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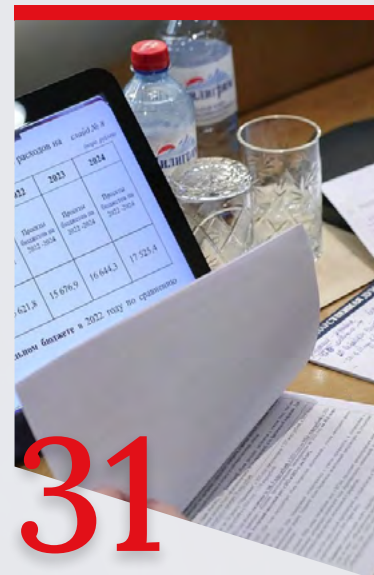
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SOURCE:TSOUA.COM

13 May 2022

RUSSIA TARGETS UKRAINIAN ENERGY FACILITIES, ATTACKS REFINERIES, SIPHONS OFF GAS

Kyiv halted the use of a major transit route blaming interference by occupying Russian forces, the first time exports via Ukraine have been disrupted since the invasion. Kyiv says Russia intensifying its assault with attacks reported on oil facilities. The goal is to curb the fuel supplies available and cripple the whole economy.

Yuriy Vitrenko, head of the state energy company Naftogaz, on May 11 said the gas flow via Ukraine was “limited.” The Ukrainian gas system operator shut a gas route running from Russia into Europe after the pipeline operator said Russian shipments through its Novopskov hub, in an area controlled by

Moscow-backed separatists, would be cut as the Russians diverted them to the so-called people’s republics in Luhansk and Donetsk through the Sokhranivka transit point. Ukraine asked Gazprom to divert gas flows via the Sokhranivka point, which is between Ukraine’s Luhansk and Russia’s Rostov regions,

northwards to Sudzha--on the border between the Sumy (Ukraine) and Kursk (Russia) regions. There is no heavy fighting in the Ukraine-controlled area. Gazprom yet says it is not technically possible to shift all volumes to the route. So there is only one point in Ukraine's Sudzha through which gas is pumped via Ukraine into Europe. Russia's Gazprom said the security of gas supplies has been undermined by Ukraine shutting one entry point for Russian gas transit to Europe. But volumes were seen at 72 million cubic meters on May 10, down from 88.2 mcm on May 11. Back on May 2, this stood at 98 mcm. Gas is pumped by the Sudzha entry point only. Once the Sokhranivka point is shut, up to a third of Europe's gas supplies could be disrupted, according to Ukraine's gas system operator. In consequence, Ukraine's budget will see more modest transit fees. But what

grapples Ukraine most is Russian attacks on oil and fuel facilities throughout Ukraine. In April Russian forces fired missiles at the refinery in the central Ukrainian city of Kremenchuk. In May they attacked the country's second-largest refinery in Lysychansk in the Luhansk region. The fiercest fighting takes place in Ukraine's fuel-richest region--in the northern part of the Luhansk oblast. Russian forces target both refineries and oil storage facilities. According to the Kyiv School of Economics estimates, the total amount of direct damage caused by Russia's ongoing war stood at \$227 million as of May 10. Fuel prices in many gas stations in Ukraine are now higher than in neighboring Poland. Interestingly, Ukraine has always been one of Europe's cheapest countries for fuel and gas. ■

13 May 2022

UKRAINE'S KHARKIV OFFENSIVE FOILED RUSSIAN PLANS

The Ukrainian offensive near Kharkiv, which started in early May, is the first large-scale operation Kyiv started since the war has broken out. Indeed, Ukrainian forces recaptured considerable areas in the country's north and northeast from where Russian troops had withdrawn. By their successful assault east of Kharkiv and some earlier efforts throughout the region, Ukrainian forces show their attempts to seize areas in the south are not just an empty boast.

Ukrainian armed forces' General Staff said on May 11 that it had recaptured Pytomnyk, a village located just 20 kilometers north of Kharkiv. This is another success in the eastern offensive that began in early May and pushed Russian troops 40 kilometers to the

east already on May 4. Russia moved some of its forces bracing for the attack towards Sloviansk and Kramatorsk from Iziium northwards to cut off Ukrainian forces that defended the Luhansk region. Russian troops had no choice but to defend their position in the eastern Kharkiv



SOURCE:TWITTER

region while delaying key assaults of the Donbas operation. The reason was obvious. This was not just the loss of some captured areas. Not only did the Ukrainian offensive push the Russians far enough from Kharkiv to target the city, but it also pose a threat to major supply routes two expressways and a railway linerunning from the Belgorod region to Izium. Russia's negligence of the Ukrainian offensive to attack Sloviansk could eventually end up cutting off Russian troops seeking to encircle Ukrainian forces in the Luhansk region. Rapid at the beginning, the Ukrainian assault eventually slowed down but its forces are still strong enough to attract many Russian soldiers. This wrecks the prospect of cutting off Ukrainian

forces, now located near Severodonetsk. Feeling Russian pressure, Ukrainians lost some of the cities, but are now retreating to inflict heavy losses on the enemy. Their offensive efforts near Kharkiv protected them against being secluded between Sloviansk and Kramatorsk on the one hand and Severodonetsk on the other. A lesson learned is that Kyiv is capable of taking increasingly aggressive action. It is better not to neglect reports on a possible Ukrainian offensive in the southern Ukrainian regions of Kherson and Zaporizhia. This is all the more so because Ukraine receives more military hardware from Western countries, including artillery and tanks. ■



SOURCE:KREMLIN.RU

17 May 2022

PUTIN APPOINTS ACTING GOVERNORS IN DISPLAY OF POWER

Frustrated at the failure of Russia's army to quickly defeat Ukraine and Western sanctions against Moscow, the Kremlin is making efforts to consolidate its grip on the regions. Russian President Vladimir Putin made his supporters acting governors of five regions while much is now said about eliminating popular regional elections across the country.

