informing on developments in the military-industrial complex (funded by the defense industry).

ENDNOTES

¹ Aleksandr Khramchikhin, "Advancing on thin ice" [Наступление по тонкому льду], *Nezavisimoe Voенное Obozrenie*, Mar. 10, 2022, https://nvo.ng.ru/realty/2022-03-10/3_1180_ukraine.html.

² Evgeny Fedorov, "Second Afghanistan: the West is trying to drag Russia into a protracted war" [Второй Афганистан: Запад пытается втянуть Россию в затяжную войну], *Topwar.ru*, Mar. 7, 2022, <https://topwar.ru/193080-vtoroj-afganistan-zapad-pytaetsja-vtjanut-rossiju-v-zatjazhnuju-vojnu.html>.

³ Evgeny Fedorov, "Fear and loathing of the 'golden billion'" [Страх и ненависть «золотого миллиарда»], *Topwar.ru*, Mar. 14, 2022, <https://topwar.ru/193412-strah-i-nenavist-zolotogo-milliarda.html>.

⁴ I. Bondarev, "Who is the Russian soldier-liberator fighting in Ukraine" [С кем русский солдат-

освободитель сражается на Украине], *Topwar.ru*, Mar. 16, 2022, <https://topwar.ru/193512-s-kem-russkij-soldat-osvoboditel-srazhaetsja-na-ukraine.html>.

⁵ Aleksandr Frolov, "The United States is using Ukraine for its own purposes" [США используют Украину в своих целях], *Krasnaya Zvezda*, Mar. 16, 2022, хх.

⁶ Vladimir Ivanov, "America above all" [Америка превыше всего], *Nezavisimoe Voennoe Obozrenie*, Mar. 17, 2022, https://nvo.ng.ru/realty/2022-03-17/10_1181_america.html.

⁷ Vladimir Mukhin, "NATO is preparing Ukraine for a counteroffensive" [НАТО готовит Украину к контрнаступлению], *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, Mar. 13, 2022, https://www.ng.ru/armies/2022-03-13/2_8389_kiev.html.

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