

RUSSIA MONITOR

MONTHLY

October 2021



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SOURCE: GAZPROM.RU

6 October 2021

RUSSIAN GAS TRAP: GAZPROM CURBS GAS TRANSIT CAPACITY

The price of gas commodities contracted for November is now four times higher in Europe than last year. If this winter is similar to the last one, the European Union will face a major energy crisis. Gazprom is taking advantage of the whole situation to push for European concessions on Nord Stream 2.

Russian gas exporter Gazprom has booked around a third of the gas transit capacity it was offered for October via the Yamal-Europe pipeline. Russian gas supplies via the pipeline fell by almost 77 percent from October 1. However, the Kremlin says the company is supplying customers with gas in full compliance with existing contracts. Already high natural gas prices in Europe could scale new heights

due to low gas storage levels and growing demand, according to the CEO of Gazprom Alexei Miller. Delayed efforts to replenish gas stocks are largely due to the Russian company. Gazprom is in compliance with its deals, but until recently the firm got commodities from EU-based storage facilities, and not from Russia, before delivering them to customers. In recent months, deliveries shrank by five times than the

year before. Gazprom is unwilling to send more gas to Europe than it had to under long-term deals. Russia is making double gains from this. First, it is due to the eye-watering gas price, prompting record-high profits for Gazprom and the federal budget. Secondly, in case of harsh winter, Gazprom will be in a position to dictate conditions, also by forcing consent to launch the Nord Stream 2. Ukraine will be first

to fall victim to Gazprom's strategy as shown on October 1. In the morning, the Russian gas giant suspended the transit of gas to Hungary via Ukraine before saying a few hours later that gas would flow to Hungary and Croatia via the new TurkStream link and gas transmission systems in Bulgaria, Serbia, and Hungary. Undoubtedly, Gazprom will seek to repeat the "Hungarian scenario" in other countries in the region. ■

11 October 2021

RUSSIANS HAVE MORE TRUST IN ARMY THAN IN PUTIN

The fall in Vladimir Putin's popularity ratings is bucking the trend. So is that of the public trust in the army yet it came first in the popularity ratings. The trust in secret services is also falling dramatically but is far higher than that for the Orthodox Church and media outlets. This shows that the Russian regime is now redoing so state authorities resort to fraudulent, manipulative, and forcible practices more often than before.

According to a survey by the independent Levada Center, which released the results on October 6, public trust in the president fell to 53 percent. It has not been lower since October 2012 (51 percent). It was 71 percent in September 2017. At its peak, public trust in the president was 80 percent in 2015 following Russia's annexation of Crimea from Ukraine that eventually elicited a wave of euphoria across the country. Putin's ratings have been hit by an unpopular retirement-age increase as well as broader economic woes, and household wealth levels that are also lower than at any time since 2012. Other state agencies are seeing a more dramatic decline in their trust ratings.

Levada's new poll showed a decrease in trust for the lower chamber of the parliament, the State Duma — from 33 percent in 2017 to 25 percent now. The level of trust dropped as a result of the campaign of the recent fraudulent vote. The public trust in political parties also went down from 19 percent in 2017 to 17 percent now. People in Russia show the most trust in the army (61 percent). Those behind the president, who came second, are secret services (45 percent), Orthodox Church and religious organizations (40 percent), charities, and media outlets (36 percent each). Some 33 percent of Russians show trust in the government. Among those that the Russians trust least are



SOURCE: KREMLIN.RU

political parties (17 percent), big business (18 percent), trade unions (20 percent), State Duma (25 percent), and the Federation Council (25 percent). Although the top trusted institutions are still dominated by power structures, this too shows a steady decline in support. The poll

displayed a drop in trust for the army—from 69 percent in 2017 to 61 percent now. In 2017 the FSB and other secret services enjoyed 61 percent support compared to 45 percent now, marking a profound decline in trust. ■

12 October 2021

LUKOIL CONTINUES CASPIAN EXPANSION

In just a couple of days, Russia's biggest oil and gas company announced it would mark a significant footprint in Caspian gas and crude oil exploration in Azerbaijan. Lukoil has bought shares from BP and Petronas, following approval from Azeri authorities.

Russia's Lukoil has agreed to acquire a stake in the BP-managed project in the Azeri section of the Caspian Sea. The biggest Russian oil company will buy a 25 percent

stake in the Shallow Water Absheron Peninsula (SWAP) exploration project offshore Azerbaijan from BP, which will remain operator on the project with a 25 percent stake. Azerbaijan's



SOURCE: LUKOIL.COM

state-owned oil and gas company SOCAR will retain a 50 percent stake. The deal should be ready by the end of 2021, following approval from Azerbaijan's government. The SWAP project is located at shallow waters south of the Absheron peninsula in the Azeri section of the Caspian Sea. The SWAP production sharing agreement was signed between BP and SOCAR in December 2014. The first exploration well was spudded at North Khali. "Lukoil joining the BP and Socar project is in line with both Russia and Azerbaijan's national interests regarding the development of international energy cooperation," Lukoil CEO Vagit Alekperov said in a statement. "I am convinced that all the scientific and technical resources gathered by the partners will boost the development of the prospective area in the shallow waters of the Absheron Peninsula," he added. Purchasing stakes at the SWAP project is not the only example of Lukoil's stepping foot in the Caspian Sea. On October 7,

