

# RUSSIA MONITOR

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INSTITUTE

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SOURCE: NATO.INT

8 December 2020

## NATO EXPERT REPORT: HOW TO EFFICIENTLY STOP RUSSIA?

A two-day meeting of NATO foreign ministers was held in early December where the officials discussed reforms to amend the military bloc, among other topics. Therefore, an expert group wrote a report outlining suggestions about how to reboot the alliance. The high-level paper mentions still-belligerent Russia and its military potential as a chief task for the alliance.

After talks, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said the alliance is adapting its deterrence posture to address Russia's destabilizing actions, but the ministers agree that they must continue to pursue dialogue with Russia. On the sidelines of the ministerial meeting, talks were held with foreign ministers of Georgia and Ukraine on security

in the Black Sea basin and NATO's continued support for both partners. On the meeting agenda was also a high-level report that is to be presented to NATO leaders at a summit planned for 2021. It will also update NATO's Strategic Concept document as the current document dates from 2010 and considers Russia as a partner. The report was compiled

by a group of 10 experts headed by German politician Thomas de Maiziere and former U.S. diplomat West Mitchell. Among its co-authors there was also Anna Fotyga, Poland's former foreign minister. The report covers 138 specific recommendations on how to amend NATO through 2030 in some 67 pages. It was devised to help the bloc adapt to new challenges and strengthen its political dimension. The paper sees Russia as a top source of threat to the transatlantic area. The part of the report on the Russian threat contains a detailed description of Moscow's activities over the past years, in particular its belligerent feats in Georgia and Ukraine as well as a military buildup. In their report, the authors do not doubt that Russia will most likely remain the chief military threat to the bloc through 2030. Pundits offered a number of detailed recommendations that will boost NATO's effectiveness in handling threats from Russia once implemented. "NATO must maintain adequate conventional and nuclear military capabilities and possess the agility and flexibility to confront aggression across the Alliance's territory, including where Russian forces are either directly or indirectly active,

particularly on NATO's eastern flank," the report says. The report features an entire chapter on arms control and nuclear deterrence. The paper urges also a set of guidelines on cybersecurity issues, hybrid threats, and new technologies. It also features the issue of assassinations using chemical agents. According to Anna Fotyga, the report lists some recommendations on raising the costs of Russia's further aggressive steps and outlines the need for NATO to develop its tools for political deterrence. There could be no "business as usual" in the NATO-Russia relation, the report reads. It allows for a possible dialogue between the bloc and Moscow but under several specific and strict conditions. As for Russia, it is worth paying attention to what the document says about the bloc's partnership with other nations. Experts believe that NATO does not develop this asset to the fullest. The report recommends continued support for Ukraine and Georgia. The document also suggests appointing a special unit to monitor and assess "how Russia-China cooperation in the military, technological and political fields, including coordination in disinformation and hybrid warfare, impacts Euro-Atlantic security."

8 December 2020

## TURKEY, RUSSIA SIGN DEAL FOR KARABAKH PEACEKEEPING CENTER

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**The Russian and Turkish defense ministries sealed a deal to monitor a truce over the Nagorno-Karabakh region from a joint peacekeeping center. It was about setting technical details for dispatching and operating the facility. However, Moscow and Ankara did not settle the project entirely, a move that shows these two still have distinct opinions on the issue.**





SOURCE: MIL.RU

There will be an equal number of personnel in the center from the Russian and Turkish sides, according to the defense ministry's spokesman General Igor Konashenkov. The facility will be situated in the territory of Azerbaijan. Russia and Turkey signed a memorandum of understanding for the creation of a joint center back in mid-November. Ankara then informed that it would be built in a location selected by Azerbaijan. But as it turns out, this is a major bone of contention. Russia does not want such a facility – and thus the Turkish military – to be deployed to the territories Azerbaijan captured after the latest war. The war ended with a tripartite deal signed by the Russian and Azerbaijani president as well as the Armenian prime minister. There was not even the slightest mention of Turkey in its provisions. Ankara's absence seemed all the more striking as it occupied a vital role in the military victory of Azerbaijan and threw its official support to Baku. This was even Vladimir Putin who said that Turkey could serve a key role in potentially resolving the

Nagorno-Karabakh issue. Besides, just two days before announcing the truce, there was a media leak on the details of the deal mentioning Turkey's participation. Roughly everything was true except for Ankara's involvement in the peacekeeping forces. Nonetheless, briefly after stopping the fire in the enclave, Ilham Aliyev and the Russian news agency Interfax mentioned Turkey's efforts to bring peace to the region. Right after announcing the truce, a delegation of top Turkish officials involving the country's defense and foreign ministers, the head of the National Intelligence Organization (MIT), and Land Forces Commander arrived in Azerbaijan for a meeting with Aliyev. Sometime after, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov added that the Turkish-Russian facility would be located in Azerbaijan – and not Nagorno-Karabakh – as a ceasefire monitoring center, without Turkey being involved in the military "peacekeeping" mission. On November 11, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan added even more fuss to the whole matter saying "Turkey will join the peacekeeping forces in the [Karabakh] region

to monitor the implementation of the deal with Russia.” According to the Turkish leader, “the joint center, which will be established on Azerbaijani territories that were liberated from Armenia’s occupation.” However, Moscow does not agree to deploy it to the areas Baku reclaimed during the latest war. The Turkish side claims that although the agreement has already been signed, its details still need to be determined. Regardless of how the deal would

ultimately look like and despite Turkey’s not being included in the formation of the peace contingent, it has shown its important role in the Russian-dominated area. Turkish influence is likely to grow not only in Azerbaijan and Georgia but also in the whole Black Sea region. Now, despite their cordial relations, Moscow will have to compete with Turkey in areas the Kremlin saw as its traditional sphere of influence.