The trial of Sergei Furgal, the former governor of the Far Eastern Khabarovsk Krai, began on May 11 in a Moscow court. His arrest and dismissal sparked mass protests in Russia's Far Eastern region. Furgal is charged

with attempted murder and ordering two killings in 2004 and 2005. He faces a life sentence if convicted. Furgal, a member of the nationalist Liberal Democratic Party of Russia, was elected in 2018 in a runoff that

he won handily against the region's longtime incumbent from the Kremlin-backed ruling United Russia party. His arrest on July 9, 2020, sparked mass protests in Khabarovsk Krai's capital, Khabarovsk, and several other towns and cities in the region. The protests were held almost daily for many months. The Furgal case and the riots that followed might make the Kremlin introduce a new law on the pretense of an emergency amid the war with Ukraine. Recent months have seen some reports on the Kremlin's plan to scrap direct elections in the country's regions. In fact, before 2013, local authorities would be tasked with picking new governors--under the watchful eye of the Kremlin. Putin used the Beslan hostage-taking crisis and massacre in September 2004 to justify the end of direct elections for regional heads. Regional elections are scheduled across Russia for September 11, 2022; fifteen governors will be picked--except for the Republic of Adygea where the local parliament appoints the governor--alongside deputies to six local parliaments, twelve administrative centers,

and deputies to self-government bodies. Putin has in the past often replaced officials ahead of elections with the aim of fielding stronger candidates backed by the Kremlin. That is what now happened. Russian President Vladimir Putin on May 11 appointed acting governors to five regions of the country. All five are known as strong supporters of Putin. The former governors stepped down on the same day. In the changeover, Putin named Pavel Malkov, the chairman of Russia's Statistics Agency, as the acting governor of the Ryazan region, who replaced Nikolay Lyubimov as he announced he would not seek another term. Roman Busargin was made the acting governor of the Saratov region to replace Valery Radayev who quit. Aleksandr Sokolov became the acting governor of the Kirov region and replaced Igor Vasiliev. Vladimir Mazur is now the acting chief of the Tomsk region after Sergey Rumakhin quit the office. Last but not least, Yury Zaitsev was appointed the acting head of the Republic of Mari El. ■

17 May 2022

DONBAS OPERATION: FIERCE FIGHTING BY DONETS RIVER

Russian forces once again shifted their military strategy in Donbas. As Ukrainian troops claimed success in the region, Moscow lowered its expectations. Many signs are that Russian forces will seek to encircle the Ukrainian military in Severodonetsk though to a smaller extent than intended.

The Russians are massing many pieces of military hardware near the town of Popasna. They may be seeking to strike northwest to cross the route linking Lysychansk and Bakhmut, which is one of the major routes that link Ukrainian forces defending Severodonetsk and Lysychansk with the rest of

the country. The Russian command eventually scrapped its plan to encircle Ukrainian troops along an axis stretching several dozen kilometers further west. What was to be a major element of the operation was the Russian offensive to the southeast--from Iziurm towards Sloviansk. But the few first weeks into the



SOURCE:FLICKR

operations, Ukrainian forces slowed down the invader while the offensive they launched in early May from Kharkiv to the east made the Russians advance away from Iziium northwards. Russia's offensive operation between Iziium and Sloviansk eventually stalled. Ukrainian forces on May 14 conducted counteroffensive operations to dislodge the Russians from around Iziium. So the Russians have no other choice but to defend their positions from the north--to avoid being cut off from some remaining troops around Kharkiv--and from the west to bar Ukrainian soldiers from advancing towards the M03 route that runs to Sloviansk. Severodonetsk is now the scene of the fiercest battle of the Donbas operation. After the Russians seized Rubizhne some eight kilometers northwest of Severodonetsk, they on May 12 captured the strategic settlement of Voivodivka along the route between Rubizhne and Severodonetsk, just two kilometers from the latter. Russian forces will have a tough task to capture Severodonetsk and Lysychansk, the latter of which is located on the western bank of the Donets River where

Ukrainian troops used fortified trenches. The whole situation resembles that in Mariupol and the Azovstal steel plant-turned-fortress. Severodonetsk and the towns nearby are home to numerous industrial facilities. This might explain why Ukrainian troops easily repel Russian attacks. This is why Severodonetsk is now being shielded from the north. Possibly what was a bold attempt to reach the rear of the Ukrainian battalion was a maneuver that a Russian mechanized brigade made some eight kilometers east of Severodonetsk. Russian forces suffered heavy losses in a Ukrainian attack that destroyed a pontoon bridge they were using to try to cross the Siversky Donets River towards Bilohorovka. Up to 1,000 personnel were killed and more than 70 military vehicles drowned. The Donets River with its swampy banks served a major role in the offensive in the Kharkiv region. Russian forces have begun to blow up bridges to slow a Ukrainian counteroffensive in the northeast and to protect supply lines running from Russia east of the Donets River. ■



SOURCE:KREMLIN.RU

17 May 2022

SOUTH OSSETIA'S CUMBERSOME REFERENDUM AFTER LEADER QUILS

The leader of Georgia's breakaway region of South Ossetia set July 17 as a date for a referendum on joining Russia. Anatoly Bibilov, who has been the de facto president of South Ossetia, yet lost to his top challenger who is against a vote on whether or not to join Russia. The sham referendum is a headache for Russia, being an obstacle to rapprochement efforts made by Georgia's ruling party. If the Kremlin is seeking to please Putin, it could be through claiming some Caucasian regions from Georgia while possibly ripping some lands from Ukraine.