Russian oil and gas company Lukoil agreed to acquire a 15.5 percent stake in the Shah Deniz offshore gas field in the Azerbaijan sector of the Caspian Sea from Malaysia's Petronas. The value of the transaction is \$2.25 billion. After the completion of the transaction, Lukoil's stake in the Shah Deniz project will increase from 10 percent to 25.5 percent. The other parties to the project are BP (operator, 28.8 percent), TPAO (19 percent), Socar (10 percent), NICO (10 percent), and SGC (6.7 percent). The Shah Deniz field is located 70 kilometers southeast of Baku. Commercial production there began in 2006. In 2020, the Shah Deniz consortium extracted 18.1 bcm of gas and 3.6 million tons of gas condensate. In 2018, the second stage of the project was launched, with annual production expected to reach 26 bcm of gas and 5 million tons of gas condensate. The gas is sold on the markets of Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey. Since December 2020, gas from Shah Deniz is also delivered to Europe via a pipeline system. ■



SOURCE: MID.RU

13 October 2021

RUSSIA TO INVITE TALIBAN TO “MOSCOW FORMAT” TALKS ON AFGHANISTAN

State authorities in Russia are seeking to break the deadlock in relations with the Taliban and gain some influence in Kabul, hence an idea of an international conference in Moscow, attended by new Afghan authorities. So far, the Taliban have reneged on promises to make their government more inclusive, contrary to what Moscow had expected. Russia and China are urging the Taliban to take Afghanistan on a more moderate political course to facilitate international recognition of the new government of the Central Asian country.

On October 12, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said Moscow was currently waiting for a response from the Taliban to take part in the October 20 conference on Afghanistan. No further details were disclosed on who possibly could attend the meeting. Russia will invite the Taliban to international talks on Afghanistan scheduled for October 20 in Moscow, the Kremlin's envoy to Afghanistan, Zamir Kabulov, said. The representative did not provide further details on the planned talks. The conference is another initiative Russia has made in the last few years to discuss the situation in Afghanistan. At a March meeting of the representatives of Russia, China, the United States, and Pakistan, the officials released a statement calling on the sides to conclude a peace agreement and reduce the level of violence in the country. Moscow has managed

to accomplish its first goal as Western forces retreated from Afghanistan. Now it is essential to forge good ties with the Taliban to nip in the bud any threats incoming from Afghanistan (like exporting jihadi militants from Russia's Central Asian allies) and to create a zone of political and economic influence. And, naturally, Russia seeks not to admit Western forces back to Afghanistan. In this respect, Russia can count on China. Both countries expect the new Afghan government to be inclusive, by adding also people linked to former president Hamid Karzai. Now the interim government in Afghanistan is dominated by radical groups, including the Haqqani network, and does not guarantee stability in the long run. In the worst-case scenario for Moscow, Afghanistan would again plunge in terror the country had seen when the Taliban first came to power. ■

13 October 2021

PATRUSHEV ACCUSES, RYABKOV THREATENS: WILL RUSSIA FORCE U.S. INTO CONCESSIONS?

Russia's Security Council Secretary Nikolai Patrushev accused Washington of meddling in the recent State Duma elections and fueling tensions between Russia, Ukraine, and Georgia. For his part, Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov said there was a risk that U.S.-Russian relations could worsen, a comment he made during the visit of U.S. Undersecretary of State Victoria Nuland to Moscow. This was the first top-level U.S.-Russia meeting since a summit in Geneva where the presidents of the United States and Russia held talks.



SOURCE: KREMLIN.RU

Patrushev voiced his harsh criticism of the United States at the opening of the 17th conference of CIS security and intelligence chiefs on intelligence activity. A close Putin associate, Nikolai Patrushev, the secretary of Russia's Security Council and a former director of the FSB, said the United States was implementing a course towards stimulating Russia's economic and cultural disengagement with Ukraine and Georgia. According to him, Washington continues to meddle in Russia's domestic affairs, including the recent State Duma elections in September this year. Patrushev scolded the United States on the third day of Nuland's visit to Moscow, before she met with Putin's aide Yuri Ushakov and Kremlin deputy chief of staff Dmitry Kozak. Nuland spoke to the deputy foreign minister

just the day before that. "I cannot say that we have achieved great progress," Ryabkov said after the meeting. "There is a risk of a further sharpening of tensions if we do not normalize the work of our diplomatic missions," he added. Ryabkov warned that Moscow would like to avoid this scenario but does not rule out freezing the work of the diplomatic missions. Russia's very tough stance in talks with Washington confirms that the Kremlin's goal remains to regulate nuclear issues with the United States, but Moscow is not keen on any political compromise. Through accusations and unfulfilled conditions, Russia will be able to keep its ties with Washington at the poor level as they now are. It could bring bigger political gains, according to the Kremlin. ■



SOURCE: KREMLIN.RU

14 October 2021

PUTIN INTIMIDATES UKRAINE, BLACKMAILS EU

Moldova is now on the verge of a gas crisis after Russia imposed exorbitant conditions for gas supplies. Gazprom seeks to repeat the same scenario in Romania. In addition, Russia is waging an information campaign involving ambassadors and President Putin himself to force the EU, now in the middle of an energy crisis, into concessions to Gazprom, and to be able to launch the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline. At the same time, Moscow no longer hides that halting gas transit through Ukraine is just a matter of time.