10 December 2020

## GERMANY’S AfD VISITS MOSCOW: IS THIS KREMLIN’S ATTEMPT TO DISCIPLINE MERKEL?

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**It is not coincidence that Germany’s top opposition party has paid a visit to Moscow right now. With this invitation, the authorities in Moscow show their German counterparts they have other conversation partners in Germany. This serves as an attempt to exert pressure on Angela Merkel and Germany’s ruling coalition to quit its firm actions after the attempted poisoning of Russian opposition activist Alexey Navalny and come back to the business-as-usual attitude towards Russia. Especially since it is the key time for the Nord Stream 2 energy project and its plausible success, and it is not incidental that a delegation of Germany’s AfD broached this topic. The day before the meeting, on December 7, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov commented on the visit, citing Russia’s “diverse relations” with Germany.**

**O**n December 8, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov met with a delegation of Germany’s Alternative for Germany (AfD) party. Members of the far-right populist party arrived in Moscow in response to an invitation issued by the State Duma, the lower house of the Russian parliament. The German delegation was headed

by the deputy head of the AfD’s parliamentary group, Tino Chrupalla, accompanied by Paul Hampel, the party’s spokesman on foreign affairs. Lavrov said “many serious problems have built up between Russia and Germany so all channels of communication are important.” Both the invitation for the AfD delegation





SOURCE: DUMA.GOV.RU

and these words imply a tool of pressure that the Russian authorities seek to exert on their German peers. This is a signal sent to Berlin not to complicate ties with the Kremlin also amid the Navalny case many deputies in the Bundestag itself hope to cooperate closely with Russia regardless of similar “incidents.” Besides, Lavrov mentioned the surprise of its foreign ministry of the fact that the German authorities “tried to bar the AfD delegation from going to Moscow.” He also expressed surprise at what he called the “hysterical” reaction that sparked in German media outlets to the deputies’ visit. What draws attention is another utterance from the top Russian diplomat. According to him, as Moscow never opposes meetings between German officials and Russian opposition members—and here he possibly meant Navalny, his medical treatment, and Germany, and talks with Angela Merkel – Berlin should not hinder contact between the German opposition and the Russian authorities. “Meanwhile we are surprised that Berlin officials prefer not to meet with representatives of the opposition’s parliamentary parties, but rather with its ‘non-systemic’ figures,” he added in a move to perplex Berlin. Of course, in Russia,

the parliamentary opposition is so in name only. Parties like that of the communists, A Just Russia, and Zhirinovskiy’s Liberal Democratic Party of Russia are part of the ruling regime. The AfD delegation also visited the Russian parliament where they met with the First Deputy Chairman of the State Duma Alexander Zhukov and the chairman of the State Duma energy committee. In 2017, the AfD became the largest opposition party in the Bundestag after winning nearly 6 million votes in the election. Since its early days, it has been notorious for its anti-European and anti-immigrant views and touted mostly slogans targeting the United States and NATO while praising Russia. During the Moscow meeting, the members of the AfD thanked Russia for “reunifying Germany while both France and the United Kingdom stood against.” They decried Western sanctions on Russia and declared support for the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline as a solution for Europe’s enhanced energy security. They reiterated the rhetoric that often resonates in Russia and Germany and that claims that the U.S. sanctions against the gas link come only from Washington’s business plans.



SOURCE: GOVERNMENT.RU

14 December 2020

## NOVAK GETS SUPERVISION OVER ENERGY GIANTS

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**Although Alexander Novak stepped down as Russia's energy minister in November, he will still control Russia's biggest oil and gas companies as a new deputy prime minister. Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin approved a new division of powers in his cabinet to distribute control of some state businesses between deputy prime ministers.**

According to it, deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak will supervise such companies as Gazprom, Rosneft, Transneft, Rosneftegaz, Zarubezhneft, Rosetti, FSK JES, Inter RAO, CO JES, and Rosharubezhneft. Novak was granted a power of attorney to accept directives for government officials in these companies. On November 13, Prime Minister

Mikhail Mishustin divided responsibilities between his deputies. Former energy minister Alexander Novak will be responsible for energy issues, earlier overseen by Yury Borisov. Under Mishustin's decision, Novak's purview would include the supervision over state-run nuclear company Rosatom. Any issues on the development of state defense



and space industry will remain the domain of Yury Borisov, currently Russia's deputy Prime Minister responsible for industrial issues. As agreed sometime earlier, Novak will continue to represent Russia in OPEC+ ministerial meetings as he did while serving as the country's energy minister. This is reflected by how tasks were distributed in the field of energy where Novak is responsible for the oil and gas sector while Nikolay Shulginov, the new energy minister and a former chief executive

officer at state-controlled utility RusHydro PJSC, was assigned to control the remaining industries. The decision to appoint Shulginov the energy minister might have been driven by the CEO of Rosneft Igor Sechin. The oil tycoon was at odds with Alexander Novak, a former energy minister in office since 2012. These two expressed opposing views on the OPEC+ formula. Novak will now keep an eye on Rosneft, which means that Sechin failed to get rid of the uncomfortable minister.

## 15 December 2020

# RUSSIA REPORTS DRAMATIC DROP IN EXPORT FIGURES

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**The global economic slowdown amid the coronavirus pandemic and the collapse in the oil price worldwide have both taken their toll on Russian energy exports. The demand has dropped while prices went low. In consequence, Russia's crude oil revenues decreased by more than 40 percent year-on-year throughout the ten first months of 2020. Profits from coal exports dropped by one-fourth, a situation that shows the structural weakness of the Russian economy that heavily relies on energy exports.**

Between January and October 2020, Russia's crude oil exports decreased by 11 percent compared to 2019 totalling 199.86 million tons. The slump looks all the more serious if to look at the financial issue. Exports shrank by as much as 41.1 percent to \$60.37 billion, according to the latest figures from Russia's Federal Customs Service (FTS). In October, Russia exported \$5.13 billion worth of crude oil commodities, a decline by 12.4 percent compared to September and by 52 percent year-on-year. Still, in the same month, deliveries went down by 9.4 percent month-on-month and by 25.3 percent year-on-year, hitting 18.38 billion tons. In October 2020, Russia's exports of petroleum products decreased to 9.63 million tons, which is a 12.6

percent drop from September. Financially, the figures dropped to \$2.88 billion in a 14.2 percent decrease. In the January–October 2020 period, deliveries of petroleum products did not report any year-on-year change remaining stable at 116.6 million tons. There was a financial decline by 32.1 percent, to \$37.6 billion. The situation is no better for coal sales abroad, Russia's other leading export industry. Between January and October 2020, revenues dropped by 24.2 percent year-on-year hitting \$10.19 billion, the FTS said in a statement. Exports declined by 5.5 percent year-on-year amounting to 160.19 million tons within the ten first months of the current year. Only in October, exports fell by 31.3 percent month-on-month, to 13.88 million



SOURCE: MEDIA.GAZPROM-NEFT.COM

tons worth a total of \$802.9 million. Back in 2019, export figures stood by 2.9 percent higher than in 2018, though they decreased financially, by 6.2 percent. Russia is also in the red with its

electricity exports. The drop was 170 percent within the ten first months of 2020 while revenues halved to \$382.6 million.