Both South Ossetia and Abkhazia are part of Georgia and so they were before the demise of the Soviet Union. But both Moscow-backed regions rebelled against the government in Tbilisi and claimed victory in the war. In the early 1990s, Russia sent thousands of “peacemakers” to the region. The August 2008 war between Russia and Georgia is commonly said to have begun with a Georgian offensive on Tskhinvali. After claiming victory in the Russo-Georgian war, the Kremlin also recognized the two countries as full-fledged states and immediately established diplomatic relations with them. Other Moscow-allied countries, such as Nicaragua, Venezuela, and Syria, followed suit later. Other nations consider the two breakaway republics as part of Georgia. South Ossetia and Abkhazia are Russian-occupied regions, according to the authorities in Tbilisi. What could come next is their joining Russia, but now it could happen in South Ossetia as local Abkhazian elites—although pro-Russian—wield power firmly throughout the region. Bibilov had said on March 30 that the mountainous region of around 60,000 people would take imminent measures to join Russia, which it borders. “In line with provision 16 of article 50 of South Ossetia’s constitution, I hereby resolve that South Ossetia’s referendum [on unification with Russia] be appointed,” according to the presidential decree. Bibilov signed a decree on holding a referendum in the Republic of South Ossetia,” an official government statement said, citing the citizenry’s “historic aspiration” to join Russia. The former leader lost the May 8 presidential election as he appears to have

suffered from public discontent over the deployment of Ossetian soldiers, members of Russian military units based in South Ossetia, to fight in Ukraine. The first round unexpectedly pitted incumbent Bibilov (35 percent) against the leader of the opposition party, Alan Gagloyev (39 percent). Perhaps it was because some 300 South Ossetian troops, deployed to fight in Russia’s bloody invasion of Ukraine, had shown up back, complaining of poor treatment and being thrown into the battle unprepared. Bibilov has led South Ossetia since 2017, when he won a surprise victory over an incumbent who was widely considered the Kremlin favorite. But he has since lost favor with many South Ossetians for his authoritarian tendencies. Facing a difficult battle for reelection, Bibilov has been seeking to ingratiate himself with South Ossetia’s patrons in Moscow amid public controversy over the deployment of troops from the territory to fight for Russia in Ukraine and the possibility of the breakaway territory joining Russia. The victory of Gagloyev is to a large extent a reaction of local elites to Bibilov’s policy. While the former president said South Ossetia did not need independence and should remain tied to Russia, Gagloyev insisted on state institutions and perhaps independence in the long run. The goal is to make South Ossetia widely recognized by outsiders and eventually abandon the Russian occupation. Once a new leader is elected, South Ossetia still has strong ties to Moscow while frowning upon Tbilisi. The sham referendum will eventually show whether Russia will stick to its current strategy in the Caucasus or it will go bold by grabbing more lands from Georgia. ■



SOURCE:GOV.BG

17 May 2022

AFTER RUSSIAN CUTOFFS, EUROPEAN COUNTRIES FACE GAS CONUNDRUM

Gazprom's halted gas deliveries to Bulgaria and perhaps soon Moldova made eastern Balkan countries look for some alternatives. One could be an increased flow of liquefied natural gas (LNG) through Greek terminals, currently under construction. Another might consist in expanding gas facilities to deliver more gas from Azerbaijan. In addition, Romania says it will produce much gas once it starts extracting from the Black Sea shelf. The easiest and fastest solution is the second of them, though. Greece-based LNG terminals will be operational in a year and a half. It is only in four years that Romania is poised to become a gas exporter.

Russian energy giant Gazprom on April 26 halted gas supplies to Bulgaria over a failure to pay for gas in roubles. Bulgaria imported almost 73 percent of its natural gas from Russia. After the Russian gas cutoff, Bulgaria received Greek-sourced gas flows via a number of companies. After Bulgarian Prime Minister Kiril Petkov met U.S. officials in Washington, it was announced that an unnamed US company would supply Bulgaria in June. But gas imports from Greece are still insufficient amid inadequate facilities and the country's receiving capacity. Bulgaria is hoping to triple gas supplies from Azerbaijan, Petkov added. Sofia has so far imported 300 million cubic meters of gas from the Central Asian country. While seeking to receive more gas supplies, Bulgaria should rush to complete the Gas Interconnector Greece–Bulgaria (IGB) to link the country to the TAP gas pipeline carrying gas from Azerbaijan to Europe via Turkey. Once the IGB is online, it will initially provide Bulgaria with 1 billion cubic meters (bcm) of gas per year. The IGB could have been online by now if it had not been for the policy of the previous government in Bulgaria. The cabinet of Boyko Borisov eagerly opted for energy cooperation with Russia. Bulgaria said on May 12 it would launch a full investigation into the Turkish Stream gas pipeline project that stretches through the country. Bulgaria launched a 474-km gas pipeline in January this year to transport Russian gas from its southern border with Turkey and Serbia, with the latter receiving 13.88 bcm of gas per

year. It then supplies Hungary with gas. The Bulgarian prime minister said the Russian-controlled pipeline was built rapidly, albeit at the expense of the interconnector linking the country to Greece. Petkov believes the Balkan Stream is corrupt. It cost Bulgaria some €3 billion. Two new LNG terminals are expected to come online in Alexandroupolis, Greece, in a year and a half to supply Bulgaria, Serbia, North Macedonia, and Romania and Moldova and Ukraine, according to the prime minister of Greece, Kyriakos Mitsotakis. Moldova currently relies 100 percent on gas from Russia's Gazprom and is seeking to escape this dependency amid the ongoing dispute with the gas giant. The government in Chisinau is eyeing some supplies from neighboring Romania. Romanian leaders say gas extractions from the Black Sea's field, due to come on stream in 2026, will make Romania a regional energy exporter. In March, Romania's state-owned energy company Romgaz approved the contract to buy over 50 percent of the Neptune Deep field from US ExxonMobil for \$1.06 billion. The main shareholder in Romgaz is the Romanian state, which has a 70 percent stake. Romanian officials estimated that the total amount of gas in the Neptune Deep field exceeds 100 bcm. Romania's Energy Minister Virgil Popescu said Romania will produce more natural gas than it needs once it starts extracting gas from the Black Sea area—and will then be in a position to export to countries in the region, with Moldova a priority. Gas will flow through the Iasi-Chisinau pipeline that was built last year. ■



SOURCE:TWITTER

24 May 2022

RUSSIAN TROOPS WANT TO CUT OFF UKRAINIANS BY DONETS RIVER

With their attacks on the town of Popasna, Russian forces possibly seek to cut off the Severodonetsk-based Ukrainian battalion on the Donets River from the rest of the country. Perhaps the Russians would cut Ukrainian forces off between the cities of Severodonetsk and Lysychansk. But what is advantageous to Ukrainian is the geographical location of the northern wing, where the swampy valley of the Donets River is a major obstacle for Russian battalions.