Addressing the plenary session at Russian Energy Week, Russian President Vladimir Putin outlined the main theses of the Kremlin's energy strategy. He started with a false claim, insisting the country was not using gas as a geopolitical weapon. In fact, it is precisely the opposite. Putin also reiterated that his country denied any responsibility for a large increase in

gas prices in EU states. He said this was related to energy shortages in Europe while Moscow is ready to start talks to make some suggestions on how to balance the market. The Russian leader blamed Europe for higher gas rates as its countries are seeking to diversify energy supplies by purchasing more liquefied natural gas. Putin pointed to a fall in supplies with

cargoes drawn to higher-priced Asian markets, and not to Europe. The recipe for turmoil is long-term gas deals with Gazprom, according to the Russian leader. What Putin said is a classic Russian disinformation campaign. Gazprom is not a recipe for crisis, but one of the main sources of the problem. Russia has contributed to an eye-watering increase in gas prices in Europe and is pursuing a panic-stricken policy, saying some countries may simply run out of gas, as in the case of the Kremlin's policy towards Moldova. Gazprom's goal is to force the European Union into treating the Russian energy giant advantageously. Meanwhile, it is about overwhelming Ukraine. With Nord Stream 2 and possible concessions Brussels could make to Russia, Kyiv's position will only worsen. German and U.S. "paper" guarantees

for Ukraine's energy security is somewhat that could be forgotten, which Putin almost directly articulated at the Moscow summit. Putin also warned of the risk of supplying more gas to Europe via Ukraine, saying it would be "dangerous to increase deliveries given that the Ukrainian equipment was 80–85 percent outdated. Putin said these pipelines should be refurbished, an idea that suggests bringing back a Russian-German-Ukrainian consortium in charge of the entire network. This would mean Moscow taking control of Ukrainian pipelines. Putin said Russia was ready to maintain the transit contract with Ukraine after 2024 "if the economic and environmental conditions are there." So Russia may offer transit conditions that are suitable just for Gazprom. ■

22 October 2021

MOSCOW IS GOING BACK INTO LOCKDOWN AS COVID-19 CASES AND DEATHS SOAR

The epidemiological situation in Russia is worsening every single day. New restrictions come far too late while the country is likely to see a renewed surge in cases and deaths. Russian health minister says the virus has already overwhelmed the country's hospitals. Those to be blamed are state authorities who have neglected the pandemic for months now while failing to encourage people to vaccinate.

Russian President Vladimir Putin approved a government proposal for a week-long workplace shutdown from October 30 to combat a sharp rise in Covid-19 cases and deaths. The Russian leader said the heads of regions were given the right to impose additional measures. Since the outbreak of the

pandemic, the Kremlin has blamed regional authorities for remaining idle in face of the epidemiological threat. At the same time, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov admitted that while the government has not done everything to encourage people to vaccinate. Coronavirus-related deaths across Russia in



SOURCE: DUMA.GOV.RU

just 24 hours hit yet another daily record at 1,036, with 36,339 new infections, Russian state authorities reported on October 21, marking The country is struggling with the highest number of coronavirus cases since the start of the pandemic. The daily toll is now more than 1,000 every day since mid-October. Furthermore, Russia has detected a new sub-variant of the Delta strain of the coronavirus-- the AY.4.2. variant. It could be as much as 10-15 percent more contagious than Delta. Russian health officials say the Delta variant is the dominant strain of the fourth wave of the

pandemic. Most cases are reported in Moscow (20 percent of all new infections in the country). Moscow's authorities have stepped up the urgency of their efforts to slow the pandemic. The restrictions suspend businesses, services, catering, sports, recreation, entertainment between October 28 and November 7. All employers are obliged to send at least 30 percent of their staff to work from home till February 2022. The same applies to staffers over 60 years of age. In Moscow, three million people are sixty or older. Just one in three of them has been inoculated. ■



SOURCE: KREMLIN.RU

22 October 2021

TURKEY DETAINS RUSSIAN HITMEN: ARE THEY KADYROV'S PEOPLE?

Turkish authorities have arrested six men on charges of alleged plans to attack Chechen opposition activists residing in Turkey. Four of the purported hitmen are Russian citizens. All signs are that the operation was staged to take revenge on critics of Ramzan Kadyrov, the Kremlin-backed leader of Chechnya.

A court in Istanbul ordered the arrest of six people, including four Russian citizens, for alleged “military and political espionage”, which in a conviction carries a sentence of 15–20 years in prison. In early October, Turkish police and MIT officers detained the suspects in an operation focused on Istanbul and the southern resort city of Antalya, naming them

as four Russian citizens, one Ukrainian and one Uzbek. During the search, they found three pistols, one equipped with a silencer and a laser sight, as well as ammunition. Turkish officers raided two apartments in Antalya and three in Istanbul. The men were detained on suspicion of preparing armed attacks on Chechen dissidents, according to Turkish media outlets. On October

20, the Turkish Prosecutor-General's Office revealed more details on who was detained on October 8 in Antalya and Istanbul. The arrested were Abdula Abdulayev, Ravshan Akhmedov, Beslan Rasayev, and Aslanbek Abdulmuslimov of Russia; Ihor Yefrim of Ukraine; and Amir Yusupov of Uzbekistan. All four Russian citizens come from Chechnya, allegedly led by Beslan Rasayev. The men are also suspected of buying weapons to use against Turkish-based critics of Ramzan Kadyrov, the Chechen president. The men were ordered to kill blogger Hassan Khalitov and Chechen jihadi commander in Syria Rustam Hajiyeu. They were allegedly involved in an attack against a supporter of

