



CNA Russia Studies Program

## THIS WEEK'S ABSTRACTS

### 1. THE UKRAINE CRISIS: VIEWS OF US-RUSSIA NEGOTIATIONS

Negotiations between the United States and Russia over the Ukraine-Russia crisis are widely discussed across Russian media, from a variety of angles. Most commentators are in agreement that the United States and its allies are engaging in bad-faith negotiations, given their continued military-technical support for Ukraine, although some note concern with Russian posture. The negotiations themselves are seen as a first step, and meetings with Secretary Blinken and Foreign Minister Lavrov, as well as the formal diplomatic response from the United States to Russia over their treaty proposals, are treated in a variety of ways.

### 2. THE UKRAINE CRISIS: PERCEPTIONS OF US STRATEGY

In discussing the current confrontation between the United States and Russia, a number of publications consider causal factors affecting US strategy. The focus is on the impact of the withdrawal from Afghanistan and its effect on US assessments of geopolitical risks and US aggressiveness. The articles also discuss the US predilection for narcissism and double standards. Some analysts do note the clear rejection of a military response by US leadership as leaving open the possibility of a compromise solution.

### 3. THE UKRAINE CRISIS: DISCUSSION OF RUSSIA'S STRATEGY

Russian media published a number of articles discussing Russian goals and strategy in the Ukraine crisis. Several articles focus on Russia's need for security guarantees as a key driver of the current crisis. Other articles suggest that Russia's real concern is not NATO enlargement per se but specifically the placement

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of NATO military hardware near Russia's borders. Others suggest that in provoking a crisis now, Russia is reacting to a perception of weakness on the part of the United States in order to push the US into making concessions on Russian security demands.

#### **4. THE UKRAINE CRISIS: SIGNALS OF POTENTIAL ELITE UNEASE**

Two articles highlight the possibility of concerns within the Russian military about how an invasion of Ukraine would play out. The two authors, both well connected with segments of the Russian military and defense industry, suggest that a Russian military intervention in Ukraine could go badly and does not correspond to Russian national interests.

#### **5. THE UKRAINE CRISIS: REACTION TO POTENTIAL US SANCTIONS**

In *Voенно-Promyshlennyi Kur'er (VPK)*, Vladimir Vasil'yev of the Institute of USA and Canada Studies (ISKRAN) argues that the Russia sanctions bill proposed by Senate Foreign Relations Committee chair Bob Menendez is "Cold War 2.0 legislation." Vasil'yev notes that one way to interpret the bill is that it intends sanctions to "speed up and ease the Ukraine's accession" to NATO. In a Topwar.ru article focused on how sanctions on exports of high technologies to Russia can be incredibly damaging to the Russian economy, Andrey Mitrofanov posits that US sanctions seek to turn Russia into North Korea 2.0.

#### **6. THE UKRAINE CRISIS: REACTIONS TO WESTERN MILITARY ACTIVITIES AND "INFORMATION WARFARE"**

Numerous articles in the Russian press focus on the US deployments to Europe and the shifts in force postures and military activities in the region. *Kommersant* describes the state of "information warfare" and "hysteria" around Ukraine. *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* describes the military exercises and troop movements in the region, noting that NATO "assumes Russian aggression against Ukraine, [while] the Russian-Belarusian side [is concerned about] the possibility of NATO provocations that could push Kiev to resolve the problem of Donbass and Luhansk by force. Anton Lavrov, Roman Kretsul, and Andrey Fedorov discuss changes in the US force posture in Europe and quote a former Ministry of Foreign Affairs official as saying that some can be regarded as a "menacing maneuver."

#### **7. THE UKRAINE CRISIS: MILITARY AID TO UKRAINE**

More than 10 articles report on training and military aid to Ukraine, including new shipments from the US and UK, as well as transfers of US weapons from the Baltics, UAVs from Turkey, and artillery shells from the Czech Republic. While one article suggests that the acquisition of these new capabilities proves Ukraine's intent to invade the Donbas, most are skeptical that these weapons provide Ukraine with any new meaningful capability.

#### **8. THE UKRAINE CRISIS: UKRAINIAN MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS**

Several articles report on Ukrainian military developments "which confirm the fact that it is preparing for aggression against the [Luhansk and Donetsk People's Republics]." Two articles report on movements of the 58th Separate Motorized Infantry and 53rd and 54th Separate Motorized Brigades, transport of portable demining units, military exercises near Crimea, and Zelensky's decree to increase the size of armed forces by 100,000. A Topwar.ru article argues that Ukraine has been preparing to take back the Donbas by force since 2014. A fourth article reports on the low morale of Ukrainian troops.

## **9. REACTIONS TO NATO DEVELOPMENT PLANS**

Several articles address how NATO is planning to develop in the near to medium term and the threat that the organization's plans pose to Russia. The topics include the expansion of NATO's zone of operations to new territories, such as the Middle East, and new domains, such as space. NATO enlargement and its aggressive militarism, in the context of an overwhelming conventional force superiority over Russia, are highlighted as the main threats to Russia. The possibility of an unwanted NATO-Russia war being caused by Ukraine is also mentioned.

## **10. SCANDINAVIA AND NATO ENLARGEMENT**

Yevgeny Fedorov, writing in *Topwar.ru*, discusses the possibility of Sweden and Finland joining NATO. He argues that even though the two countries recently reiterated that they are not currently interested in joining the alliance, they retain the right to join at any point in the future while remaining so closely integrated with the alliance that membership would be merely a formal change in status.

## **11. CONCERNS ABOUT TURKISH EXPANSIONISM**

An article in *VPK* discusses how Turkey is increasingly being used by the US and UK as a proxy to contain Russia on its southern flank and to pursue expansionist ambitions in Central Asia. The article argues that despite some tensions with its NATO allies, Turkey remains firmly committed to the alliance's strategy to weaken Russia by forcing it to defend all of its borders and to impact its economy by creating alternative energy sources for Europe.

## **12. POTENTIAL RUSSIAN MILITARY DEVELOPMENT IN THE CARIBBEAN**

Two articles discuss potential Russian military developments in Caribbean states—namely, Cuba, Venezuela, and Nicaragua. A *Topwar.ru* article argues that because NATO is “increasingly, unceremoniously settling in close to Russia's borders from the Barents to the Black Sea,” including US missile deployment, Russia is forced to respond in kind. A *Novye Izvestiya* article argues that while US influence on Venezuela and Cuba may prevent them from being viable hosts of Russian military bases, Nicaragua may be a more suitable option. Both articles acknowledge the challenges associated with challenging US hegemony in the region.

## **13. US SUPPORT FOR JAPAN'S MILITARY GOALS**

Russian commentators continue to be concerned about a further deepening of the US-Japanese security relationship, arguing that Japan's military-strategic plans to reemerge as an important player in East Asia have led it to follow the US lead on geopolitical issues elsewhere. Writing in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, Valery Kistanov explores the question of why Japan wishes to become a military power, and what it is willing to sacrifice in order to achieve this. Although suspicious of Japan's claims to be concerned about national security, he nevertheless writes that it is necessary to take this as-is and focus on the fact that a considerable military buildup is in its early stages.

## **14. CHINESE-RUSSIAN RELATIONS AS A 'BIATHLON'**

The Olympic Games in Beijing may bring about renewed and strengthened diplomatic ties, according to Yuri Tavrovsky, the head of the Expert Council of the Russian-Chinese Committee for Friendship, Peace, and Development. Writing in *Moskovskii Komsomolets*, Tavrovsky argues that upcoming meetings between

Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping in the context of the games are a perfect venue for continuing down a line of close cooperation between the two at a personal level.