Russia is advancing in Ukraine's eastern Donbas region to capture at least the whole Luhansk region. Ukrainian forces now control just 10 percent of the region, with some areas stretching south of the town of Popasna and north of it, running from Zoloty to Pryvillia. Many of these villages and towns--of which Lysychank is the biggest--lie on the western bank of the Donets River contrary to the eastern part that includes Severodonetsk, among others. Russian forces are now targeting areas west and northwest of Popasna to cut off routes linking Bakhmut, Lysychansk, and Severodonetsk. But it is unlikely for Ukrainians to be cut off as from the north they are covered in a woody and swampy shore of the Seversky Donets River. Russian troops on May 8 suffered heavy losses in a fatal river crossing. Despite that, while advancing towards Sloviansk and

Lyman, Russian forces are seeking to cross the river as they have already massed equipment, according to the Ukrainian military. The Ukrainian city of Severodonetsk is under near-constant shelling by Russia as was Mariupol weeks ago. As the Ukrainian stronghold is fighting fiercely on the eastern bank of the Donets River, Russia is making slowed territorial gains while Ukraine has more time to stage a counteroffensive campaign. The right flank also stretching towards Iziium has been under Russian attack. The Ukrainian army said Russia was preparing to resume an offensive on Sloviansk that had been halted several days before. But Russia is now unlikely to consider cutting Ukrainian forces off along a route linking Iziium, Sloviansk, and Debaltseve and seize the whole Donetsk region. ■

24 May 2022

INDIA HALTS RUSSIAN HELICOPTER DEAL, U.S. COMES INTO PLAY

India buys the most Russian weapons in the world. According to SIPRI's data, the country has bought \$25 billion worth of military equipment in the last decade, which is four times more than what India spent on U.S.-made hardware. It is key to curb Russia-India cooperation that affects the Indian stance on the war in Ukraine.

India has halted negotiations with Russia for the former to acquire 10 Ka-31 (NATO codename: Helix) airborne early warning helicopters for \$500 million. What is the Indian administration afraid of then? It said the suspension is due to concerns over Moscow's ability to execute orders as well as issues

related to payment transfers amid sanctions on Russia--those already in force and any potential ones. India must have also felt Western pressure, notably from the United States, to curb cooperation with Russia--both energy and military. India asked to buy Ka-31 helicopters from Russia three days ago. The Navy currently



SOURCE:WIKIPEDIA

operates 14 Ka-31 helicopters, which were inducted progressively — four in 2003, five in 2005, and five in 2013. They are dependent on the original equipment manufacturer for spare parts, repairs, and overhaul support. Recent years have seen large-scale purchases of other Russian-manufactured equipment—including fighter jets and tanks. Around 85 percent of India's military equipment which includes tanks, aircraft, helicopters, and missiles, is of Russian or Soviet origin. This is unacceptable for the United States whose administration is voicing hopes for cooperation with India--

alongside Japan and Australia--to build stability and security across the Indo-Pacific. China is a rival here but there is no doubt that Russia is a Chinese ally. What harms Moscow, harms Beijing to some extent. Washington came up with the idea of arms cooperation as it now has with Israel and Egypt. According to Bloomberg, the U.S. administration is discussing a package for India that might include up to \$500 million in foreign military finance. What is noteworthy is U.S. military aid for India will mean fewer Russian oil supplies to India. ■



SOURCE:KREMLIN.RU

25 May 2022

THE CASE OF GERHARD SCHROEDER, OR THE GERMAN HYPOCRISY

Out of a sudden, Germany's governing parties plan to strip former Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder of his office and staff after he maintained and defended his long-standing ties with Russia. He has come under increasing pressure from media outlets and other politicians, notably those of the CDU. Now they all suddenly found outrageous what had been known for years---the German ex-leader used his reputation to stage lobby for Russian interests.

Germany's governing parties have decided to strip former chancellor Gerhard Schroeder of his parliamentary privileges. The

former leader, who holds positions at Rosneft and Nord Stream, will lose staff and office amid his close ties to the Russian authorities. Why

is this just now? As many seek to incriminate Putin personally for the Russian war against Ukraine, just as many see Schroeder Germany's number one and sole culprit of close ties between Russia and Germany. In an interview for German TV broadcaster ARD, Wolfgang Schaeuble of the CDU lambasted the ex-leader for his lobbying for Russian companies and posts he had taken in Russian energy firms after retiring from politics. Schroeder's being part of Russian companies is "wicked," according to the 78-year-old German politicians who had served as a minister under Helmut Kohl and Angela Merkel. "I was wrong, we were all wrong," he added. The construction of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline was a mistake," he said when asked about his views on Russia. "It is too late to discuss this issue," he said. It is a pity that Schaeuble did not criticize Angela Merkel over her policy on Russia. Germany's "we-have-made-a-mistake" narrative towards the Eastern European policy is facing fiercer criticism. If it is true, though, the authorities in Berlin have for years been playing an amateur-like game. Nonetheless, this is hard to believe. Germany consciously sought rapprochement with Moscow. Schroeder's quitting some Russian companies means little-- being nothing but an empty gesture. Former German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder will leave the

board of directors of Russian oil giant Rosneft following public pressure. Schroeder has for years sat atop Rosneft's board of directors. Matthias Warnig, a German businessman, also left Rosneft. Before, five foreign officials had announced their resignations from the board of directors of the Russian state-run energy giant. Russian state oil giant Rosneft on May 20 confirmed that Austria's former foreign minister, Karin Kneissl, has left the company's board of directors. Kneissl was confirmed to the Rosneft board as an independent director in June 2021. Her wedding in 2018 was attended by Russian President Vladimir Putin. She left the government in 2019. German Chancellor Olaf Scholz called on former German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder to step down from the boards of Russian state-owned energy companies. Schroeder indeed stepped down from the board of Rosneft, but he still sits atop Gazprom and Nord Stream AG. Does it matter? Not that much. It is important that Scholz eventually starts sending weapons to Ukraine. But that is not going to happen. Sacrificing Schroeder will not make any deal, contrary to what German officials would think for now. Berlin is undoubtedly seeking a ceasefire in the Russia-Ukraine war to come back to business as usual with Moscow. ■