Kadyrov in early September. Relatives of the beaten Chechen man allegedly promised to take bloody revenge. There have been other cases when Turkish agencies detained people tasked with killing Chechen dissidents, usually at Kadyrov's request. In 2016, the Turkish security services arrested two Russians, Yuri Anisimov and Aleksandr Smirnov, on suspicion of killing seven Chechen migrants in Turkey. Turkey suspected these two worked for Russian agencies. In 2018 they were extradited to Russia, possibly in exchange for the release of two deputy leaders of the Mejlis, the Crimean Tatar self-governing body, jailed in Russia-occupied Crimea. ■

25 October 2021

KOSOVO EXPELS TWO RUSSIAN DIPLOMATS AMID CONFLICT WITH SERBIA

State authorities in Kosovo said the two diplomats at Russia's liaison office to Kosovo were ordered to leave the country. As the office is closely linked to the Russian embassy in Belgrade, the expulsion could have been due to renewed tensions between Kosovo and Serbia. Russia and Serbia are allies; furthermore, Moscow does not recognize Kosovo as an independent state while Russian intelligence outlets have been involved in many joint operations with Serbian operatives in this Balkan country.

Kosovo's government tells two Russian diplomats to leave the country over harmful activity which has violated the national security and constitutional order. "We will continue to cooperate closely with our U.S. and European allies to prevent Kosovo and our region from being prey to destabilizing

ambitions of the Russian Federation," President Vjosa Osmani said on Facebook on October 22. Russia has a liaison office in Kosovo, not an embassy. Moscow refuses to recognize Kosovo as a country and backs Serbia in its insistence that its neighbor is part of Serbian territory. Kosovo unilaterally declared independence



SOURCE: RU.WIKIPEDIA.ORG

from Serbia in 2008. Russia opened a liaison office in Kosovo in 2005, three years before Kosovo declared independence from Serbia. It was not clear what activities prompted the government to expel the two officials. Possibly this was due to tensions in the mostly-Serb regions in the north whose inhabitants clashed with police officers in riots. At the same time, Serbia demonstrated its military power by its border with Kosovo. Formally, the liaison office in Priština is part of the Russian diplomatic mission in Belgrade. It labeled the decision made by Kosovo as “provocative,” adding it had no legal force for Russia as Moscow is

cooperating with the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) in this respect. This was another incident when Russian diplomats were expelled from Balkan states for activities incompatible with their diplomatic status. In May North Macedonia expelled a Russian diplomat over spying allegations. In the same month, Albania sent a Russian national back home and accused him and his compatriot of spying. In April Romania ordered the aide to Russia’s military attaché to leave while Bulgaria expelled a Russian diplomat, possibly after detecting a spy ring among Bulgarian military personnel. ■



SOURCE: KREMLIN.RU

25 October 2021

ISRAELI PRIME MINISTER ARRIVES IN RUSSIA FOR FIRST TALKS WITH PUTIN

Moscow and Beijing are pushing for an inclusive government in Afghanistan. At the same time, they are seeking friendly ties with the new government in Kabul as soon as possible. These efforts were channeled into a visit of Russian and Chinese special envoys for Afghanistan. Not only did they join forces, but there were also accompanied by a representative of Pakistan, a country that has the biggest influence on the Taliban and their policy.

The two officials met for their first face-to-face talks since Bennett took office. Earlier they had held two phone conversations. Before leaving for Sochi, Israeli officials agreed to recognize tourists vaccinated with Russia's Sputnik V shot as immunized and allow them to enter the country without requiring quarantine, a move pushed by political leadership ahead

of meeting between Bennett and Putin. The meeting was scheduled for two hours but it lasted five hours. Both leaders were joined only by Minister Zeev Elkin and a Russian translator. In the past, Elkin, a native Russian speaker, also accompanied Benjamin Netanyahu in his meetings with Putin to provide translation and advice. A top specialist in Russia affairs among Israeli officials, Elkin is a bridge between the two countries. However, he was not the only one to arrive in Sochi. The Israeli delegation also included national security adviser Eyal Hulata, General Avi Gil, and foreign policy adviser Shimrit Meir. The contentious issue was the war in Syria and Iranian entrenchment in the country. Putin told Bennett that the pair had “many problematic issues” to discuss,

but also many “points of contact.” Moscow sides with Bashar al-Assad and Iran, but has for years allowed Israel to attack targets in Syria. Nonetheless, Moscow has been at odds with Israel, saying the latter country did not communicate its plans for Syria. Yet the two parties do not have the same interests when it comes to Iran’s nuclear program. In addition, Moscow provides support to Palestinian organizations. Nonetheless, Netanyahu forged friendly relations with Putin, based on seeking accord where possible and avoiding clashes elsewhere. At the Sochi meeting, Putin praised trade with Israel while Bennett talked about the Red Army’s contribution to defeating Nazi Germany and the importance of Russian-speaking Israelis. ■

25 October 2021

NATO–RUSSIA: POLITICAL, NOT SECURITY, CRISIS

Russia cut almost all remaining ties with the North Atlantic Alliance for the expulsion of Russian diplomats, who were allegedly working as intelligence officers. Moscow is now fueling its rhetoric targeting the Western military alliance. NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg has described relations with Russia as hitting a new low since the end of the Cold War. Russia’s policy confirms that Moscow sees the alliance as the biggest obstacle to its belligerent deeds. Hitting the military bloc fits into the Kremlin’s long-lasting strategy consisting of crippling or breaking up the transatlantic bloc.