## **15. THE CSTO IN CENTRAL ASIA VERSUS NATO**

The deployment of CSTO forces into Kazakhstan during political troubles earlier in January has led to some Russian analysts to reappraise the organization. One article in *Gazeta.ru* by Viktor Sokirko and Dmitry Mayorov attempted to assess the CSTO's military capabilities at the alliance level. They argue that in fact the CSTO, while inferior to NATO in general, is more than capable of maintaining order in Central Asia and ensuring a form of moderate collective defense. This is more than sufficient, given that the CSTO has very different goals from NATO in the first place, according to the authors.

## **16. RUSSIAN-IRANIAN COOPERATION AND REACTIONS TO JCPOA NEGOTIATIONS**

Topwar.ru provides an update on the JCPOA negotiations and expressed criticism of the US position in the talks, highlighting Russian opposition to artificial deadlines. An article in *Ekspert* about the recent visit by Iran's president Ebrahim Raisi to Moscow highlights areas of Russo-Iranian cooperation, and says that the visit was aimed at securing Russian support in the face of US pressure for additional concessions from Iran as part of JCPOA negotiations.

# 1. THE UKRAINE CRISIS: VIEWS OF US-RUSSIA NEGOTIATIONS

Negotiations between the United States and Russia over the Ukraine-Russia crisis are widely discussed across Russian media, from a variety of angles. Most commentators are in agreement that the United States and its allies are engaging in bad-faith negotiations, given their continued military-technical support for Ukraine, although some note concern with Russian posture. The negotiations themselves are seen as a first step, and meetings with Secretary Blinken and Foreign Minister Lavrov, as well as the formal diplomatic response from the United States to Russia over their treaty proposals, are treated in a variety of ways.

An article in *Kommersant* by Elena Chernenko in early February reviews the leak of the formal diplomatic letter by the Spanish newspaper *El País*, arguing that the NATO response to Russia's request for security guarantees was equivalent to "simply sending a telegram to Moscow with the words 'f--- you,'" although couched in fine diplomatic language.<sup>1</sup> The article surveys a variety of experts about the diplomatic response, who noted that there remained potential points of agreement in terms of arms control and other issues even as many of the "counterclaims" in the document were deemed quite sharp and unconstructive.

In *Izvestiya*, Anton Lavrov summarizes the leaked letter as well. He notes that the NATO diplomatic response was useful insofar as it established a formal diplomatic back-and-forth on issue areas of relevance—but that from a military perspective it showed how wide the gulf was between the two parties and the complete lack of anything from the US side that was militarily acceptable to Russia.<sup>2</sup> Interestingly, Lavrov admits that it "was not to be expected that the US and NATO would refuse to further develop infrastructure in Eastern Europe or give a written promise not to accept Ukraine into the alliance." But he argues that leaving open the wide range of military training exercises and equipment that can be gifted to Ukraine represents a considerable threat, one that Russia will have no choice but to react to in an arms-race dynamic.

Andrei Kortunov writes in *Rossiiskaya Gazeta* about a potential way through the conflict. A well-known expert and the director general of the Russian International Affairs Council, he expresses a moderate position on the diplomatic realities, pointing to the many ways in which the sides simply are going to have to agree to disagree, while also seeking some sort of resolution to the conflict.<sup>3</sup> He offers a key suggestion, saying that the major concession on the NATO side should be to "impose a long-term moratorium on the admission of new members," while not necessarily acceding to further requests of Russia. He notes that this would still require "that the moratorium be supplemented by some kind of obligations regarding restraint in military-technical cooperation," so as to avoid further military buildups in Ukraine. Taken together, however, he argues that this would be a solution that might stabilize the situation.

Several articles focus on Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov's response to the response in late January, before the text leaked; these articles were sarcastic and biting.<sup>4</sup> A piece in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* provides a full narrative context to the situation, noting new military deals between Ukraine and the UK, plans for money coming from the US Congress, a "war frenzy" being whipped up in Ukraine, and other signs that point to doubt about the real diplomatic position of the alliance.<sup>5</sup> Another article in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, by Gennady Petrov, was more circumspect, arguing that "Moscow is in no hurry to escalate the conflict."<sup>6</sup> A piece at *Kommersant* also summarized the response and Secretary Blinken's public discussion of it, as well as the continued Russian dissatisfaction with the state of affairs and the resistance of NATO to a special status for the borderlands between NATO and Russia.<sup>7</sup>

A long, analytical review of in-person diplomatic activity between Russia and the US, NATO, and the OSCE, respectively, held in Geneva from January 9 to 13, was published in *VPK*.<sup>8</sup> Vladimir Kozin states that the talks “did not lead to substantive or constructive agreements,” but rather played a useful role in confirming to the Russian side that the US and NATO do not perceive security issues in the same way, and do not understand Russia’s insistence on sovereignty and security guarantees. While “the results of Russia’s negotiating tour with the United States, NATO and the OSCE have shown that further endless continuation of negotiations on the range of issues raised on the entire agenda is unproductive,” the idea-space of what the West considers acceptable was made much clearer, insofar as it meant only to “fully ensure unilateral and unequal security, but only for themselves [i.e., the US/NATO].” Throughout, Kozin casts considerable aspersions on US and NATO diplomatic entreaties, but he argues that this remained a helpful exercise, although also a cynical and pessimistic one.

An article in *Moskovskii Komsomolets* by Mikhail Rostovsky reviews the potential contours of “secret” negotiations between presidents Vladimir Putin and Joe Biden.<sup>9</sup> He evocatively describes the American position as a Matryoshka doll:

Biden's policy towards Putin and Russia is based on the principle of nesting dolls. The upper matryoshka is available to the eyes of absolutely everyone. The President of the United States publicly flexes his muscles... publicly calls VVP a 'murderer' and tells how Washington will effortlessly twist Moscow into a pretzel. The medium matryoshka is only visible to Putin and a narrow group of other high-ranking Russian and American officials. According to reliable information, at the summer talks in Geneva, Biden behaved with emphatic courtesy and assured that he understood the special role of Russia in international affairs and our concerns. What is Biden's smallest nesting doll hiding? Here, alas, for now we stop. At the moment we can say absolutely nothing about its content. And perhaps even the American leader himself does not know everything yet. What kind of nesting doll he will eventually have to present to the world depends on whether there will be some kind of agreement with Russia in this very end or not.

In *Topwar.ru*, Yevgeny Fedorov writes a biting account of the US position regarding Ukraine in the wake of the diplomatic exchanges of the prior weeks, suggesting that Ukraine is deeply uncomfortable with being turned into a centerpiece for American and Western aggression against Russia.<sup>10</sup> He points out concern by Kyiv that spreading panic about a potential war is a negative outcome, but he also notes that war is unlikely: “Part of the collective West will for some time whip up hysteria around the imaginary Russian invasion of Ukraine. Everything that is in the arsenal of propagandists will be used—it is necessary to convince everyone around of the inevitability of aggression. At the same time, Russia will silently stand its ground, occasionally fighting off the most absurd attacks. But the intensity of aggression will eventually subside, and the West will inevitably sit down at the negotiating table.” This concern about the United States whipping up a false panic in Ukraine is also reported in an article in *Novye Izvestiya* about Russian ambassador to the US Anatoly Antonov’s accusations that the West is planning a “false flag” operation to start a war in Ukraine.<sup>11</sup>

## 2. THE UKRAINE CRISIS: PERCEPTIONS OF US STRATEGY

In discussing the current confrontation between the United States and Russia, a number of publications consider causal factors affecting US strategy. The focus is on the impact of the withdrawal from Afghanistan and its impact on US assessments of geopolitical risks and US aggressiveness. The articles also discuss the US predilection for narcissism and double standards. Some analysts do note the clear rejection of a military response by US leadership as leaving open the possibility of a compromise solution.