15 December 2020

## PUTIN PROMOTES NORTHERN FLEET COMMANDER, STRENGTHENS THE ARCTIC

**As the commander of the armed forces of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin signed a decree promoting senior military officials. In addition, the leader of the Northern Fleet – a formation whose status will be equivalent to Russia's fourth other military districts from 2021 – was appointed to Admiral.**

**O**n December 10, President Vladimir Putin signed a decree appointing the powerful leader of the Arctic forces to Admiral,

the second-highest rank in the Russian navy. Aleksandr Moiseev is 58 years old. He studied at the navy's technical institute before joining the





SOURCE: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Northern Fleet. In the 1990s, he served onboard several of the Northern Fleet's Delta-IV ballistic missile submarines. He took part in many missions under the Arctic ice cap, including one surfacing at the North Pole. In 2011, Moiseev was awarded Hero of Russia – the country's highest military award – with reference to his leadership onboard submarines, including when test-launching ballistic missiles. Later he studied at the Naval Academy in St. Petersburg and the Military Academy of the General Staff of the Armed Forces. In the Northern Fleet, Aleksandr Moiseev commanded the submarine forces from 2012-2016. Then, between 2017 and 2018, he was Deputy Chief of the General Staff of the Russian armed forces.

Moiseev had the rank as Vice-Admiral since June 2015. In May 2019, he was appointed as new Head Commander of the Northern Fleet and before he had commanded the Black Sea Fleet for a year in Sevastopol on the annexed Crimea. A few months before Moiseev moved to Severomorsk (Murmansk Oblast), the home base of the Northern Fleet, the Ukrainian Security Service (SBU) notified him of suspicion

of engaging in an aggressive military action related to the Kerch Strait incident in November 2018 when the Russian coast guard fired upon and captured three Ukrainian Navy ships.

Undeniably, taking the lead in the Northern Fleet was somewhat a promotion for Moiseev. The Russian navy currently comprises the Northern Fleet, the Pacific Fleet, the Black Sea Fleet, the Baltic Fleet, and the Caspian Flotilla. The Northern Fleet is the biggest and most prestigious of them all. Contrary to what its name says, it is something more than just a navy formation. At its heart there are nuclear-powered submarines capable of carrying SLBM missiles and multi-purpose nuclear submarines – as the Northern Fleet has the biggest such arsenal – with the battlecruiser Pyotr Velikiy as well as land forces and aircraft. The Northern Fleet will remain the core of the Northern Fleet Joint Strategic Command until the end of the year. Beginning on January 1, 2021, it will have the same status as Russia's other military districts. There will be five of them in Russia – so far the country has been divided into such formations as the Western Military District,



Southern Military District, Central Military District, and Eastern Military District. Headed by Admiral Aleksandr Moiseev, the Northern (Arctic) Military District will be a new addition. Moiseev's promotion is not Putin's only personal decision in the armed forces. Under the same decree, the Russian leader also appointed

Alexei Kim, who currently serves as the deputy commander of peacekeeping forces, to Colonel-General. Chief military officials at the 29th and 41st armies became lieutenant generals while the commanders of the Kamchatka-based forces and the Belomorsk navy base were officially promoted to Vice-Admiral.

16 December 2020

## RUSSIA INTIMIDATES THE WEST WITH NUCLEAR WEAPONS

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**A vessel of Russia's Pacific Fleet test-fired a salvo of Bulava intercontinental ballistic missiles while a few days earlier the country's military had held its nuclear triad drills in a show of readiness of Moscow's nuclear forces against the United States and NATO. This cannot be taken lightly while it is worth paying attention to the strategic area in a possible military conflict between Moscow and the West in the future.**

On December 12, the Vladimir Monomakh submarine launched four Bulava intercontinental ballistic missiles from an underwater position in the Sea of Okhotsk. Their warheads hit their designated targets on the Chiza shooting range in the Arkhangelsk region in northwestern Russia some 5,500 kilometers away. This was the second missile launch that Russia has ever seen in its post-Soviet history. In May 2018, the submarine Yuri Dolgorukiy test-fired four Bulava ballistic missiles in a similar salvo launch. The Vladimir Monomakh is one of the new Borei 955-class nuclear submarines. They are capable of carrying 16 Bulava missiles each. It is one of the four Borei-class ships currently in use in the Russian navy, as two are based in the Pacific Fleet and the remaining two remain in service of the Northern Fleet. Four more

same-class vessels are now being built in the shipyard in Severodvinsk. Borei-class strategic submarines will carry up to 16 ballistic missiles, each with between four to six warheads. The day before the Vladimir Monomakh test-fired ICBMs, Russian aircraft intercepted a U.S. spy plane off the exercise area in the Bering Sea. On December 11, the MiG-31 fighter of the Pacific Fleet was scrambled to follow the U.S. Air Force RC-135 in international airspace. In a report to President Vladimir Putin, Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu said that the launch wrapped up large-scale drills of Russia's strategic nuclear forces that began on December 9. As part of those maneuvers, another Russian nuclear submarine also performed a practice launch of an R-29RM intercontinental ballistic missile from the Barents Sea, a ground-based ICBM was thrust from the Plesetsk facility in



SOURCE: MINOBORON

northwestern Russia, and Tu-160 and Tu-95 strategic bombers fired cruise missiles at test targets at an Arctic range. The aircraft came from two bases at Engels and Ukrainka while

the missiles were reported to be the Kh-101. Russia usually tests its nuclear triad in October while this year's delay could have been due to the coronavirus pandemic.