SOURCE: KREMLIN.RU

NATO is gradually gathering forces near our borders amid calls for military deterrence of Russia, the Russian defense minister said, adding the Western military bloc is unwilling to be in dialogue with Moscow. “But it is NATO that is not ready for an equal dialogue on this issue,” he said on October 23. His words came shortly after NATO defense ministers agreed on the master plan to defend the Alliance, approved by Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg. The scheme is confidential, but one of its top parts must be a response to the Russian threat. It is about repealing a possible Russian attack in the Baltic and the Black Sea regions using nuclear weapons, cyberattacks, and aggression in outer space. The bloc says it is just the way

of deterrence, but Moscow sees this as another reason to wage a new Cold War against NATO. The Kremlin said after the meeting of NATO defense ministers showed Moscow had been right to cut ties with NATO. Russia responded by suspending its mission at NATO and ordering the closure of the alliance’s office in Moscow. “The situation which existed de facto has now been legalized formally,” Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters. Despite cutting many ties with the bloc, there are still some working channels for communications between the two sides. Russia will have military contact with the Chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff. ■



SOURCE: MOLDOVAGAZ.MD

25 October 2021

RUSSIAN GAS BLACKMAIL: A “MOLDOVA LESSON” FOR EUROPE

Russian energy giant Gazprom is trying to force Moldova into signing a new contract to purchase gas at eye-watering prices. Russia is taking advantage of a gas monopoly by exerting pressure on Moldova and restricting its gas flows to the country. The government in Chisinau is hoping that the EU and Ukraine helps the country while the Moldova gas crisis shows the danger of becoming fully reliant on Russian energy commodities.

Gazprom will suspend gas exports to Moldova if it does not get payment for previous supplies and no contract for December is signed, the Russian energy giant said on October 23 in a statement. Moldova's gas contract with Gazprom expired at the end of September, and the two have taken time to seal the deal and extended it for a month yet paid more than before. Moldova has balked at Gazprom's price of \$790 per 1,000 cubic meters of gas instead of \$550 now. Moldova had asked Gazprom to halve its price offer while Gazprom had offered a cut of 25 percent. Not only does Gazprom want more money for gas, but it also cut flows to Moldova by a third in October. Moldova relies entirely on Russian commodities for its gas needs. On October 22, Moldova's parliament has voted to approve a 30-day state of emergency in the energy sector allowing the country to buy gas under a simplified scheme with additional funds. The Moldovan government is asking for help from its European Union partners and Ukraine. Gas could possibly reach Moldova through reverse flows from neighboring Ukraine and Romania while Poland and Slovakia will also supply the commodity. Moldova consumes some 2.8

billion cubic meters of gas each year. Gas prices soared five-fold since last year, obviously due to the situation in Europe where the price of this commodity skyrocketed dramatically. Moldova's contract with Gazprom ties the price of gas for Chisinau to its prices on the German stock exchange. However, Moldova refuses to pay the full market price, saying Gazprom has a monopoly. It is the only gas supplier to Moldova while controlling transportation, distribution, and sales. How is that possible? That is because Russia has a 50 percent controlling stake in Moldova's state gas company Moldovagaz. Moscow-loyal insurgents from Moldova's breakaway region of Transnistria have a 13.44 percent stake while the Moldovan government has just 35.33 percent. However, Gazprom's latest announcement to suspend supplies from November should come as part of a war of nerves. Russia is pressing on Chisinau but it cannot halt supplies to Moldova completely because most plants and facilities in Transnistria run on Russian gas commodities, including those where Moscow is the main shareholder such as the biggest power station in Kuchurgan. ■

26 October 2021

RUSSIAN AND CHINESE VESSELS PASS THROUGH JAPANESE STRAITS

The Russia-China strategic cooperation is intensifying as evidenced by their joint drills in the Sea of Japan and their patrols including 109 vessels transiting twice between the islands of Japan.



SOURCE: STRUCTURE.MIL.RU

Chinese and Russian naval vessels passed together through the Osumi Strait off Japan's southwestern prefecture of Kagoshima, the Japanese Defense Ministry said on October 24. It is the first time that a flotilla of Chinese and Russian vessels went through the strait, located between the Osumi Peninsula and Tanegashima Island. The day before, the Russian defense ministry informed about the patrols. Between October 17 and 23, a group of five Russian and five Chinese vessels held the first joint patrol in the western Pacific, the ministry said in a statement. They sailed through 3,000 kilometers and staged joint tactical maneuvers and drills. Meanwhile, the Russian ships were those of the Pacific Fleet: the destroyers Admiral Tributs and Admiral Panteleyev, the Project 20380 corvettes Gromkiy and Hero of the Russian Federation Aldar Tsydenzhapov, and the missile range instrumentation ship Marshal Krylov. The fleet had been taking part in joint military drills with China in the Sea of Japan earlier this month. Back then, on October 15, Moscow said a U.S. Navy ship made an attempt to cross the Russian sea border. The United

States yet claims that a U.S. destroyer, the USS Chafee, was conducting routine operations in international water when a Russian destroyer, the Admiral Tributs, came within about 60 meters of it. The incident occurred in the Peter the Great Gulf. After wrapping up the drills, the Russians and the Chinese conducted the patrol. Chinese and Russian vessels have for the first time jointly traversed the Tsugaru Strait in between Honshu and Hokkaido islands. The strait narrows to just 19.5 kilometers wide and is international waters open to foreign ships just through the middle. The strip of unclaimed water permitted U.S. ships carrying nuclear weapons to transit the strait in the Cold War era. The loophole was exploited, restricting Japan's territorial waters to a minimum not to violate the country's commitment of not stocking atomic weapons. Once en route from the ocean, Russian and Japanese vessels again transited a strait between the two islands of Japan. The joint operation of the Chinese and Russian navies confirms the increasing military cooperation between the two countries. These incidents took place close to Japan, which is a key U.S. ally in this region. ■



SOURCE: PRESIDENT.GOV.BY

27 October 2021

LUKASHENKO THREATENS WITH POLISH TANKS ON PRETEXT OF INVITING RUSSIAN TROOPS

The Belarusian dictator claimed that Poland had moved tanks to the border as part of its response to thousands of illegal crossings in what he named as an excuse to “bring troops closer to the Belarusian borders.” This is ridiculous but a handy cover-up for Lukashenko to invite more Russian soldiers to Belarus.