Writing in *NVO*, Bartosh and Letyago describe US foreign policy as being determined by a syndrome of national exceptionalism. This syndrome includes an unshakeable belief in the universal applicability of American values and the US model of state-building. It also includes a tendency to use stereotypes and double standards in evaluating the international situation. The authors point to Anthony Blinken's recent observation that "it's hard to get Russians to leave once they're in your home" as an example, given the history of long-lasting US interventions around the world. Finally, they highlight a tendency towards narcissism, which prevents US ruling elites from understanding complexity in international relations. This narcissism means that rejection of US models is often seen as a hostile act. Furthermore, this narcissism leads to aggression, as US leaders refuse to accept compromise. The defeat in Afghanistan has pushed the US toward greater confrontation, as it seeks to compensate for the loss there by strengthening its position elsewhere.<sup>12</sup>

Vladimir Vasilyev makes a similar point in *VPK*. He sees the US response to Russian security proposals as a manifestation of a new Vietnam syndrome that has appeared in US policy since its humiliating withdrawal from Afghanistan. Since then, the US has sought to understand the new geopolitical configuration through a form of "combat reconnaissance." The author describes the original Vietnam syndrome as a period during which the US leadership recognized that defeat abroad was the result of domestic problems and which led to a period of internal reforms. The first Iraq War signaled the end of this period and a renewed period of confidence in the United States. After the US defeat in Afghanistan, the new Afghan syndrome is just getting under way and has given Russia the opportunity to launch a series of diplomatic initiatives to improve the security situation along its borders. The author argues that the Biden administration might not be able to survive a second geopolitical catastrophe, this time in Europe. Biden's open rejection of the military option is a sign of the Afghan syndrome at work. But at the same time, he is not willing to work toward a diplomatic solution, having instead decided to give sanctions another try. Vasilyev mentions US double standards in the context of its negative reaction to recent Russian suggestions that it might place military forces in Latin America, contrasting this to the refusal to understand negative Russian reactions to the deployment of NATO forces near Russia's borders.<sup>13</sup>

An article in *Moskovskiy Komsomolets* considers what the United States might want in its confrontation with Russia. It quotes Russian analyst Aleksey Arbatov, who suggests that NATO is convinced that Russia is planning to attack Ukraine. The Western response is currently aimed at achieving consensus among NATO members, and is therefore focused on serious sanctions, but not military action, in response to a Russian attack on Ukraine. Western leaders understand that they need to provide Ukraine with military assistance, while doing so in a way that does not provoke Moscow. For this reason, they are providing defensive systems, such as various short-range antitank and air defense systems, but nothing serious like heavy artillery or tanks. He sees these as the minimal possible actions. He also believes that Western leaders are ready to respond constructively to Russian proposals, without accepting the package as a whole. He believes that Western leaders understand Russian concerns about the development of NATO military infrastructure near its borders, but cannot accept an agreement that limits NATO enlargement. Instead, he suggests that Western leaders are considering a diplomatic compromise that would avoid formal changes to NATO rules while given Russia certainty that the alliance would not add Ukraine and Georgia.<sup>14</sup>

### 3. THE UKRAINE CRISIS: DISCUSSION OF RUSSIA'S STRATEGY

Russian media published a number of articles discussing Russian goals and strategy in the Ukraine crisis. Several articles focus on Russia's need for security guarantees as a key driver of the current crisis. Other articles suggest that Russia's real concern is not NATO enlargement per se but specifically the placement of NATO military hardware near Russia's borders. Others suggest that in provoking a crisis now, Russia is reacting to a perception of weakness on the part of the United States in order to push the US into making concessions on Russian security demands.

Two articles in *Krasnaya Zvezda* focus on Russia's security needs. The first argues that the end of NATO enlargement and the removal of strike weapons from eastern Europe are necessary to maintain Russian security and are therefore Russia's highest priority. It quotes Sergey Lavrov, who argues that the crisis is caused by the West's refusal to accept the reality that a multipolar world is being formed. He goes on to say that Russia will not allow the West to tie it down in endless discussions to ensure the security of Russia and its citizens. He also expresses concern about the possibility of a Ukrainian attack on the Donbas causing a larger conflict and suggests that the solution is direct negotiations between Kyiv and Donetsk/Luhansk.<sup>15</sup>

The second article focuses on Vladimir Putin's recent call with Boris Johnson, in which Putin focused on Ukraine's "chronic sabotage" of the Minsk agreement and NATO's inability to react appropriately to Russia's "well-founded" security concerns. It also quotes Lavrov discussing the promise made by all OSCE member states that they will avoid actions that increase their security at the expense of others, which he believes should have precluded NATO enlargement or the placement of offensive weapons near Russia's borders. The rest of the article discusses various international agreements on the indivisibility of security that have been adopted by NATO and OSCE member states over the years and suggests that the West has consistently ignored or violated these agreements.<sup>16</sup>

An article by Andrey Kortunov in *Izvestiya* discusses the reasons for Russia's fear of NATO expansion, which the author suggests is often portrayed as an "eschatological catastrophe" by Russian media and political leaders, on the same order as the Mongol invasion in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, something that could cost Russia its sovereignty and independence. Kortunov rejects this perspective, providing several examples of NATO member states with which Russia has better relations than it has with comparable nonmember states nearby. He also rejects the notion that NATO membership leads to the adoption of Western values, using Turkey as a counter-example. These observations lead him to conclude that the real fear is related to the placement of military infrastructure near Russia's borders. He suggests that Russia should focus directly on this issue, rather than on the question of NATO enlargement. The formal agreement that NATO military infrastructure would not be placed in eastern Germany could be used as a model for an agreement on this issue.<sup>17</sup>

In an interview with *Ekspert*, Andrey Sushentsov highlights the various occasions since the end of the Cold War when Russian leaders have warned that failure to agree on a new European security architecture with Russian involvement would inevitably lead to a new round of hostilities between Russia and the West. He mentions then-foreign minister Andrey Kozyrev's Stockholm speech in 1992, Boris Yeltsin's "cold peace" speech in 1994, and Vladimir Putin speeches in Berlin in 2001 and Munich in 2007. All of these statements were ignored, because the West had become used to Russia not carrying out its threats and believed that "Russia would endure everything, the main thing is to give her bad news in parts, in small pieces." Sushentsov argues that the goal of Russian policy is to restore realism, particularly in US analysis of the



situation. He also suggests that the West does not understand how important stability is for Russia. The United States is beginning to recognize that Russia is a strong player and can make demands, rather than just plead to be heard and while it cannot immediately agree to Russian demands, it can start the process of reaching agreement. One important step in this regard is for the US to stop outsourcing Russia policy to Russia's immediate western neighbors, which are consumed with an irrational Russophobia and governed by young and inexperienced political elites.<sup>18</sup>

Aleksandr Khramchikhin, writing in *NVO*, suggests that Russia has decided to undertake the current escalation of tensions because it senses weakness in its adversary. This weakness is apparent in military terms, but also politically, since Russian leaders believe that the withdrawal from Afghanistan might encourage NATO to make concessions in order to avoid another humiliation. In this context, Russia seeks to restore its sphere of influence across the former Soviet Union, with the possible exception of the Baltics, and to have this sphere recognized officially by Western leaders. Forcing the US and NATO to sign such documents would be a bitter blow to Western powers and would make other countries reject the possibility of allying with the US and NATO. The author warns that even if Russia were to succeed in this effort, this would be a pyrrhic victory, as it would have to once again expend resources to support and defend its relatively weak neighbors. In the meantime, the people of these countries would come to hate Russia as an occupying force, much as the people in Eastern Europe did under Communism.<sup>19</sup>