SOURCE:ROSGVARD.TATARSTAN.RU

27 May 2022

PUTIN'S ILLEGAL PLAN FOR ISSUING RUSSIAN PASSPORTS IN RUSSIAN-OCCUPIED REGIONS OF UKRAINE

Russia simplified the procedure for issuing passports to Ukrainian people living in Russian-occupied regions. This is another piece of evidence for Russian efforts to occupy the Kherson region and most of the Zaporizhia, Donetsk, and Luhansk regions to formally add them to the Russian Federation. Russia deploys its administration there and introduces its currency while the Russian army is taking fortified positions in Moscow-occupied southern Ukrainian regions.

The mass distribution of Russian passports to people living in Moscow-occupied regions is a strategy the Kremlin has often

resorted to in the past, as in Georgia's breakaway republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in the past. The Russian-provoked

military campaign in South Ossetia gave ground for the Russian invasion in 2008 to allegedly protect Russian citizens as many people in the region had applied for Russian citizenship. The phrase “protection of Russian citizens abroad”, conveyed in what is known as the Medvedev doctrine, gives Moscow effective leverage that it has used increasingly since the Russo-Georgian war. The strategic granting of Russian citizenship has been an instrument of Russian war policy. Russian President Vladimir Putin on May 25 signed the decree affecting residents of the two Ukrainian regions, parts of which have been occupied by Russian forces during Moscow’s unprovoked invasion of Ukraine. The decree states that residents of the two regions can receive Russian passports through a simplified procedure that was introduced in 2019 for residents of parts of Ukraine’s Donetsk and Luhansk regions and the Crimean Peninsula.

Russian passports have been distributed in the city of Mariupol in eastern Ukraine, but also in Kherson, Zaporizhia, Donetsk, Luhansk, and Crimea. It will take about three months to process applications in Kherson and Zaporizhia. Making people apply for Russian citizenship will possibly prompt Moscow to stage a sham referendum to create what is known as the “Kherson People’s Republic.” The self-proclaimed governor, Volodymyr Saldo stated during a meeting with invading pro-Russian collaborators that Kherson will “soon become part” of Russia. Ukraine protested the “illegal issuing of passports,” calling it “legally worthless.” The United States also condemned Moscow’s plan to give Russian citizenship to residents of occupied southern regions. State Department spokesman Ned Price voiced concern that the plan was part of “Russia’s attempt to subjugate the people of Ukraine.” ■

27 May 2022

A LONG WAR OF ATTRITION IN UKRAINE, RUSSIA’S REGIME FIGURES OUT PUBLIC OPINION

Despite mounting pressure from military veterans and experts, the Kremlin is pursuing its strategy in the war against Ukraine. Moscow can afford months of conflict. But the regime—just in case—allows for some critical comments to know what those most interested in waging the war think about it.

Nikolai Patrushev, the head of Russia’s Security Council, said in a newspaper interview published on May 24 that Russian forces are not “chasing deadlines” in Ukraine, suggesting a possibly open-ended timeline for the Russian invasion. Patrushev, a hawkish member of Putin’s inner circle, says the

Kremlin must achieve its top goal no matter how long this takes. Russia claims to be waging a campaign of “denazification” in Ukraine, a vaguely defined goal. “Nazism must either be 100 percent eradicated, or it will raise its head in a few years, and in an even uglier form,” he said in a response to a question about the war



SOURCE:TWITTER

dragging on. His words were echoed by Sergei Naryshkin, the head of Russia's foreign spy agency. Senior Russian officials are keener to admit that the Russian offensive in Ukraine is sluggish and look for possible explanations. Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu said at a meeting of security officials that Russia is deliberately slowing down its offensive by arranging cease-fires and humanitarian corridors "in order to avoid casualties among the civilians." According to what officials from Putin's innermost circle say, the Kremlin is wondering what to do next in Ukraine. On the one hand, Moscow says it is patient, but, on the other, pressure is on the rise to speed up the campaign in Ukraine. Those who rose to prominence are people like Vladimir Kvachkov—he is a former colonel of Special Forces. He is respected in the Army because of his war record in Afghanistan. In 2005, he was actually charged with trying to kill Anatoly Chubais, a big name in the Russian reformist government

back in the nineteen-nineties. Lots of Russians blame Chubais for the way reforms went in the nineties. Allegedly, Kvachkov tried to kill him. He got caught and sent to prison, and then got acquitted and released. On May 19, a statement signed by Kvachkov, which lots of people inside of the Army support, says that Russia needs to admit that it lost the first stage of this war. They believe that this pretense of running special operations should be abandoned and an all-out war should be declared. Such a stance is echoed by the All-Russian Union of Officers whose members are retired and reserve Russian officers. However, the Kremlin is in no hurry to take such radical steps. All signs are now that Moscow will stick to its current strategy in Ukraine, especially amid some tactical successes it has achieved. Russian forces claimed the southern Ukrainian city of Mariupol and will probably soon seize the whole eastern region of Luhansk. ■



SOURCE:KREMLIN.RU

30 May 2022

EX-MOLDOVAN PRESIDENT DODON CHARGED

Igor Dodon, a former president of Moldova, is a Putin ally. The criminal case against him, paired with corruption and treason charges, could shake the already fragile political landscape in Chisinau. Targeting a pro-Russian Moldovan party leader at this time might not be incidental. Efforts to neutralize a domestic threat amid provocations in Moldova's breakaway region of Transnistria could now be the best solution for Moldova's pro-Western authorities.