What Lukashenko said alongside the narrative of the regime’s media outlets makes it clear that Minsk is using alleged Polish military efforts to build up Russian and

Belarusian military potential on the country’s border with the North Atlantic Alliance. The Belarusian president said that the response could involve moving more of its own, and

also Russian, forces to the border. He was speaking during a meeting with Russian prosecutor general Igor Krasnov. Belarusian state broadcaster Belarus 1 aired a TV program saying Poland had dispatched 700 troops and 58 pieces of military equipment to the region of Biała Podlaska off the Belarusian border. Journalists said the neighboring state would add much more than that. What Belarus used as a pretext for disseminating that kind of propaganda was that a group of 700 troops from the 10th Armored Cavalry Brigade was being moved from western Poland to the region of Biała Podlaska for better border protection to stop illegal crossings by people on the Belarusian side. Using Polish tanks to threaten others will help Belarus tighten cooperation with Russia or make the former country fully reliant on its mighty neighbor in the area of

security. At a meeting of top military officials in Moscow on October 20, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Shoygu spoke much about NATO's alleged expansion on the borders of Russia and its allied states. The Russian top brass also mentioned the bloc's intense military drills to improve logistics skills and rapid troops transfers eastwards. Addressing the meeting, Shoygu revealed a plan to adopt a joint Russian-Belarusian doctrine to counter threats from NATO and the West. More Russian forces will be sent to Belarus under the five-year strategic partnership agreement the two countries signed earlier this year. The scheme provides for establishing joint training centers in Russia and Belarus. In consequence, Belarus now hosts Russian missile troops and fighter jets patrolling the country's border with NATO. ■

27 October 2021

UKRAINE USES BAYRAKTAR TB2 FOR FIRST TIME IN DONBAS

The Turkish-made Bayraktar TB2 combat drone has been deployed at Donbas by the Ukrainian Joint Forces Operation for the first time, the Ukrainian Armed Forces said in a statement. The drone targeted the positions of pro-Russian insurgents on October 26. The incident has been met with criticism from Moscow.

The General Staff of the Ukrainian Armed Forces stated that the unmanned aerial vehicle was used to attack a battery of howitzers that fired Ukrainian positions in Hranitne on the southern part of the line of contact. One Ukrainian soldier was killed and the other was

wounded. Despite calls for a ceasefire from the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine, "Russian-terrorist" forces did not stop the fire. The Commander-in-Chief of the Ukrainian Armed Forces ordered the drone strike to "force the ceasefire." The drone did not cross the line



SOURCE: WIKIPEDIA.ORG

of contact during the operation. The Ukrainian army fired a 22 kg laser-guided rocket and destroyed a D-30 howitzer. There was no response from the rebels, the Ukrainian army said. The Ukrainian Joint Forces Operation said on October 26 that separatists made thirteen breaches to the ceasefire, also by their use of weapons prohibited under the Minsk agreements. Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov was commenting on media reports on deploying drones to Donbas, saying Turkey's decision to sell strike drones to Ukraine risked destabilizing the situation in eastern Ukraine. The Kremlin official reiterated that the conflict in Donbas is a Ukrainian internal problem. Bayraktar TB2 is a medium altitude and long-range (MALE) tactical unmanned

aerial vehicle system designed for conducting reconnaissance and intelligence missions. But it is most known for its offensive operations involving the launch of guided anti-tank missiles. Ukraine received six Bayraktar TB2 drones from Turkey in 2018. The Turkish-built vehicle has been sold to countries including Azerbaijan, Qatar, and Libya. Besides, Turkish drones have altered the course of conflicts not only in Syria but also in Libya and the South Caucasus. They also replaced mostly Soviet and Russian-made armored weapons. The army of Libya's government in Tripoli deployed combat drones to target Russian mercenaries. Last fall, Azerbaijan used Turkish aerial vehicles to wreak havoc in the Armenian army. The latter country is an ally of Moscow. ■



SOURCE: SOVCOMFLOT.RU

28 October 2021

ROSNEFT, VITOL DEEPEN THEIR COOPERATION

Trading firm Vitol closed a deal to buy large supplies of crude oil from Russia's biggest oil firm Rosneft. The Russian giant signed a preliminary agreement to sell a 5 percent stake in Vostok Oil to a consortium that includes Vitol and planned to finalize the deal this fall.