18 December 2020

## RUSSIA STRUGGLES TO MEET OPEC+ OIL CUTS

**Russia noted a slight increase in its crude oil output in November 2020. It rose to 9.28 million barrels per day (bpd) in December from 9.26 million bpd in October, according to data from OPEC. Russia's compliance with the OPEC+ oil production cuts in November likely stood at only 86 percent as the country slashed 1.72 million bpd from 2.007 million bpd.**

**A**lso, the figures from the OPEC report have shown that Russia's production of condensate had hit its October baseline of 850,000 bpd. In the same paper, the oil-producing cartel has revised the country's liquids output in 2020 by 40,000 bpd, up to

10.39 million bpd. However, OPEC has brought down the forecast for 2021. It has predicted Russia's slash in oil production to 10.24 million bpd next year. According to its November figures, OPEC saw an increase from 10.35 million bpd to 10.36 bpd throughout 2020. In





SOURCE: MEDIA.GAZPROM-NEFT.COM

2021, the production of condensate is poised to average 810,000 bpd. Thus, Russia's oil production will stand at 9.43 million bpd. On December 3, OPEC and its oil-producing allies agreed to lightly increase production by 500,000 bpd beginning in January. Yet they failed to reach a consensus on their common policy in 2021. Possibly this is why December meetings were postponed to January – thus to win some more time to agree on stances. Neither the joint technical committee (JTC) nor the joint monitoring ministerial committee (JMMC) gathers for talks in December as those have been rescheduled for early January. Also

in January, all members of the group will take place in a joint summit. Initially planned for December 16 and 17, their meetings were moved to January 3 and 4. The 13th OPEC and non-OPEC Ministerial Meeting is scheduled for January 4. Raising oil output limits in January 2021 puts the daily production cap at 7.2 million bpd instead of 7.7 million bpd so far. The prospects for a relatively early market launch of the coronavirus vaccine spurred oil prices up in November, and, while some members of the Saudi-led group warned this might not turn into a sustained trend, others no longer see reasons to go on with output cuts.





SOURCE: TWITTER/PETROLEUM DIVISION, MINISTRY OF ENERGY, GOVERNMENT OF PAKISTAN

22 December 2020

## RUSSIA ENTERS THE PAKISTAN GAS SECTOR

A group of Russian Gazprom-led energy companies seek to invest \$14 billion in the gas infrastructure in Pakistan, with two gas pipelines and underground storage facilities to be built. Russia will also send some gas commodities from its Iranian deposits to Pakistan as the nation needs more and more gas. The energy cooperation between these two is part of better ties between Moscow and Islamabad.

Pakistan has become one of the top emerging markets for super-chilled fuel in recent years as domestic gas production has leveled out, forcing the nation to import cargoes. Pakistan, which imported its first

cargo five years ago, currently has two LNG terminals. Two more are expected to start in the next few years. However, Pakistan lacks an adequate transport infrastructure to send liquefied natural gas commodities throughout

the whole country. But liquefied natural gas flows will be not sufficient to meet all energy needs. Russia has a plan to help Pakistan solve both these issues. A Russian delegation headed by Gazprom Management Committee Deputy Chairman Vitaly Markelov signed a deal during a recent visit to Pakistan. Russians would invest around \$10 billion in an offshore gas pipeline project, \$2.5 billion in the North-South pipeline project, and the remaining \$1.5 billion on building underground storages.

The project envisages the supply of liquefied natural gas over the 1,122-km Pakistan Stream (previously known as North-South gas pipeline) link from Karachi's Port Qasim to Lahore. A consortium of Russian companies would build the pipeline to send imported gas from LNG terminals to the Punjab province. The construction is due to start in July 2021. Pakistan will have a majority share of 51 percent to 74 percent in the project, while Russia will own the remainder. Pakistani gas distribution companies Sui Southern Gas Co. and Sui Northern Gas Pipelines Ltd, which have already started gaining land for the gas pipeline, are involved in the project. The Russian investment package also provides

for the construction of underground storage facilities. Also, Gazprom will conduct feasibility study to build an offshore pipeline from Iran to Pakistan. The pipeline construction is expected to be completed in three to four years to send Russian gas flows from its Iran-based fields. The pipeline will pass through the strategic Gwadar Port on the Arabian Sea.

The latest energy deal comes at a time when bilateral relations between Moscow and Islamabad were warming up. This year, recurring spats with such Gulf nations as the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia have forced Islamabad to revise its geopolitical strategy and boost independence in every domain. Pakistan's ties with Moscow have improved as its long-standing India moved closer to the United States. Importantly, Pakistani-Russian military cooperation received a new impetus. Both armies hold regular joint drills. In November, Russian Special Forces' contingent arrived in Pakistan for a joint exercise. Russia is trying to fill the vacuum left by the Americans after they had halted all military cooperation schemes with the Pakistani military.

22 December 2020

## **RUSSIA'S ROSGVARDDIA SETS FOOT IN BELARUS**

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**From November on, the Russian National Guard (Rosgvardia) is allowed to carry out a wide range of operations on the territory of Belarus after Belarus and Russia had inked an appropriate deal. It was only after a month that Belarusian officials made it public. Possibly it was long ago that Russian riot police tasked with suppressing social unrest began to support Belarusian siloviki.**





SOURCE: KREMLIN.RU

The Russian National Guard (Rosgvardia) and the Belarusian Interior Ministry officially signed a cooperation deal. It says either side may carry out law-enforcement-type operations on the other's territory. Under the deal, Rosgvardia is allowed to conduct legal law-enforcement operations throughout Belarus. An official Belarusian legal portal published the four-page agreement on December 18. But it is dated November 19 and states that it went into immediate effect. In short, only recently has it turned out that Russia's Rosgvardia has been free to operate throughout Belarus for a month now. How is this cooperation supposed to look like? According to some official data from Belarus, an interested party requests such aid or the other one asks so if the latter deems such a step necessary. The new Russian-Belarusian agreement brings broad areas of possible cooperation, including "maintaining public order and safety" (which might formally pave Russia's way to suppress street rallies), combating "extremism and terrorism", and "ensuring fuel and energy infrastructure." The deal also provides for joint control of the arms

trade between Rosgvardia and the Belarusian Interior Ministry. Both institutions will also develop sports and cultural ties and cooperate in the domain of medical care and personnel rehabilitation.