The former president of Moldova, Igor Dodon (2016–2020), has been detained for 30 days by Moldovan authorities on corruption charges, the Prosecutor-General's Office said on May 25. Before, he had been placed in house arrest. Dodon was detained in a treason and corruption case. The prosecutor's office wants

to place in 30-day custody the person who was identified as the brother-in-law of the former head of state for allegedly swallowing a receipt sought as evidence. In May, the case was reopened after three years. It was an element of the political game between Vlad Plahotniuc, a mighty Moldovan oligarch at

that time and the leader of the ruling party, and former president Igor Dodon and his Socialist Party. The criminal case was based on video footage from the June 2019 meeting between Dodon and then-Democratic Party leader Vladimir Plahotniuc. It can be seen that Plahotniuc hands the former president a large black package, which they call a “bag” Dodon refuses to take, asking him to hand it over to an unidentified person. Investigators say it is clear from the conversation that the “bag” contains money intended to fund the Party of Socialists. Still in the hidden camera video, Dodon boasts about his close ties to Vladimir Putin. Yet the case was silenced as Dodon and his Socialist

Party then ruled the country. It has been reopened only now. More videos depict Dodon as corrupt and closely tied to Russia. Timing is not incidental, though. Recent weeks have seen Moscow igniting tensions in Transnistria, which is formally part of Moldova. In Moldova, the pro-Russian elite is strong, too. Perhaps Moldova’s pro-Western government is seeking to take advantage of the corruption case to neutralize Dodon. Regardless of possible political motivation, there was enough evidence to bring Dodon to trial three years ago. This yet did not happen due to the tremendous influence of the Socialist Party on courts and the prosecutor’s office. ■

30 May 2022

OIL PRODUCTION IN RUSSIA IS DECLINING

Western sanctions against Russia have stricken the number top source of revenue to the federal budget. As more Western nations ban Russian oil, it is not enough for Russia to open up to new markets, including India’s, to maintain current output levels.

Russia’s oil production is expected to decline to 480-500 million tons this year from 524 million tons in 2021, according to official estimates. Crude oil production in Russia could shrink by up to 5-8 percent this year, Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak said, adding these estimates may vary depending on the market situation. The Russian economy ministry has said Russia’s oil output this year was set to fall 9.3 percent to 475.3 million tons in the base-case scenario and 17.2 percent

to 433.8 million tons in the conservative one. Novak referred to the estimates, saying he was more optimistic about oil production in Russia. Russia had planned to expand its annual LNG output to 140 million tons by 2035 and it is sticking to the plan now, Novak added. When asked what projects can be discussed according to the instructions of the president and whether Arctic LNG-2 falls into this list, he clarified that he meant “those that are already being implemented.” According to Novak, all LNG



SOURCE:GAZPROMNEFT-OIL.RU

refining projects will be supported, in particular the Amur Gas Chemical Complex and the Baltic Chemical Complex in Russia's Ust-Luga. According to the International Energy Agency (IEA), Russia shut in nearly 1 million barrels per day (bpd) in April, driving down the world oil supply by 710,000 bpd to 98.1 million bpd. Russia's total oil and condensate production fell by 960,000 bpd compared to March, to 10.4 million bpd, the lowest since November 2020. Oil production alone fell by 900,000 bpd to 9.1 million bpd. It is now seen by 1.3 million

bpd below the OPEC+ target, the IEA report reads. "After being at a relatively stable level in March, Russian oil output fell in April. Refineries in the country were processing less oil due to a slowdown in exports of petroleum products and a decline in domestic demand caused by a wave of Western sanctions," the IEA explains. "If this is confirmed, the average annual oil production will fall to 9.6 million barrels per day, such a level was last observed in 2004." The only solution for Russia is to trade its oil outside Europe, notably in Asia. ■



SOURCE:KREMLIN.RU

31 May 2022

RUSSIAN ALLY SERBIA SAYS YES TO RUSSIAN GAS, NO TO SANCTIONS

The authorities in Belgrade have consistently refused to impose sanctions on Moscow for its invasion of Ukraine. At the same time, Serbia wants to join the European Union and has more robust economic ties with the bloc than Russia. But what changes the whole picture is political and security-related considerations. Moscow is throwing support to Serbia's revisionist efforts and plays a leading role in the nation's energy industry.

Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic says his country has reached a three-year deal with Russia for supplies of natural gas

following a telephone conversation with Russian President Vladimir Putin on May 29. The deal now in force expires on May 31. Under

the new agreement, Russia will ship to Serbia 2.2 billion cubic meters of gas per year. Serbian government officials say Serbia had received a very good offer for the price of gas, which would in reality stand at some \$400 per 1,000 cubic meters, which is much lower than the market price. In the last six months, Serbia has been paying 270 dollars for 1,000 cubic meters. Serbian Prime Minister Ana Brnabic denied that the deal with Russia over gas prices had any connection with its refusal to impose sanctions on Moscow for its invasion of Ukraine. But the authorities in Belgrade refuse to join the EU in blacklisting Russia while restrained and moderate criticism of Serbia remains only on paper. Earlier Serbia and nine other countries bordering the Adriatic and Ionian Seas had signed a declaration condemning the “unjustified Russian aggression of Ukraine.” They had also reiterated their support for Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity. Serbia also voted in favor of the UN General

Assembly resolution, condemning its attack on Ukraine. The country’s pro-Russian stance somewhat stems from its energy sector reality. In 2008 the Balkan country put its gas and oil sectors in the hands of Russian companies. Gazprom Neft and Gazprom together hold a majority stake in the country’s sole oil company while Gazprom is majority shareholder in the country’s sole gas storage facility. But unlike Hungary, Serbia is showing pro-Russian sympathies due to something more than mere economic calculations and its reluctance to Western nations. Russia has for years helped Serbia to rebuild its military potential. It has also shared Belgrade’s stance on Kosovo. In a nutshell, Moscow is the only country to assist Serbia in building what is known as the Greater Serbia, or to at least restore the country’s former influence by including Serbia, the Serbian region of Bosnia and Herzegovina, possibly added to this some territories now in Montenegro, Kosovo, and North Macedonia. ■

31 May 2022

RUSSIA SENDS MORE OIL TO ASIAN COUNTRIES

As Western nations are imposing sanctions on Russian oil while the EU is seeking to ban Russian crude totally, Moscow is looking for new market opportunities. It targets Asian countries that eagerly buy oil at record discounts.