In *VPK*, Konstantin Sivkov suggests that Russian military pressure has already achieved one of Russia's objectives. By forcing Joe Biden to clearly state that the US will not use military means to defend Ukraine, it has restrained Ukrainian leaders from launching an attack to retake the Donbas region. Russian pressure has also worked to force the US and its allies to adopt a more pragmatic posture, such as discussing the possibility of mutual concessions rather than ignoring Russian interests altogether as they have in the past. In the second half of the article, Sivkov discusses additional measures Russia could take to press the US to come to an agreement. These include the establishment of military bases in Latin America, the recognition of the independence of the Donbas republics, and the production of advanced weapons such as S-500, Tsirkon, and Sarmat. He also discusses possibilities in the information sphere, where Russia's ideas about multipolarity may be attractive to countries not eager to live under the yoke of Western-run multinational corporations and enforced liberal values. In the economic sphere, Russia could shift its energy supplies from Europe to China or nationalize Western investments in the Russian economy. Sivkov brings up the possibility of establishing a military-political alliance with China, something he believes could happen if Western pressure on Russia continues to increase. Iran, Belarus, and North Korea could also be included. With the possibility of subsequent expansion to Pakistan and Syria, such an alliance could be equal to NATO. In conclusion, he suggests that the Russian government should "liquidate the fifth column among Russia's political elite"—those who own assets in the West, who have family living there, and who have been promoting harmful Western ideas in Russia.<sup>20</sup>

## 4. THE UKRAINE CRISIS: SIGNALS OF POTENTIAL ELITE UNEASE

Two articles highlight the possibility of concerns within the Russian military about how an invasion of Ukraine would play out. The two authors, both well connected with segments of the Russian military and defense industry, suggest that a Russian military intervention in Ukraine could go badly and does not correspond to Russian national interests.

Mikhail Khodarenok, writing in *NVO*, argues that military action against Ukraine “will not be the walk in the park” that Russia’s “bloodthirsty politologists” are predicting. He argues that faith in a single disabling missile strike combined with air superiority will not result in Ukrainian capitulation, just as it did not work in the past for a variety of actors, including the Soviet Union in Afghanistan and Russia in Chechnya. Assuming that the initial onslaught does not result in a Ukrainian capitulation, Russia would then be facing a protracted occupation of a hostile population in a large country. Khodarenok argues that Russian leaders “underestimate the level of hatred towards Russia. The Russian army will not be met with bread, salt and flowers in Ukraine.” Furthermore, Russia has “learned nothing from what happened in south-west Ukraine in 2014,” when Ukrainian forces fought fiercely against separatist and Russian forces. Big cities are ideal terrain for insurgents, and “there would be more than one Stalingrad or Grozny in Ukraine.”<sup>21</sup>

Retired Lt. General Leonid Ivashov—long considered a hardline nationalist opponent of Vladimir Putin, but one who retains connections with the Russian military elite—recently published an open letter to the president, calling on him to reject a war against Ukraine. He argues that “the use of military force against Ukraine, firstly, will call into question the existence of Russia itself as a state; secondly, it will forever make Russians and Ukrainians mortal enemies.” He also believes that “the escalating situation around Ukraine is, first of all, artificial and mercenary in nature.” Ivashov believes the confrontation with Ukraine is being driven by a kleptocratic elite in order to continue stealing the country’s wealth while ignoring the domestic problems that are the true threats to Russia’s long-term viability.<sup>22</sup>

## 5. THE UKRAINE CRISIS: REACTION TO POTENTIAL US SANCTIONS

Vladimir Vasil’ev of the Institute of USA and Canada Studies (ISKRAN) argues that the Russia sanctions legislation proposed by Senate Foreign Relations Committee chair Bob Menendez is in effect a “Cold War 2.0 legislation.”<sup>23</sup> The *VPK* article lists all of the sanctions legislation focused on Russia in the US Congress, positing that its authors are seeking for electoral and other gains, and provides a detailed analysis of the Menendez legislation in particular. Vasil’ev states that one way to interpret the bill is that it intends sanctions to “speed up and ease the Ukraine’s accession” to NATO and notes that, because the legislation is cosponsored by leading Democratic senators, the Biden administration has already made up its mind on Ukraine’s accession to the Alliance. It analyzes the text of the legislation and points out that “one paragraph in the [second] section of the bill could be interpreted in a way that [the US supports] operations to destabilize Crimea from Ukrainian territory.” He concludes the analysis of the bill by saying that efforts to disconnect Russia from SWIFT and other things in the legislation are “nothing more than a form of declaring a large-scale economic war on Russia, the purpose of which is not inflicting the maximum possible damage, but the destruction of its economic system as such.” At the same time, the article notes that US sanctions have been ineffective to-date in changing Russian behavior, and that there might be significant friction between the US and allies over this potential new round.

US sanctions seek to turn Russia into North Korea 2.0, argues Andrey Mitrofanov in *Topwar.ru*.<sup>24</sup> The author states that sanctions on US exports of high technologies to Russia can be incredibly damaging to the Russian economy and, as an example, analyzes US restrictions on Chinese companies ZTE and Huawei and other US restrictions on export of microelectronics-related technologies to China. Mitrofanov posits that by pushing China to work with Taiwanese producers, US policy is actually forcing China to look at a resolution of the Taiwan situation with the use of force. In turn, US sanctions on Russia could cause collapse of specific Russian markets, depress Russian domestic industries, and leave some equipment inoperable without access

to Western parts and maintenance. The author argues that the only way to counter such sanctions is to develop “a government strategy to restrict trade that relies on borrowing of technologies and full-cycle enterprises, and not a thoughtless acquisition of end goods. Let it be a little outdated, but all its components (or at least critical ones) must be produced on the territory of the Russian Federation.”

## 6. THE UKRAINE CRISIS: REACTIONS TO WESTERN MILITARY ACTIVITIES AND “INFORMATION WARFARE”

Numerous articles in the Russian press focus on the US deployments to Europe and the shifts in force postures and military activities in the region.

Marina Kovalenko and Sergey Strokan', writing in *Kommersant*, describe the “information warfare” around Ukraine that was impacting the value of the Russian ruble.<sup>25</sup> The authors posit that the most recent examples are that Russia could go to war because of sanctions imposed by the West for its actions in Ukraine. They point out the “hysteria” around the announcement by the US Department of State about the evacuation of diplomatic families from Ukraine and a halt to several Western airlines’ overnight stops in Kyiv. The article notes that not all Western governments are in a state of panic. It further posits that the Ukrainian side itself is contributing to the panic by calling urgent meetings of the national security council and local meetings that focus on territorial defenses.

An article by Dmitry Litovkin in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* describes military exercises and troop movements in the region, noting that NATO “assumes Russian aggression against Ukraine, [while] the Russian-Belarusian side [is concerned about] the possibility of NATO provocations that could push Kyiv to resolve the problem of Donbass and Luhansk by force.”<sup>26</sup> The article notes that the West has been “discussing [Russian plans for invasion of Ukraine] for two months,” even though the Ukrainian government doesn’t seem to believe that an attack is imminent. It describes the changes in US and NATO force posture and arms transfers to Ukraine, noting that, while the US says that it won’t deploy forces to Ukraine, it is unclear whether it considers countries such as Ukraine and Georgia to be “allies.”