In late August 2020, when Putin declared official support to the Belarusian leader, he said Russia had formed a reserve of law enforcement officers to assist Belarus at Lukashenko's request to deploy them at any time if needed. In Sochi on September 14, Putin and Lukashenko reportedly agreed that the "reserve of Russian security forces" created near the border would be removed and sent to places of permanent deployment. It is not known whether such a formation was indeed created. In October 2020, Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin tasked officials with hammering out the details of the November agreement. Rosgvardia is subordinated to Vladimir Putin. Created in 2016, it was set up from the old interior forces and riot forces like OMON and SOBR. The formation is headed by General Viktor Zolotov, one of Putin's most trusted siloviki.





SOURCE: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

22 December 2020

## BULGARIA EXPELS RUSSIAN MILITARY ATTACHÉ FOR SPYING FOR GRU

**Bulgarian authorities expelled a senior diplomat in the Russian embassy in Sofia over alleged espionage. He is the sixth diplomat to be expelled by Bulgaria throughout 2020 for suspected espionage. The official had worked for the GRU military intelligence service and had been seeking sensitive military information, including on the U.S. military activity in Bulgaria.**

Bulgaria's foreign ministry informed about the case on December 18. Bulgarian authorities have given a Russian diplomat 72 hours to leave the country due to activities incompatible with his diplomatic status. This euphemism comes most often in cases of diplomats involved in espionage activities. The Bulgarian prosecutor's office issued a separate statement alleging that from 2017 until now the diplomat "has engaged in spying activities,

during which he collected military information, including about the numbers of U.S. troops deployed on Bulgarian territory during exercises." Prosecutors and counterintelligence officers at the State Agency for National Security also added they had evidence that the diplomat had been in contact with a Bulgarian citizen with access to classified information to whom money had been offered. The expelled diplomat is a Russian military attaché, thus

one of the top embassy employees. Usually, and not only in Russian diplomatic facilities, this job is taken by military intelligence officers of their respective states. However, the Russian embassy said the diplomat was the military attaché, and that Moscow reserved the right to take retaliatory steps. Possibly the Russians will expel a Bulgarian diplomat whose rank is comparable to that of the Russian military intelligence spy. Russia expelled two Bulgarian diplomats in October, nearly three weeks after two staff at the Russian Embassy in Sofia accused of military espionage were told to leave.

The decision to send the Russian military attaché home came shortly after Chief of Staff for NATO Special Operations, Lieutenant-General Eric Wendt, made a trip to Sofia. Wendt came there to discuss the participation of Bulgarian special forces in NATO operations.

This might be yet another blow dealt by the Bulgarian services and government officials against Russian intelligence – to some extent forced by the country's Western allies. For many years now, Bulgaria has been one of the heaviest Russian-infiltrated states among its EU and NATO peers. This naturally limited their trust in Sofia. Over the past year – possibly in a U.S.-inspired move – the Bulgarian government had to go to war with Russian spies, whether it sought it or not. Putting Bulgarian services and the country's chief prosecutor on high alert might stem from NATO's more decisive actions in the Black Sea region within the past year. As the military bloc noticed the need to strengthen its southern flank, Bulgaria should play a vital role in this due to its geographical location. After the announcement of the expulsion, the U.S. and British embassies in Sofia immediately expressed support for Bulgaria's decision.

## 22 December 2020

# GAZPROM POURS THREE TIMES AS MUCH MONEY TO BRING GAS TO CHECHNYA

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**The Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov still enjoys a firm position in the Kremlin while being among Vladimir Putin's most trusted people. The republic signed a deal with Gazprom, under which the Russian energy giant will build 1,300 kilometers of gas pipeline network, also in the remaining region that has not yet had access to gas.**

**G**azprom declared to complete efforts to bring gas to all regions in Chechnya by 2026. The CEO of Gazprom Alexey Miller and the president of Chechnya Ramzan Kadyrov signed the development scheme to supply gas and gasify the North Caucasus republic

between 2021 and 2025. Gazprom plans to invest 12.3 billion roubles, or \$163 million, which is three times more than it did between 2016 and 2020. Under the scheme, Gazprom will build 1,300 kilometers of gas pipelines in twenty-five places throughout Chechnya,





SOURCE: GAZPROM.RU

including its mountainous region of Galanchozh. As of January 1, 2020, the gasification rate in Chechnya was 98.2 percent, including 98.3 percent in towns and 95.2 percent in rural areas. The figure is likely to hit 100 percent soon yet pipe-lay costs are high in hard-to-reach regions. Yet the Chechen gas debt has not been settled yet. In October 2018, Chechnya asked a subsidiary of Gazprom to forgive billions-worth of gas debt. Back then, the debt was worth 13.5 billion roubles (\$180 million), of which 9.3 billion roubles dated from over three years before. On December 20, 2018, a court in Grozny obliged Gazprom to cancel debts older than three years. But it was only then that the Russian chief prosecutor ordered to inspect the Chechen prosecutor's office that

went negatively for the latter. In consequence, Chechnya's Supreme Court reversed an earlier ruling ordering Russian gas giant Gazprom to write off 9 billion roubles of the region's gas debt. It was in the spring of 2019 when Kadyrov got involved in the case, suggesting to write off Chechnya's gas debts and reminding debts Russia had forgiven other nations. As of January 1, 2018, the total gas debt of North Caucasus republics stood at 26.9 billion roubles (\$357 million). Chechnya is the biggest debtor, followed by Dagestan, Kabardino-Balkaria, Krasnodar Krai, and Ingushetia. In 2019, Gazprom informed that Chechnya, Dagestan, and Ingushetia improved their gas payments. Nonetheless, North Caucasus republics make up for 88 percent of the population's gas debt.



SOURCE: KREMLIN.RU

23 December 2020

## **PUTIN ADDRESSES GENERALS: ARMS RACE, HOSTILE WEST**

Russian President Vladimir Putin attended an annual meeting of the Defense Ministry Board. Two features arose from both his speech and that of Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu. Firstly, Russian officials believe that updated weapons in the army are necessary to ensure the security of Russia as the country sees threats from the outside. By saying so, and secondly, they meant the United States and NATO. Putin's words in this matter fitted into his sharp anti-Western rhetoric at the recent annual press conference.