The country’s sole refinery received crude, enabling its restart for the first time since March amid crippling shortages. The Russian grade of Siberian Light will be processed at Ceylon Petroleum Corp.’s refinery in Sapugaskanda, according to Bloomberg. Sri Lanka is the latest Asian nation to accept Russian crude after Moscow’s invasion of Ukraine prompted sanctions from the West.

Most refiners in the U.S. and across Europe have halted purchases from Russia, prompting the cost of Russian oil to plummet, while buying from Asian customers in China and India has surged. The Sapugaskanda refinery is using Siberian Light crude. It is one of several grades of crude that the refinery can process. Sri Lanka is facing a worsening economic crisis that has left its citizens struggling to buy food



SOURCE:SOVCOMFLOT.RU

or oil. The nation has been trying to come up with cash to pay for oil that is now on tankers off its coast as its fuel crunch persists. The case of Sri Lanka does not pinpoint any tendency for Russian oil exports, but it fits into Moscow's effort to trade with Asian nations amid Western condemnation of the Russian invasion of

Ukraine. In April, a record volume of Russian oil arrived in Asian--and not European--countries, with more to come in May. Among the top oil importers in Asia are China and India, but more countries, including Sri Lanka, show interest in purchasing Russian energy. ■

31 May 2022

GAZPROM'S RECORD EARNINGS MEAN HIGH DIVIDENDS

Russian gas giant Gazprom said on May 26 its board was recommending a dividend of 52.53 roubles per share on its 2021 results. The company added an annual general meeting of shareholders is due to approve the dividend on June 30. The 2021 gas crisis was beneficial for the Russian gas giant and so is the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Gas prices are still high while most EU countries still buy Russian-sourced gas even in forced to pay in roubles.



SOURCE:GAZPROM.RU

Gazprom board recommended a record-high dividend of 52.53 roubles per share on its 2021 results. The company added an annual general meeting of shareholders is due to approve the dividend on June 30. This is a record high result for both Gazprom and all Russian state-run businesses. The energy firm said the total payout will amount to 1.244 trillion roubles for 2021, or 50 percent of adjusted group net income last year. In 2018, Gazprom revised its earlier dividend proposal to a record 16.61 roubles per share. In 2020, the company's management board proposed paying 12.55 roubles per share. Dividends for 2021 may therefore soar four-fold as Gazprom

notched its best-ever financial result. Last year, the company net profit stood at 2.093 trillion roubles. As a result, record dividends were expected. Last December, Gazprom's Deputy CEO Famil Sadygov told journalists free cash flow is seen above 1 trillion roubles for 2021. In Q4 2021, Gazprom could use its net profit to finance the \$10 billion Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline. Earlier, the board of Gazprom Neft, a Gazprom subsidiary, recommended paying a dividend of 16 roubles per share in Q4 while the total dividend for 2021--if to include those already paid for the first nine months--will stand at 56 roubles, some 3.7 times more than what was paid to shareholders for 2020. ■



SOURCE: MEDIA.GAZPROM-NEFT.COM

31 May 2022

RUSSIA'S OIL OUTPUT AND EXPORTS AMID SANCTIONS

The collapse in Russia's oil output is inevitable, according to Russian officials and oil companies. In May, Russia is recovering after a robust decline in oil output and exports in March and April. Despite more modest production and fewer supplies abroad in 2022, Russia does not forecast any decline in profits, which is due to high tariffs.

Russian oil and gas condensate output edged up by 1 percent month-to-month in May, to 1.374 million tons per day. In May 2022, Russia's total oil production was 10.174 million barrels. Last spring, Russia began to steadily increase output figures. Production

yet started to collapse in March 2022 in a 0.33 percent drop month-to-month. It dropped by 9 percent month-to-month in April amid widespread sanctions. According to the International Energy Agency (IEA), Russia shut in nearly 1 million barrels per day (bpd) in April.

Finance Minister Anton Siluanov said earlier that Moscow might lose up to 17 percent of oil production in 2022 due to sanctions. Russia's Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak said the government would expect oil production to be partially restored in May after it went down by 1 million barrels per day in April. Oil production in Russia may go down from 524 mln tonnes in 2021 to 480–500 mln tons in 2022. Russia's Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak predicted a drop of between 5 percent and 8 percent in the country's oil production, adding these estimates may vary depending on the market situation. The Russian economy ministry has said Russia's oil output this year was set to fall 9.3 percent to 475.3 million tons in

the base-case scenario and 17.2 percent to 433.8 million tons in the conservative one. Russia should cut oil production by 20–30 percent, according to Leonid Fedun, the vice-president with Russian company Lukoil. “Which is better – to sell 10 barrels of crude for \$50 or seven, but for \$80?” he wrote in an RBK newsletter. “Is it necessary to keep export volumes unchanged while offering a 30–40 percent discount?” he wrote further in the article. Current large discounts may turn permanent from being just temporary, he fears, with foreign players increasingly able to fix such discounts into their terms by introducing import tariffs on Russian oil, he added. ■

31 May 2022

RUSSIA'S SEQUENTIAL STRATEGY FOR DONBAS OFFENSIVE

While in Ukraine's Donbas, Russian forces are following the same strategy as they did in Syria. Many officers have fought in the Middle Eastern country. Instead of simultaneous pursuit of multiple goals, the Russians have picked one goal and are now sparing no efforts to achieve it. Only after completing one, another goal could be identified. Although it has little propaganda effect, the strategy is actually efficient.