In *Izvestiya*, Anton Lavrov, Roman Kretsul, and Andrey Fedorov discuss changes in the US force posture in Europe, the deployment of troops to Poland and Romania, as well as heavy armaments to Poland.<sup>27</sup> The article quotes a “military expert” as saying that the small-scale US deployments are symbolic because of a need to reassure allies because “over the last several months, they have inflated the hysteria around Ukraine.” It also quotes former deputy MFA minister Sergey Ordzhonikidze as saying that the US is escalating the situation:

It is interesting that they are going to send troops not through NATO, but under their own command. It would seem that this is not so important. But by doing so, the Americans are sending a signal to their allies that they are ready to confront Russia along the entire border—from the Black Sea to the Baltic Sea. This we can regard as a menacing maneuver. In addition, by announcing the increased combat readiness of the troops, they indirectly confirm their statements that Russia is about to invade Ukraine. At the same time, it is already clear that they are not going to fight for Ukraine itself. They want to help her with the supply of weapons. But there is one more nuance. This grouping is another pressure factor in the negotiations. The US thinks that they are strengthening their negotiating position with Russia.

Several other articles discuss military activities:

- *Novye Izvestiya* describes ongoing US military exercises around the world.<sup>28</sup> These include the IMX/CE 2022 exercise in Bahrain, billed as the largest exercise in terms of vessels and unmanned aerial systems of 10 countries; the Winter Camp exercises in Estonia; and the upcoming Cold Response-2022 in the Arctic, noting that this is the largest exercise of its kind since the 1980s.
- An article by Viktor Sokirko and Dmitry Mayorov in *Gazeta.ru* notes the NATO exercise Clemenceau 22 in the Mediterranean. It also posits that, at the same time, the US “is considering introducing new rules for the passage and navigation of ships in the Black sea to open a passage in the Bosphorus for US aircraft carrier groups.”<sup>29</sup> The article discusses the possibility of entry of a US aircraft carrier, noting that it would be a political signal by the US, even though the aircraft carrier would be incredibly vulnerable. It quotes a retired counter-admiral as saying that “the very fact of this location will be discussed in the sense that the United States and NATO thus ‘marked’ this territory. If the aircraft carrier will conduct aircraft launches—this will be discussed twice as much. After all, it can even be imagined in such a way that Russia is afraid to wage war against Ukraine precisely because of the American aircraft carrier. It does not matter that Russia did not plan any war. Such entry will have a powerful political effect.”
- *Gazeta.ru* also reports on the US deployment of the WC-135 Constant Phoenix “nuclear sniffer” aircraft to the UK ahead of the Russian Thunder-2022 nuclear command and staff exercise.<sup>30</sup> The article quotes a “military-diplomatic source” as saying that the US deployment of the aircraft, which is usually focused on North Korea, is likely related to a US concern that Russia may be testing the Burevestnik cruise missile during the exercise.
- Another article in *Gazeta.ru* focuses on Western reaction to the deployment of Russian nuclear submarines in the Atlantic closer to US shores.<sup>31</sup> Noting concerns about this and demands for reciprocal deployments close to Russia by US lawmakers, the article quotes several analysts as saying that the Russian deployments are ordinary, even though some in the US may not be used to them, and that Russia is already used to similar US submarine deployments close to its borders. Maksim Aleshin of the Institute of USA and Canada Studies is quoted as saying that Russian deployments, particularly with submarines that can be armed with the Tsirkon cruise missile, are demonstrative in nature.

## 7. THE UKRAINE CRISIS: MILITARY AID TO UKRAINE

One of the most frequent topics during this reporting period is assistance to Ukraine. A February 6 *Gazeta* article provides an overview of the countries that have provided training support to Ukrainian troops in recent months. Such support includes an unspecified number of Latvian trainers, more than 100 special forces from the UK, and 200 Canadian military instructors.<sup>32</sup> A *Krasnaya Zvezda* article notes that on January 27, Trudeau announced that the training program would be extended until 2025 and that the number of instructors would soon increase by 60 people.<sup>33</sup>

More than 10 articles address military aid to Ukraine. Several of the articles focus on the delivery of a new package of aid from the US which began on January 22.<sup>34</sup> A *Nezavisimoe Voyennoye Obozreniye (NVO)* article speculates about the 90 tons of contents in the first Boeing 747 cargo plane: “[J]udging by the footage released by the Pentagon of loading the aircraft at the American Dover airbase, another 100 Javelin

anti-tank guided missiles with storage, as well as about 100 units (probably the first of a significant batch) of very exotic small-scale American M141 SMAW-D disposable anti-bunker grenade launchers, produced in the late 1990s." The article continues by speculating about future US military aid to Ukraine, which, according to the author, could include Stinger MANPADs, TOW-2 portable missile systems, modern electronic warfare equipment, and helicopters used in Afghanistan.

Aid from the UK is also discussed. In addition to the recent announcement of a \$2.3 billion loan for the development of the Ukrainian Navy,<sup>35</sup> an *NVO* article reports that the UK flew in eight cargo flights' worth of military aid from January 17 to 20.<sup>36</sup> According to an *Izvestiya* article, among these shipments were some "460 tons of weapons," consisting of "more than 2 thousand NLAW portable anti-tank missile systems" and "possibly Brimstone air-to-ground missiles.... The cost of one such aircraft missile is about £100,000, which is extremely burdensome for the Ukrainian budget. The effectiveness of their combat use is likely to be low due to the extremely limited potential of the national Air Force."<sup>37</sup>

Additional articles address contributions from other countries, including Estonia's transfer of Javelin antitank missiles "reaching their storage expiration dates" and "old Soviet" D-30 122-mm towed howitzers "they had previously received from the Finns," as well as Stinger MANPADs from Latvia and Lithuania. Additional contributions include: from Turkey, attack UAVs and construction of two Ada corvettes with guided missiles; and from the Czech Republic, more than 4,000 artillery shells to 152-mm howitzers.<sup>38</sup>

A *Topwar.ru* article concludes, "In turn, Kiev, along with new weapons, will receive broader combat capabilities. And some of the products received indicate that Ukraine's preparations to repel a hypothetical invasion may be masking preparations for its own attack on the republics of the Donbas."<sup>39</sup> Other articles are more skeptical about any increased capabilities. An *NVO* article notes that "Western military supplies to Ukraine are so far limited and are unlikely to significantly affect the balance of the Armed Forces of Ukraine and Russia. In principle, short-range anti-tank and anti-aircraft weapons can play only a limited role in countering large combined-arms and aviation groupings." The author concludes: "Any deliveries of more significant and heavy weapons will require a completely different level of military assistance from Western countries to Ukraine, a long time, and the involvement of Western personnel to maintain more complex systems, which will create an escalation of involvement for which the West is completely unprepared. Therefore, what is now being sent to Ukraine by Western countries with such pomp and advertising can play no more role than a pellet for an elephant."<sup>40</sup>

## 8. THE UKRAINE CRISIS: UKRAINIAN MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS

A *Krasnaya Zvezda* article summarizes recent steps the Ukrainian military has taken. According to the article, "[I]ntelligence data indicates an active build-up of the Ukrainian army in the zone of Kiev's military operation in the Donbas, which confirms the fact that it is preparing for aggression against the LPR and DPR." According to the article, the intelligence states:

[T]ank units of the 58th separate motorized infantry, 53rd and 54th separate mechanized brigades of the Armed Forces of Ukraine were ordered to come out of leave and sent to temporary deployment points. In addition, all drivers and gunners who are being treated are urgently discharged from medical institutions with recommendations to continue treatment in the units themselves.... In places where, according to the Minsk agreements, weapons and heavy equipment of the Ukrainian army are stored, in particular in the areas

of Andreevka, Dobropolya and Volnovakha of the Donetsk region, the work of tank crews and artillery crews was recorded. These groups of military personnel of the Armed Forces of Ukraine bring the equipment into a state of combat use.<sup>41</sup>

In addition, there are reports of the transport of UR-77 and UR-83P portable demining units to the front line. “The use of this technique makes it possible to make passages in minefields up to 14 meters wide, which is quite enough for the passage of tank columns and, subsequently, ‘driving tank wedges’ into the DPR and LPR defense militia units.” A *Novye Izvestiya* article adds that Ukraine recently conducted military exercises near its border with Crimea, firing Uragan missile launcher systems.<sup>42</sup> Additionally, the article reports on President Zelensky’s decision to increase the size of the Ukrainian army by 100,000 over three years.