The meeting of the Defense Ministry Board took place on December 21. “The world’s leading armies are spending enormous resources that do not compare with ours on ensuring their supremacy,” Putin said. Therefore, he claims Russia cannot slow down in this peculiar arms race, with each falloff being equivalent to a bigger advantage of its rivals. Putin added Russia could not give the edge to anyone in this respect, arguing that his nation is gaining an advantage over others. “I proudly repeat: we have developed weapons that the world does not possess, primarily, of course, hypersonic arms,” the president added, yet again broaching the topic of nuclear weapon that Russian propaganda has named as “Russian Wunderwaffe.” Putin said he had ordered to boost the level of modern weapons in the country’s armed forces to 75.9 percent by 2024. The things already look very good in some forces, he added. The share of advanced types

of armament and military hardware in the Russian troops equals already over 70 percent in general-purpose forces and 86 percent in nuclear forces, according to the Russian leader. Putin also stressed that the nuclear triad had reached the level that allowed guaranteeing Russia’s security. The president mentioned the Avangard strategic missile system tipped with a hypersonic cruising warhead among other prospective weapon systems Russia has at its disposal. These would be carried by the Sarmat intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBM) to replace the Voyevoda ICBMs currently in use (NATO designation: SS-18 Satan). During the meeting, Sergei Shoigu said that there has been an increase by 15 percent in the intensity of U.S. surveillance activities near the Russian border. “NATO sees Russia as the main threat to their military build-up on our borders,” Russian top defense official added.

23 December 2020

## GAZPROM, LUKOIL SIGN DEAL TO JOINTLY DEVELOP TWO HYDROCARBON FIELDS

**Russian privately held oil producer Lukoil and state-controlled gas monopoly Gazprom agreed on the terms of their joint project to commercialize reserves of the Vaneyvisskoye and Layavozhskoye fields in the Nenets region. This is another joint venture within the strategic partnership between the two Russian energy giants.**

In addition to Gazprom’s Alexey Miller and Lukoil’s Vagit Alekperov, the December 21 signing ceremony was attended by Yury Bezudny, the governor of Nenets Autonomous Okrug. The document, which is based on the deal inked at the St. Petersburg

International Economic Forum 2018, outlines the preparations required to commence hydrocarbon production at the two fields. The paper sets out the procedure for creating a joint venture to execute the project. The venture will be established by the subsidiaries of Gazprom



SOURCE: GAZPROM.COM

and Lukoil: Gazprom Dobycha Krasnodar and Lukoil-Komi. The new company will receive an exploration license. During the preparatory stage, the joint venture will carry out design and survey works as well as draw up design documentation for the pre-development of the fields and the creation of infrastructure for hydrocarbon treatment and delivery up to Lukoil's oil receiving facility and the entry point to Gazprom's gas transmission system. Also, potential contractors and equipment suppliers will be selected, and proposals will be developed with regard to the contract strategy and the terms of project financing. The proximity of these fields to Lukoil's operational production site will add extra synergies to the

implementation of the project while minimizing the amount of infrastructure to be built. The Vaneyvisskoye and Layavozhskoye fields have the aggregate recoverable reserves of 27.4 million tons of liquid hydrocarbons and 225.3 billion cubic meters of natural gas. The joint deal to explore the Nenets fields comes as one of the Gazprom-Lukoil ventures under their 2014–2024 General Agreement on Strategic Partnership. Under the deal, Lukoil supplies gas to Gazprom's gas transmission system. In 2015, Gazprom's Sosnogorsk gas processing plant (GPP) started to receive associated petroleum gas from the northern group of fields developed by Lukoil-Komi.





SOURCE: PREMIER.GOV.RU

24 December 2020

## CHEAPER GAS FOR BELARUS? MOSCOW DICTATES TERMS OF THE DEAL

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**The Russian government has accepted a draft agreement to provide Belarus with a loan of \$1 billion in 2020 and 2021. Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin signed a relevant decision on December 21. Meanwhile, Moscow has no intention of forgiving Minsk on any contentious economic and financial matters. This applies to gas prices. A few days earlier, the Russian ambassador to Minsk had spoken on the issue, setting out under which conditions Russia would grant gas discounts to Belarus.**

Russian Ambassador to Belarus Dmitry Mezentsev told journalists that if Minsk asked for a discount for Russian natural gas in 2021, Moscow had the right to get Belarusian-produced goods at lower price. “If one side asks for a discount, then the other side has

the right to count on a similar approach, on a discount for certain groups of goods,” the diplomat was quoted as saying. The diplomat recalled about cooperation between two equal and independent countries. “Whether our ties are deep depends on the readiness

of the Belarusian side to take joint steps to build a union,” the ambassador added. The Russian diplomat finds it significant that the Belarusian side has paid off the debt for the gas supplies that existed this year. “Our partners have agreed with the calculations of the Russian side. This is an important stage in confirming that we are able and obliged to come to an agreement,” the ambassador said. In mid-October, Transgaz Belarus, a subsidiary of Gazprom, announced that Belarus had not fully paid for its gas supplies. Although the Belarusian Energy Ministry claims that Belarus has paid for the gas deliveries it had got between January and September, Gazprom Transgaz Belarus said the country had

underpaid late payment interest. In September 2020, former Energy Ministry and incumbent deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak said Belarus had owed Russia \$328 million for gas deliveries and then announced that Moscow and Minsk agreed to repay debts within a month. A similar situation occurred in May 2020. Back then, the CEO of Gazprom Alexey Miller said the Belarusian debts had stood at more than \$165 million, but the Belarusian Energy Ministry claimed there was no debt at all. Besides, Belarus’s energy officials offered Gazprom to discuss the conditions for gas supplies in 2020 and price setting methodology to apply from the following year.