Russia's number one goal is to seize two Ukrainian cities of Severodonetsk and Lysychansk or to make Ukrainian forces retreat towards the route linking Siverk and Bakhmut—either through a frontal attack or by encircling them. Moscow's next mission is to cut off Ukrainian forces by targeting the city of Sloviansk or pushing Ukrainian soldiers towards Sloviansk, Kramatorsk, and Horlivka.

The next step will consist in seizing Sloviansk and Kramatorsk and then advancing outside the Donetsk region so that Moscow could say it “liberated” what it refers to as the “people's republics” in Donetsk and Luhansk. Russian forces learned a lesson from the beginning of the Donbas operation when they sought to perform simultaneous attacks from many directions. The Russian strategy yet failed as



SOURCE:KREMLIN.RU

Russian forces have no military capabilities to overcome the unexpectedly strong Ukrainian defense. Hence the Russian command decided to seize the region systemically, piece by piece, and deploy enough troops to gain an advantage over the Ukrainians. The Russian strategy in Donbas resembles what Russian forces did in Syria, where insurgent groups had controlled large chunks of land across the country. Attempts by the Russian-backed Assad regime to destroy them were initially unsuccessful because the Syrian regime and its allies did not have such large forces to fight effectively on several fronts at once. Another tactic was selected to destroy the rebellion. Enclaves were picked one after another, then encircled and targeted with artillery and Russian air raids.

Insurgent groups eventually gave up while some of them were evacuated. The only one left is the Idlib stronghold. In Donbas, Russian soldiers are advancing towards Severodonetsk, which would mean taking the whole region of Luhansk. But there will be more chapters in this offensive. What is a threat to Ukrainian forces is more Russian troops in Lyman and near Iziium. An attack on the southeast could provoke heavy fighting nearby the two biggest Ukraine-controlled cities: Sloviansk and Kramatorsk. Not incidentally, civilians are now being evacuated from Sloviansk as the eastern Ukrainian town of Lyman, which had fallen under the full control of Russian forces, is just 20 kilometers northeast to the city. ■



SOURCE:DUMA.GOV.RU

31 May 2022

SOME 90 PERCENT OF RUSSIAN COMPANIES AFFECTED BY SANCTIONS

The European Union has agreed on the sixth sanctions package that immediately cuts Russian oil imports to the bloc. As many as 87 percent of the polled entrepreneurs have been affected by sanctions imposed on Russia amid its invasion of Ukraine. Most of them say they have adapted to the new real, but some are struggling to run business in Russia.

Sanctions affect the absolute majority (87 percent) of Russian companies. Some 75 percent of Russian companies managed to adapt to the new real or hope to do so soon. Of these, some 12 percent were unable to

adapt to the current situation and were forced to partially or completely suspend business, according to RBK, a Russian website, citing a report on the Russian business, authored by Boris Titov, who serves as Russian presidential

business ombudsman. Only 10 percent of the respondents claim their business is stable and growing, the report reads. Some 66 percent of Russian businesses have experienced fallout from the economic recession. Some 62 percent of the respondents pointed to a shortage of working capital and cash gaps, disruption of supply chains, and difficulties in import delivery. Over half of the respondents said that the government was not doing enough to deal with sanctions. More than half of the entrepreneurs

believe that under the current circumstances, it would be necessary to drastically change the rules of the game. Widespread sanctions on Russia and the exodus of Western companies from the country threaten inflation, a recession, and massive unemployment, according to economists. New EU sanctions, in particular the bloc's partial embargo of Russian oil, will deliver a blow to both Russian energy giants and the federal budget. ■

31 May 2022

DRAFT LAW ON CONSCRIPTS WILL HELP RUSSIA'S FSB

Russian conscripts will soon be able to sign contracts with the Federal Security Service, or the FSB. On May 17, the State Duma adopted a draft law in its first reading. Its updated versions will help the FSB add more specialists to the staff, according to Russian lawmakers. In fact, this just shows to what extent Russian power structures quarrel over staff. It also signals a decrease in the quality of Russian military staff for whom educational requirements have been lowered. The bill is little beneficial for the Russian army. The FSB could take its staff, also in the middle of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, when staff shortages are acute.

On May 17, Russian lawmakers adopted the draft law on allowing Russian conscripts to serve in the FSB—including those who have at least secondary vocational education. Chairman of the Committee on Security and Corruption Control Vasily Piskarev stressed that the draft law involves the already existing procedure when “experienced soldiers were offered a new contract while still on duty.” “It has worked successfully in the Russian Armed Forces, the Rescue Corps of the Ministry of

Emergency Situations, Rosgvardia, the Foreign Intelligence Service, and the Federal Security Service,” he added. Piskarev noted that by including the FSB in the scheme, the agency will be “stronger” and it “could look for young and promising specialists.” The bill was proposed by the ruling United Russia party in April. Anatoly Vyborny, one of the lawmakers behind the draft law and deputy chief of the State Duma's anti-corruption committee, said back then that the purpose was to add more personnel to the FSB.



SOURCE:DUMA.GOV.RU

“Now Russian conscripts who have vocational education could become contracting officers and get soldier’s pay while working for the Armed Forces, Rosgvardia, or the Ministry for Emergency Situations,” the lawmaker added. Once in force, the law will allow all active servicemen having vocational education to join the FSB upon signing a relevant contract. The law now in force allows a conscript to serve for a year or to become a soldier or a contracting

officer under a two-year contract. The others are ironically referred to as “substitute officers.” They are being recruited by the Armed Forces and Rosgvardia. FSB recruits may be required to serve for a limited period. But, given their education, most conscripts cannot serve as “extra conscripts” for the Federal Security Service. New educational requirements will allow the FSB to increase the number of contracting officers.. ■



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