The Dutch energy trader (crude oil, coal, natural gas) started to receive oil from Rosneft under a new term contract. In September, it signed a deal to buy 9 million tons of Russian crude each year. That is equivalent to 180,000 barrels per day (bpd). The new deal with Rosneft is the first for Vitol in eight years after its previous five-year supply agreement with the Russian state oil company was signed in 2013. The annual supply volume under the new agreement is more than twice as high as the deal back in 2013, when Vitol struck a deal to purchase 20 million tons of oil from Rosneft over five years. Vitol will load oil from

Baltic ports, the Black Sea port of Novorossiisk, and Kozmino port in the Sea of Japan. In June, Vitol and Mercantile & Maritime announced an agreement to buy 5 percent in Rosneft's Vostok Oil giant project. The deal is yet to be finalized this fall. Trafigura, another global trader and a long-standing partner of Rosneft, bought a 10 percent stake in Vostok Oil for \$8.1 billion earlier this year. Rosneft has said it is in talks with other big investors about joining Vostok Oil, one of Russia's biggest oil projects, comparable in size with the exploration of West Siberia in the 1970s or the U.S. Bakken region in the past decade. ■



SOURCE: GAZPROM.RU

29 October 2021

MOLDOVA SAYS GAS CRISIS OVER AFTER DEAL WITH RUSSIA

The Moldovan government and Russia's state-controlled Gazprom said on October 29 they have agreed to extend a contract for Russian natural gas supplies for a period of five years. It is said off-the-record that the price formula suits more the Moldovan side. It is little surprising that Moscow eventually reduced its expectations as Gazprom cannot afford to halt supplies to Moldova as Russian-sourced gas powers some utility plants in the Moscow-loyal breakaway region of Transnistria.

The agreement was reached after talks in Saint Petersburg, putting an end to the Russia-Moldova energy dispute that broke out last month. Moldova's contract with Gazprom expired at the end of September. Gazprom drastically raised the prices for gas deliveries to Moldova to \$790 per 1,000 cubic meters from \$550, while slashing its gas supply by about one-third after their contract expired. The Russian gas giant added it would halt gas flows to Moldova if the country failed to pay its debt. As the country faced an energy crisis, Moldova declared a state of emergency and had to look for gas supplies elsewhere, buying commodities from Poland, Ukraine, and the Netherlands. On October 25, Moldova bought a million cubic meters of natural gas from Poland in its first purchase from elsewhere than Russia. The European Union offered €60 million in aid to Moldova while the bloc's chief diplomat Josep Borrell said Moldova was a victim of Russia's efforts to use natural gas to

bully the country while the price increases were politically motivated. The agreement was eventually reached between Moldova's Deputy Prime Minister Andrei Spinu and the Russian state-controlled firm's CEO Alexei Miller. Neither Gazprom nor the Moldovan side revealed further details. Gazprom said in a short statement that talks with the sides reaching an agreement to extend the expired contract on "mutually beneficial terms" while Moldova's diplomats called it an "agreement using the formula proposed by the Moldovan side." The price will be between \$500-\$600 per 1,000 cubic meters, according to unofficial reports. In the summer (Q2-Q3), gas prices will be correlated with market prices. In the winter, or between Q4 and Q1, gas prices for Moldova will be tied to the prices on the diesel and mazut markets. Moldova is also obliged to repay its old gas debts estimated at \$700 million. Gas deliveries under the new contract are expected to start from November 1. ■

31 October 2021

ROSNEFT IS DEVELOPING NEW STRATEGY

Russian state oil major Rosneft is developing a new strategy centered on the transition to renewable energy resources, CEO Igor Sechin said at the 14th Eurasian Economic Forum. Sechin also said that Rosneft had invested more than \$580 million in green energy in 2020 and that it had reduced the volume of pollutants it released into the atmosphere by 14 percent.



SOURCE: KREMLIN.RU

The company is analyzing the possibility of using renewable energy sources, carbon capture, and hydrogen solutions to reduce the carbon footprint of its operations. “Rosneft is already involved in producing more natural gas, which is the cleanest fossil fuel, and is seeking to increase its share to more than 25 percent,” Sechin was quoted as saying. He also said the company was implementing a program for utilization of associated petroleum gas, developing environmentally friendly motor fuels, and a network for charging electric cars at filling stations. The company has devised a carbon strategy scheme by 2035. Under this plan, the company is committed to reducing its upstream emissions intensity by 30 percent, preventing 20 million tons of greenhouse gas emissions, reducing methane emissions

intensity, and ensuring zero routine flaring of associated gas. The erroneous decisions in the area of climate policy can lead to serious negative consequences, Sechin added. The CEO of Rosneft said the demands of climate activists had reduced a large number of energy investment projects. While the world’s leading oil and gas companies invested an average of \$16 billion per year in exploration between 2011 and 2015, spending on hydrocarbon reserves replacement dropped threefold last year, to \$5 billion. As a result, the level of global oil and gas reserves replacement has been declining for the fourth year in a row, and risks of supply shortages are already factored into the prices, negatively affecting the revenues of European and global consumers, Sechin concluded in his remarks. ■



SOURCE: ARMY.MIL

31 October 2021

U.S. BASES IN CENTRAL ASIA? RUSSIA CALLS ON AFGHANISTAN'S NEIGHBORS

Russia is seeking to prevent the return of U.S. and NATO troops to Central Asia. On October 27, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov called on former Soviet republics in Central Asia “not to allow a military presence of U.S. and NATO forces which plan to move there after leaving Afghan territory.” However, it is unlikely that the U.S. Army will set its foot in any of the post-Soviet republics.