## 24 December 2020

# RUSSIAN, CHINESE JETS DO JOINT PATROL, SPARK PROTESTS FROM SOUTH KOREA AND JAPAN

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**Over a dozen Russian and Chinese military aircraft conducted a joint patrol, yet another sign of ever-growing military ties between the two states. East Asian countries voiced concern over the incident as they noticed a threat in what Moscow and Beijing termed their joint patrol.**

Nineteen Russian and Chinese warplanes on December 22 entered the Korea air defense identification zone, according to South Korea’s Joint Chiefs of Staff. The Russian-Chinese feat prompted South Korea to scramble its fighter jets. The incident seemed to be a joint military drill between China and Russia, the South Korean military said in a statement. It

said the Chinese military had informed South Korea that its planes were carrying out routine training, Yonhap news agency reported. But the Russian jets have yet not violated South Korean airspace, according to sources. South Korean media outlets reported that Chinese planes, which were probably four H-6 bombers, were first to fly into the Korean air defense





SOURCE: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

identification zone. They were followed by fifteen Russian jets, including Tu-95 strategic bombers and A-50 airborne early warning and control aircraft. South Korean authorities said they had summoned military attaches of the two nations. Russia informed about the incident later that day. “Russian and Chinese warplanes carried out a joint ten-hour patrol in the Asia-Pacific region. In some sections, they were followed by Japanese (F-15) and South Korean aircraft,” Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu told Vladimir Putin. Russian Tu-95MS strategic bombers and Su-35 fighters took part in the patrol, flying over the waters of the East China Sea and the Sea of Japan. Russia denied having violated the airspace of other countries.

The incident marks yet another Russian provocation off the Korean Peninsula. In October 2019, six Russian warplanes entered South Korea’s air defense identification zone

without prior notice. The South Korean Joint Chiefs of Staff reported that among the Russian aircraft that intruded into the country’s air defense zone were an A-50 airborne early warning and control aircraft, three Su-27 fighter jets, and two Tu-95 bombers. They all stayed there in the area for about four hours. Russian aircraft have penetrated South Korea’s air defense identification zone more than 20 times since the beginning of this year, with the most perilous incident having occurred in late July. Back then, a Russian A-50 airborne early warning and control aircraft that flew along Chinese and Russian bomber jets at a joint patrol had entered twice the South Korean airspace over the Seoul-controlled islets of Dokdo, also claimed by Japan. Both Tokyo and Seoul had scrambled their fighter jets to follow the intruders, and the latter Air Force had even fired a series of warning shots towards the Russian A-50 jet.



SOURCE: DUMA.GOV.RU

25 December 2020

## **RUSSIA'S "DECEMBER LAWS:" THE END OF RUSSIAN OPPOSITION?**

Putin's regime is steering an ever-sharper course in its domestic policy, with new legislative changes paving the way for more severe repression. The State Duma on December 23 approved a bill, under which any individual could be deemed "a foreign agent" if they receive material or monetary support from abroad. The law along with a whole package of others adopted that day could prevent anyone whom the regime deems an enemy from engaging in public activity.



Russia's lower house State Duma on December 23 adopted new restrictions on free speech and democratic processes. Russian lawmakers passed draft legislation that includes an expansion of who can be labeled a "foreign agent," in force since 2012. The controversial changes expand the scope of individuals and groups that can be designated "foreign agents" and introduce new restrictions. This is yet another time that Russian lawmakers tightened the law. Back in 2017, the law saw a slew of foreign-funded media outlets as "foreign agents." Now even more drastic restrictions have been passed. Any citizen who "carries out political activities on the territory of the Russian Federation in the interests of the foreign state and/or deliberately collects information on the military and military-technical activities of the Russian Federation", which "may be used against the security of the Russian Federation" after being transferred abroad, could be considered a "foreign agent". What are requirements to meet to become "a foreign agent" according to the updated law? It is chiefly about receiving financial and organizational support from abroad. How does the law define "political activity" for which individuals or institutions risk being called a "foreign agent?" It is enough to take part in rallies, be a member of a political party, or help hold elections or carry out polls and socio-political research.

Recognizing someone as a "foreign agent" will severely limit their public rights. The law also says that individuals labeled as "foreign agents" would be banned from joining the civil service or holding a municipal government position, while being refused access to state secrets. The new law adds that any such person is obliged to submit detailed paperwork every six months if they receive money from abroad. Under the changes, also foreign media correspondents could be labeled "foreign agents." Tight restrictions would also affect NGOs not being legal entities. Groups or individuals deemed foreign agents had previously been required to

register with the Justice Ministry and submit their planned activities. What is worth attention is that media outlets – while publishing reports on individuals or organizations labeled "foreign agents" – will be required to include this information.

On December 23, the State Duma approved in a second reading the legislation that lays out a punishment of up to five years in prison for individuals or organizations labeled as "foreign agents" who fail to inform official entities about their status, or refuse to report their activities to Russian authorities. Also on December 23, the State Duma passed a bill in its third reading that would allow the federal media watchdog, Roskomnadzor, to block websites that "discriminate against Russian media." The bill is seen affecting major social-media websites such as YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter. The State Duma also approved a bill on introducing jail terms for people found guilty of making slanderous comments on the Internet or in the media. Under the legislation, a person convicted of slander on the Internet could face up to two years in prison and a fine of up to 1 million roubles (\$13,300). People accused of making "slanderous" accusations of rape or other grave crimes could face up to five years behind bars. Among other bills approved on December 23 is one that bans financial support of public events by foreign entities. That legislation includes prohibiting the financing of public events in Russia by foreign governments, organizations, citizens, stateless citizens, individuals and organizations labeled as foreign agents, Russian citizens younger than 16, anonymous contributors, and Russian organizations that were registered less than one year before providing financial support to a public event. The law will bar opposition activists from being publicly involved. All of the bills approved by the State Duma must still be approved by the parliament's upper chamber, the Federation Council before President Vladimir Putin endorses them into law.



SOURCE: GAZPROM.RU

27 December 2020

## BELARUS, RUSSIA SIGN GAS PROTOCOL

Russian gas giant Gazprom said it had signed a protocol with Belarus on how to calculate natural gas prices for gas supplies in 2021. Though the document does not say any exact figures, officials in Minsk said the agreed prices were “on a par with the levels in 2020 and the price this year was \$127 per 1,000 cubic meters.” Gazprom yet seems the biggest winner of that battle. Firstly, Belarus had to clear its debts. Secondly, no matter what the situation is on the global energy market, a fixed gas price means regular income. Also, as 2020 has shown so far, Russia for months traded its gas commodities to Europe for just a fraction of what Belarus had paid. Little is known whether the upcoming year will bring more stability to the market.