A Topwar.ru article argues that Ukraine, with the help of NATO, has been preparing to implement a “Croatian scenario” in line with the 1995 Operation Storm, where within four days the Croatian army successfully regained control of the vast majority of territory held by separatists, leading to victory in the war. The author notes that “an impressive contingent was pulled to the borders of the republics of the Donbas—at least 125,000 soldiers from different parts of Ukraine. In terms of numbers, it is comparable with the 1995 model of Croatian forces involved in Operation Storm.” The author argues that since 2014, such an operation to retake the Donbas by force has been Ukraine’s goal. He states:

That is why Kiev did not comply with any points of the Minsk agreements, and was not going to comply. When Russia revealed the West’s plans to give Kiev the go-ahead to invade Donetsk and Lugansk, and when Russia made it clear what consequences await those who decide to take such a step, a new wave of hysteria began in the West. Not wanting to admit the obvious—pushing the Ukrainian authorities to forcefully resolve the crisis in the south-east of Ukraine, Washington and London switched to the tactics of information pressure. Hence the flood of statements that Russia is preparing to invade Ukraine.<sup>43</sup>

A *Gazeta.ru* article reports on the low morale of the Ukrainian troops, which is due to a number of issues, including military defeats since 2014-2015, low salaries, and wage delays, which sometimes span three months.<sup>44</sup>

## 9. REACTIONS TO NATO DEVELOPMENT PLANS

Several articles address how NATO is planning to develop in the near to medium term and the threat that the organization’s plans pose to Russia. The topics include the expansion of NATO’s zone of operations to new territories, such as the Middle East, and new domains, such as space. NATO enlargement and its aggressive militarism, in the context of an overwhelming conventional force superiority over Russia, are highlighted as the main threats to Russia. The possibility of an unwanted NATO-Russia war being caused by Ukraine is also mentioned.

Writing in *NVO*, Aleksandr Bartosh argues that Western assurances that NATO is a defensive alliance fly in the face of recent history, particularly given its 1999 operation in Kosovo against Yugoslavia. He notes how this operation violated various sections of the NATO charter. He also discusses NATO member state operations in Afghanistan and Iraq in the 2000s and the intervention in Libya in 2011. He describes these operations as a gradual hybridization of the alliance, part of its transformation from a regional structure into a “global power system that serves the interests of the Anglo-Saxon elite and the world financial oligarchy,” which has led to greater instability in international relations. During this process, NATO has



sought to take over various functions from both the UN and the OSCE. Bartosh goes on to argue that NATO enlargement today presents the greatest threat to both Russian national security and international security overall.<sup>45</sup>

In a second article, Bartosh and a co-author discuss the drafting of NATO's new strategic concept. They note that the development of the concept is being hindered by the absence of a new US national security strategy document. They argue that Washington continues to view NATO as a useful and controllable instrument for US power projection in its global competition with Russia and China. However, they believe that the United States' European allies are not eager to pivot to the Pacific, while East European states are pushing to keep the focus of the US on the Russian question. These issues will require the NATO strategic concept to be built on compromise, which will negatively affect core issues in the concept. The authors identify five key imperatives for NATO in warfighting: (1) cognitive dominance through the use of joint ISR and data analytics, (2) multilayer resistance in complex conflicts, (3) ability to project power and influence against adversaries, (4) integrated multidomain defense, and (5) interdomain command superiority. They conclude by discussing the limitations of this conception, focusing on the likely importance of urban warfare and A2/AD for countering the US predilection for long-range precision strike.<sup>46</sup>

Sergey Nesterov outlines NATO's expansion into the space domain, describing the recently adopted NATO space policy document. Echoing Barosh, he notes that this expansion is part of NATO's ongoing effort to move beyond the bounds of its activity as outlined by its charter in order to achieve Western global hegemony. Nesterov describes NATO's satellite program, the establishment of a NATO space center at Ramstein in 2020, and the June 2021 declaration that attacks in or from space would elicit a response from the alliance, up to and including Article V declarations. He concludes by arguing that the new document highlights NATO's plan to integrate space into collective defense.<sup>47</sup>

A long article in *Zarubezhnoe Voennoe Obozrenie* discusses the role of militarism in US and NATO strategy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The author highlights US efforts in recent years to pressure its NATO allies to increase their military expenditures. He also discusses how the United States uses foreign military sales and military assistance to promote its militarist conception of world politics to other countries. He highlights how "Anglo-Saxon" states use the politics of force, economic sanctions, blackmail, and threats to "militarize international relations": "First, deliberately unacceptable demands are put forward against the object of future aggression, then sanctions are imposed, first of all, by the UN Security Council, [including allowing] the limited use of military force... [in order to] separate the belligerents. At the third stage, the actions of the attacking side go beyond the limits of the powers allotted to them or completely ignore international structures that refuse to sanction the further development of aggression." The Western intervention in Libya in 2011 and the 2014 Maidan in Ukraine are given as examples of these types of operations. The article concludes by highlighting the role of US militarism in the present-day crisis in Ukraine and again blames the US for ignoring international law in order to maintain its dominant role in the world.<sup>48</sup>

Several articles focus on the role of NATO in the Ukraine crisis. Aleksandr Shirokorad argues that European complaints about Russia unilaterally changing Ukraine's borders ignores the numerous cases of border changes in Europe (specifically on the territory of the former Yugoslavia) since the end of the Cold War, largely with NATO support. He argues that if Ukraine were to join NATO, it would use Article V to initiate a major war between NATO and Russia over the Donbas region. The author believes that Western leaders are engaged in a bluff, seeking to force Russia into concessions through the risk of war. But the problem is that Ukrainian leaders may provoke the war despite their "overlords'" wishes by attacking the Donbas directly. He mentions Polish leaders who dream of restoring Poland's eastern territories, while Lithuania could at any point cut off Russian land access to Kaliningrad. He suggests that Gorbachev and Yeltsin's advisors should

be tried for treason for failing to get written guarantees from the West about NATO's non-expansion, while Donbas separatists should launch a drone attack on US trainers in Ukraine.<sup>49</sup>

An article by Aleksandr Staver in Topwar.ru discusses how NATO general secretary Jens Stoltenberg is stoking tensions on Russia's western border. The author notes that despite ostensibly being a defensive alliance, NATO seems to be willing to attack and destroy any other country, all in the name of defense. He argues that the alliance is just cover for US occupation of Europe, since Europe cannot accomplish anything on its own. European military assistance to Ukraine is primarily useful for public relations purposes, to highlight the number of countries that are providing support. Although neither the US nor its NATO allies have any plans to fight Russia, Ukraine's unpredictability may lead to a conflict.<sup>50</sup>

A second article in Topwar.ru, by Yevgeny Fedorov, discusses the balance of forces between NATO and Russia. It focuses on the territory gained by NATO as a result of the end of the Cold War, as well as NATO's decisive advantage in total manpower. It also notes that NATO has a decisive overall advantage in conventional armaments. This is why Russia is seeking to establish a buffer zone on its western border, by asking for the withdrawal of NATO forces to its 1997 boundaries. By creating a more predictable security environment, such a move would increase security for both sides.<sup>51</sup>

## 10. SCANDINAVIA AND NATO ENLARGEMENT

Yevgeny Fedorov, writing in Topwar.ru, discusses the possibility of Sweden and Finland joining NATO. He argues that even though the two countries recently reiterated that they are not currently interested in joining the alliance, they retain the right to join at any point in the future while remaining so closely integrated with the alliance that membership would be merely a formal change in status. All five Scandinavian states belong to the Nordic Defense Cooperation (Nordefco) organization, a union aimed first and foremost against Russia. This organization is looking to incorporate the three Baltic states at some point in the near future.