The top Russian diplomat was speaking over video at a conference about Afghanistan held in Tehran, Iran, with representatives from Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan in attendance. A representative of China was also speaking by video link. There are

other countries besides Russia that are willing to see Western soldiers leave this region. While delivering opening remarks in Tehran, Iran's vice president said that “the failed U.S. policy in Afghanistan is not equivalent to scrapping any destructive U.S. ideas on the region.” The

most likely candidate to host a Western military base is Uzbekistan whose state authorities yet deny having been in talks with the United States. U.S. media outlets first reported this in April, so a few months before the Taliban seized Afghanistan. Two weeks before the Teheran meeting, Pentagon officials were participating in a delegation to Uzbekistan to discuss ongoing security cooperation efforts. Nonetheless, the country's chief diplomat Abdulaziz Komilov said the issue of U.S. military presence in Uzbekistan was not on the meeting agenda. Tashkent should make careful decisions; the country's 2012 foreign policy and 2018 defense doctrines prohibit foreign military bases from operating on its territory. With Russia's blessing, the U.S. used the Karshi-Khanabad Airbase in southern Uzbekistan between 2001 and 2005 for missions in Afghanistan. Tashkent evicted the Americans after Washington criticized the May 2005 massacre in Andijan. The United States will exert pressure on Uzbekistan, but the Central Asian country would risk much by admitting the U.S. Army on its territory. First, the country would in this way strain its ties with the Taliban towards whom it

is now following a conciliatory policy. In October alone, officials from Uzbekistan have held two meetings with Afghan government representatives. Komilov visited Kabul, and days later Taliban officials visited Termez, a border city in southern Uzbekistan. Secondly, this would complicate relations with Russia and China. Thus, Uzbekistan would seek to preserve its neutrality. Komilov has also ruled out Uzbekistan re-joining the Russia-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) – a regional security bloc that Tashkent quit in 2012 – as a result of the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan. Kyrgyzstan is another Central Asian state to have offered its military infrastructure to U.S. forces at the time of the Afghan operation. A part of the Manas airport served as a U.S. military base in 2001–2004. Yet the Kyrgyz side faced significant pressure from Moscow to end the deal. But U.S. troops are more unlikely to return to Kyrgyzstan than to Uzbekistan. There will be no U.S. military base in Kyrgyzstan, President Sadyr Japarov said on October 23, adding that the Central Asian country has already a Russian military facility in Kant. ■

31 October 2021

RUSSIAN NATIONWIDE SHUTDOWN WILL STOP PANDEMIC, BUT NOT FOR LONG

In the last week of October, some Russian regions entered a lockdown. The nationwide shutdown is in force since October 30 and is expected to end on November 7 to stop a surge in coronavirus infections and deaths. But as the Russians are reluctant to get vaccinated, these measures will be short to stop the pandemic.



SOURCE: DUMA.GOV.RU

Russia saw 1,003,000 new Covid-19 infections in October, setting a new monthly high since the pandemic started worldwide and a 70 percent increase month to month. The previous record-high number was in December 2020 when 864,000 cases were confirmed. But it is only now that there were more than one million new infections. The national coronavirus task force on October 30 reported 40,993 new infections over the previous day, tallying a new record of Covid-19 cases in the country. Two days before, Russia confirmed record-high 1,163 Covid-related deaths. The death toll has been more than a thousand for many days now. There is a shortage of beds at intensive care units across the country. According to official government data, some 1.3 million people in Russia are now being treated for Covid-19, of which 268,000 remain in hospitals, 10 percent in critical condition. Russia's overall coronavirus death toll in the pandemic is officially more than 230,000, but this rate is likely to be higher as regional authorities did not report everything when the pandemic broke out. Russia's collapsing healthcare system is overwhelmed with an influx of Covid-19 patients. State authorities

announced countrywide 'non-working days' from October 30 to November 7 to curb the further spread of the virus. Some regions went into lockdown a few days before. Only essential shops like supermarkets and pharmacies are allowed to open. Hairdressing salons, fitness clubs, swimming pools, cafes, restaurants, and cinemas were closed. Also, non-essential services such as laundries or car repairs were ordered to shut. Only industrial plants and those businesses that provide services to city infrastructure are allowed to stay open. Healthcare facilities, also private, and courts were not closed. Schools are shut while university students are sent home for remote learning. This lockdown could stop the current wave, but only for a couple of months. Just a third of the Russians have been vaccinated so far. While encouraging people to get vaccinated, Russian President Vladimir Putin refused to make a coronavirus jab mandatory throughout Russia. He placed this burden on regional authorities to make them blame for inadequate measures to contain the virus. And how to encourage hesitant people if the Kremlin propaganda is disseminating anti-vaccination messages outside Russia? ■



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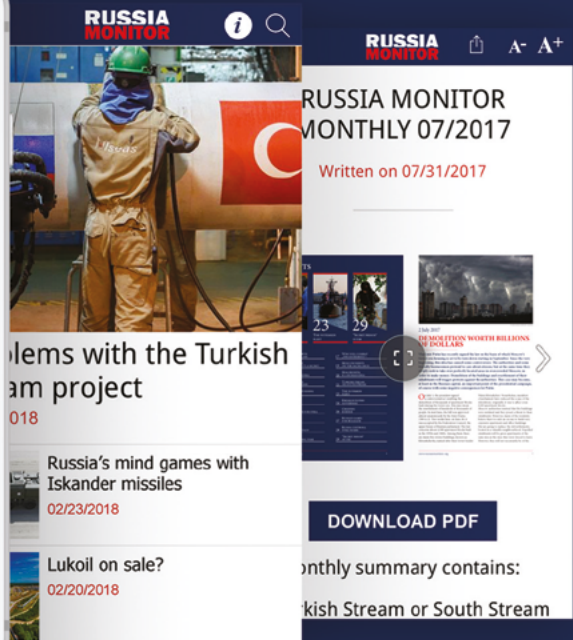
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