After arduous and lengthy price talks, Belarusian and Russian officials met on December 24 in St. Petersburg to sign a protocol on gas prices. The talks were attended by the CEO of Gazprom Alexey Miller, Belarusian Energy Minister Viktor



Karankevich, and Belarusian Ambassador to Russian Vladimir Semashko. “The parties agreed on the gas prices for 2021 almost at the level of 2020, but significantly lower than those provided for by the formula that determines the natural gas price for Belarus, fixed in the intergovernmental agreement on the procedure for setting gas prices, signed in 2011,” the Belarusian energy ministry said in a statement. The 2020 price was \$127 per 1,000 cubic meters. In the ten months of 2020, Russian gas supplies to Belarus dropped by 9 percent year-on-year, hitting 14.871 billion cubic meters (bcm). In 2019, Gazprom delivered 20.261 bcm of gas to Belarus. Alexander Lukashenko has long reiterated the urge to reduce gas prices for his country. Nonetheless, Gazprom said it

would start such talks only after Minsk had cleared its outstanding gas debts. In November, Gazprom informed that Belarus had settled the debt. Then in December, Lukashenko said that his country has repaid \$200 million to Gazprom. What is known is that Belarus will channel some of its loan from Russia to cover its outstanding debt to the Russian energy giant. \$127 per 1,000 cubic meters for most of 2020 was far higher than what Western European nations paid on the spot market, which made Belarus even more dissatisfied. It was only in the fall that gas prices in European hubs edged \$220 amid a drop in LNG supplies into Europe, which boosted the competitiveness of Russian gas, also for Belarusian customers.

## 28 December 2020

# **RUSSIA, GERMANY FEEL DETERMINED TO COMPLETE NORD STREAM 2**

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**Neither the authors nor sponsors of the Baltic gas link seek to give up as Russia and Germany are making efforts to finish the Nord Stream 2 project roughly a year after the United States imposed sanctions on the project. The consortium completed laying pipes for the project in German waters several days after works had been resumed. The pipeline will still need to be laid in the Danish exclusive economic zone. Berlin hopes to complete the pipeline soon and reiterate its support for the link.**

**I**n August, when Russian opposition figure Alexey Navalny arrived in a Berlin hospital after an attempted poisoning, a heated debate sparked in Germany whether it was still

accurate to back the Nord Stream 2 project. Many German officials, also those affiliated with the ruling Christian Democrats party, called for punishing Putin’s murderous regime



SOURCE: NORD STREAM AG

somewhat, for instance by quitting the gas pipeline being of vital importance for Moscow's interests. German Chancellor Angela Merkel first played for time to let the matter of Nord Stream 2 disappear from her agenda just a few weeks later. Roughly four months have passed while there is conclusive evidence that both the Federal Security Service (FSB) and Vladimir Putin plotted to assassinate Navalny. Does this make Germany revise its ties with Russia? Not at all. "Germany's federal government will not change its position on Nord Stream 2," Germany's Foreign Minister Heiko Maas told DPA news agency on December 28. Later that day, Nord Stream 2 AG, which manages

the pipeline, said it had finished work on a 2.6 kilometer-long portion of the pipeline running through the German exclusive economic zone. Nonetheless, this is a rather symbolic and propaganda-infused feat that has no real impact on the fate of the project. The 2.6 kilometer-long section is far less than the 70 kilometer-long part that needs to be built in Danish waters. Pipe-lay activities on the two parallel branches are expected to start in mid-January 2021. Russian-flagged Fortuna vessel would lay the pipeline along the route to the south of the Bornholm Island, the Danish Maritime Authority said in a statement.





SOURCE: MID.RU

29 December 2020

## **RUSSIA GIVES WAY TO TURKEY IN THE CAUCASUS**

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Dispatching the Turkish military to the Nagorno-Karabakh ceasefire monitoring center in the areas that Azerbaijan claimed from Armenia comes as Ankara's success while being a failure for Moscow. When early November saw a truce in the Nagorno-Karabakh war, Russia gave its green light to the Turkish military presence in the region yet not in the territory seized from Armenia, but somewhere deeper inside Azerbaijan. That would be different, though. Russia is making efforts to cover up its defeat with some vague statements that came after the meeting between the Russian and Turkish foreign ministers.

“We have confirmed our mutual intention to develop military ties with Turkey,” Sergey Lavrov noted during the Sochi meeting with his Turkish counterpart Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu. While saying so, the top Russian diplomat meant Turkey’s purchase of Russian-made S-400 anti-aircraft missile systems, a transaction that caused strains between Ankara and its NATO allies. The Russian foreign minister said the two Russian-Turkish energy projects had been completed – the Akkuyu nuclear power plant and the TurkStream gas pipeline. By doing so, Moscow sought to demonstrate its flourishing ties with Turkey. The reality is different, though. Indeed, Turkey bought the S-400s roughly a year ago, showing no signs of further cooperation since then. Besides, Turkey and Russia occupy contrary positions in a whole range of regions – from Libya, through Syria, to the South Caucasus.

In the last of them, Russia made some concessions to Ankara, with the military conflict bringing victory to Turkey’s ally and ending in the defeat of that of Russia. The same happened in Libya earlier this year. Though

many said the Kremlin had played Ankara out in the Nagorno-Karabakh war by sending its “peacekeeping” forces there while Turkey had nothing but a symbolic military presence in the joint monitoring center far from the conflict theatre, now it turns out that Turkish officials were right in November to claim they would send its troops to the region. As informed on December 27, Turkey dispatched 35 soldiers to Azerbaijan to establish a peacekeeping center with Russia to monitor a truce over the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region. Most importantly, troops will be sent to the Agdam district that Azerbaijan claimed from Armenia this fall and that would host the Russian-Turkish ceasefire monitoring facility. Russia has made repeated claims that the Turkish military would not enter the disputed area, meaning the districts Armenia had controlled prior to this fall.



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