Fedorov notes that Sweden has much more extensive cooperation with NATO than Finland has. It is currently adapting its military forces to conform to alliance demands, while also expanding trilateral military cooperation with Norway and Denmark. Both Sweden and Finland have undertaken other coordinating steps that would allow them to quickly enter any conflict on NATO's side and would allow NATO military forces to use their territory. The author describes these steps as being part of NATO's effort to create a cordon sanitaire against Russia from the Barents Sea to the Caucasus. The article notes that the two countries both assisted Nazi Germany against the Soviet Union during World War II. Their current neutrality could therefore be quickly replaced with an agreement to fight with NATO against Russia. Nevertheless, this is not enough for NATO, which wants to place military bases on Swedish and Finnish territory in order to increase its influence in the Arctic and to increase its ability to attack northern Russia.<sup>52</sup>

## 11. CONCERNS ABOUT TURKISH EXPANSIONISM

An article in VPK discusses how Turkey is increasingly being used by the US and UK as a proxy to contain Russia on its southern flank and to pursue expansionist ambitions in Central Asia. As for Turkey, its tactical successes in Libya, Syria, and Azerbaijan have expanded President Erdogan's ambitions. The article argues that despite some tensions with its NATO allies, Turkey remains firmly committed to the alliance's strategy to weaken Russia by forcing it to defend all of its borders and to impact its economy by creating alternative

energy sources for Europe. Turkey is now focusing on consolidating its influence in Central Asia, where it is attempting to create a military association as a step on a path to a unified Turkic army.<sup>53</sup>

The article describes various Turkish initiatives to bring Central Asian states into its sphere of influence, arguing that Russia can work with China to counter these efforts. It also mentions that Turkish security services have extensive ties with underground pan-Turkic movements in Tatarstan, Bashkiriya, Sakha, and Crimea. It also notes that the establishment of a pan-Turkic state is more important for Turkey than religious ties with organizations such as the Muslim Brotherhood. Erdogan, according to the article, is pursuing a predatory policy of permanent war.

## 12. POTENTIAL RUSSIAN MILITARY BASES IN THE CARIBBEAN

Two articles discuss potential Russian military developments in Caribbean states—namely, Cuba, Venezuela, and Nicaragua. A Topwar.ru article argues that because NATO is “increasingly, unceremoniously settling in close to Russia’s borders from the Barents to the Black Sea,” including US missile deployment, Russia is forced to respond in kind.<sup>54</sup> According to Boris Martynov, head of the Department of International Relations and Foreign Policy at Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO), this could include deployment of Russian military infrastructure to “Russian-friendly” Cuba and Venezuela. Martynov says, “These are all countries that are more or less aligned with our principles and share the main provisions of our foreign policy,” including Nicaragua, “which also has a long history of confrontation with the United States.

A *Novye Izvestiya* article specifically discusses the potential for hosting Russian military bases in the region.<sup>55</sup> The author states that Cuba’s reliance on US tourism and Venezuela’s desire to ease US sanctions prevent those countries from being viable hosts for Russian military bases. He believes that Nicaragua may be a more suitable option, noting that US sanctions and the recent “expulsion” of Nicaragua from the Organization of American States have made it indifferent to the attitude of Washington. Also, Nicaragua has historically been much warmer to Russia than to the United States. The article states, “[If] Moscow decides to recognize the DPR and LPR, then Nicaragua will immediately support Russia. In 2008, this country became one of the four countries in the world that recognized South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Crimea was recognized by Nicaragua 10 days after it became Russian.” The article continues by discussing the prospect of developing a Russian-Chinese Nicaraguan Canal.

However, both articles point out that such development may be difficult given US efforts to “block countries that are friendly to Russia and hinder American hegemony” in the region. The articles cite US “colonial territories” including Puerto Rico, the US Virgin Islands, Navassa Island, and Guantanamo Bay as evidence of this desire to control the Caribbean.

## 13. US SUPPORT FOR JAPAN’S MILITARY GOALS

Russian commentators continue to be concerned about a further deepening of the US-Japanese security relationship, arguing that Japan’s military-strategic plans to reemerge as an important player in East Asia have led it to follow the US lead on geopolitical issues elsewhere. Writing in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, Valery Kistanov explores the question of why Japan wishes to become a military power, and what it is willing to sacrifice in order to achieve this.<sup>56</sup> Although suspicious of Japanese claims to be concerned about national

security, he nevertheless writes that it is necessary to take this as-is and focus on the fact that a considerable military buildup is in its early stages.

Kistanov, the Head of the Center for Japanese Studies at the Institute of the Far East of the Russian Academy of Sciences, argues that Japan's government is eager to pursue remilitarization and is happy for US military assistance in order to do so. He also notes that not only is it increasingly eager to receive American aid, it also is building up its own internal capacity. He cites the rapid growth in the military budget of the Japanese armed forces, and active discussions on the Japanese sides about new R&D spending on major military equipment such as fighter jets, anti-hypersonic missile technology, helicopter carriers, and other items. In the end, the article does not actually answer the question of why Japan was seeking to do this, but rather focuses on the fact that it was rapidly doing so, regardless.

A second, shorter piece on Japan in Topwar.ru, by Aleksei Volodin, argues that US views on geostrategic competition require it to further expand its alliance network beyond NATO.<sup>57</sup> He claims that this is because of the rising power of "Russia and other powers," which requires the US to have even more support than its allies in Europe can provide. Yet European partners, such as Hungary, Croatia, Slovakia, Italy, and Germany, are not in lockstep with US goals vis-à-vis Russia, which means that the US is actively searching for "more loyal" allies. Alongside Australia and the AUKUS deal, he points to Japan specifically, saying that "US authorities are trying to make the Land of the Rising Sun one of those who will not only support anti-Russian sanctions, but also engage in military pressure on our country."

## 14. CHINESE-RUSSIAN RELATIONS AS A 'BIATHALON'

The Olympic Games in Beijing may bring about renewed and strengthened diplomatic ties, according to Yuri Tavrovsky, the Head of the Expert Council of the Russian-Chinese Committee for Friendship, Peace, and Development.<sup>58</sup> Writing in *Moskovskii Komsomolets*, Tavrovsky argues that upcoming meetings between Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping in the context of the games are a perfect venue for continuing down a line of close cooperation between the two at a personal level.

Tavrovsky characterizes the current state of relations as a political "biathlon" whereby they "will not compete with each other, but they will not act as a single team." He overviews the points of agreement and interest between the two sides related to upcoming meetings, including renewal of bilateral agreements and further military and economic cooperation. He notes that a few areas of tension remain, including the hesitancy by Chinese financial institutions to work with Russian counterparts, because of US sanction threats, as well as questions over the degree to which Russia and China are on the same page with regard to Ukraine and Taiwan, respectively.

The author suggests that any residual belief in US-China cooperation is fading, leaving China more inclined to treat Russia seriously. "Faced with unprecedented American hostility after 40 years of not simply peaceful coexistence, but closer to [uncomfortable] 'cohabitation,' the Chinese are also shedding their last illusions. Increasingly, they are coming to the conclusion that the irrational rejection of everything Chinese in the United States is due to a powerful layer of Sinophobia in the collective unconscious of the population." Yet he also notes that it is premature to think China is going to join the CSTO, or that the two sides will be concluding an "Agreement on the Joint Prevention of a Surprise Attack," an idea which Tavrovsky claims was being bandied about in Moscow think-tanks in recent weeks.

## 15. THE CSTO IN CENTRAL ASIA VERSUS NATO

The deployment of CSTO forces into Kazakhstan during political troubles earlier in January has led some Russian analysts to reappraise the organization. One article in *Gazeta.ru* by Viktor Sokirko and Dmitry Mayorov attempted to assess the CSTO's military capabilities at the alliance level.<sup>59</sup> They argue that in fact the CSTO, while inferior to NATO in general, is more than capable of maintaining order in Central Asia and ensuring a form of moderate collective defense. This is more than sufficient, given that the CSTO has very different goals from NATO in the first place, according to the authors.

Their article relies heavily on recent reporting from the *New York Times*, which they analyze as supporting US beliefs that the CSTO represents a genuine threat to NATO. The authors suggest that this direct comparison is improper, given considerable differences between the organizations' stated purposes and missions. They interview a range of military experts to support this point, quoting retired General Nikolai Bordyuzha as making a distinction between the CSTO as a "contractual-political organization" and NATO as a full, integrated military alliance. They are particularly keen on pushing back against the idea that the CSTO is perhaps a new-model Warsaw Pact—an idea which the authors, and their interviewees, view as a particularly bad way to look at the situation.

Sokirko and Mayorov review the history of the Warsaw Pact and the consequences of its dissolution, noting key dissimilarities between it and the CSTO. They also note that while both the CSTO and NATO have formal strict territorial limitations, the CSTO honors these limits while NATO has considerably expanded its out-of-area mission over the last 20 years. One interviewee, diplomat Aleksei Latyshev, is quoted as saying that due to this overreach, the CSTO has an advantage in providing credible security guarantees to Central Asian states, while there is little interest in joining NATO due to their overbroad remit: "Thus, the CSTO can defeat NATO in Central Asia. Not in the direct sense of military confrontation, of course, but through the provision of security guarantees that NATO cannot give in this region. Kazakhstan has shown this in the most obvious way."

## 16. RUSSIAN-IRANIAN COOPERATION AND REACTIONS TO JCPOA NEGOTIATIONS

An article by Aleksey Podymov in *Topwar.ru* provides an update on the JCPOA negotiations and expresses criticism of the US position in the talks.<sup>60</sup> It first notes how Western media covering the JCPOA didn't pick up on commentary by Russia's ambassador to Vienna, Mikhail Ulyanov, who represents Russia at the JCPOA talks. Ulyanov reportedly stated that, while Russia views the current situation as a glass half full, many other participants view it as half empty. And, while "Russia shares the [Western] understanding of urgency [in the talks], it is against artificial deadlines." The article posits that Secretary of State Anthony Blinken's statements about "sincere apologies" that the US would be unable to return to the JCPOA if Iran doesn't accede to new US demands sound like "blackmail."

The recent visit by Iran's president Ebrahim Raisi to Moscow highlights areas of Russo-Iranian cooperation, according to an article in *Ekspert*.<sup>61</sup> The article argues that Raisi's visit was aimed at securing Russian support in the face of US pressure for additional concessions from Iran as part of JCPOA negotiations. The article notes counterterrorist cooperation in Syria, discussions about the security situation in Afghanistan, possible purchases by Iran of Russian air defense systems, and additional areas of cooperation in "economics, trade, politics, and culture." Raisi is quoted as saying that he was interested in a "strategic" relationship with Russia

and as railing against NATO during a speech to the Russian Duma. “NATO is engaged in penetration into the geographical space of different countries under various pretexts and covers. The spread of the Western model and opposition to independent democracies, opposition to the self-identification of the people, culture and traditions—this is exactly on the NATO agenda,” states Raisi.

## LIST OF SOURCES

- *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.
- *Ekspert*, a Russian weekly business magazine that covers economics and finance, Russian business, international business, politics, science and technology, and culture and arts.
- *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.
- *Moskovskii Komsomolets*, a yellow press publication.
- *Nezavisimaia Gazeta*, a privately owned political and business daily known for quality reporting.
- *Nezavisimoe voennoe obozrenie (NVO)*, a weekly military affairs supplement to *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, a privately owned political and business daily known for quality reporting.
- *Novye Izvestiya*, an online-only publication that until 2016 was oppositional toward the Russian government but is now classified as patriotic in orientation.
- *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.
- *Topwar.ru*, a website focused on providing quality coverage for military developments in Russia and worldwide.
- *Voенno-Promyshlennyi Kur'er (VPK)*, a publication informing on developments in the military-industrial complex (funded by the defense industry).
- *Zarubezhnoe Voенnoe Obozrenie*, a monthly journal on foreign military capabilities, published by the Russian Ministry of Defense.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Elena Chernenko, “A splash of Spanish” [Брызги испанского], *Kommersant*, Feb 2, 2022, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/5194797>.



<sup>2</sup> Anton Lavrov, "Spanish drain" [Испанский слив], *Izvestiya*, Feb. 3, 2022, <https://iz.ru/1285939/anton-lavrov/ispanskii-sliv>.

<sup>3</sup> Aleksandr Gasyuk, "Kortunov: Imposing a moratorium on the admission of new members is what NATO can do" [Кортунов: Введение моратория на прием новых членов - то, что НАТО может сделать], *Rossiiskaya Gazeta*, Feb. 3, 2022, <https://rg.ru/2022/02/03/kortunov-vvedenie-moratorii-na-priem-novyh-chlenov-to-chto-nato-mozhet-sdelat.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Aleksandr Kazargin, "US and NATO responded to demands for security guarantees in Europe" [США и НАТО ответили на требования гарантий безопасности в Европе], *Sankt-Petersburgskie Vedomosti*, Jan. 31, 2022, [https://spbvedomosti.ru/news/country\\_and\\_world/ssha-i-nato-otvetili-na-trebovaniya-garantiy-bezopasnosti-v-evrope/](https://spbvedomosti.ru/news/country_and_world/ssha-i-nato-otvetili-na-trebovaniya-garantiy-bezopasnosti-v-evrope/).

<sup>5</sup> Igor Duayevsky, "US and NATO Response on Security Assurances Misses Key Issue" [В ответе США и НАТО по гарантиям безопасности нет реакции по главному вопросу], *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, Jan. 27, 2022, <https://rg.ru/2022/01/27/v-otvete-ssha-i-nato-po-garantiyam-bezopasnosti-net-reakcii-po-glavnomu-voprosu.html>.

<sup>6</sup> Gennady Petrov, "The Kremlin regarded the American response as the beginning of a serious conversation" [Кремль расценил американский ответ как начало серьезного разговора], *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, Jan. 27, 2022, [https://www.ng.ru/world/2022-01-27/6\\_8357\\_answer.html](https://www.ng.ru/world/2022-01-27/6_8357_answer.html).

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Michael Kofman, Research Program Director

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