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SOURCE: ЛУКОЙЛ – НОВОСТЬ (LUKOIL.MD)

9 January 2023

RUSSIA'S LUKOIL SEEKS TO SELL ASSETS IN ROMANIA, MOLDOVA AMID EU SANCTIONS

As reported, Russian energy company Lukoil could sell its businesses in Romania and Moldova amid a new package of sanctions the EU introduced back in early December 2022.

The decision comes amid sanctions imposed by the EU on Russian oil companies that came into force on December 5, 2022, which also affect Lukoil's activity. Russia's biggest private oil firm is seeking to quit Romania and Moldova. Lukoil Moldova owns about 20 percent

of the retail fuel market in the country. The company handled about 40 percent of diesel imports and about 33.5 percent of gasoline imports to Moldova. Lukoil owns the largest network of gas stations in Moldova – 105, and in 2021 these made a profit of about 60 million

Moldovan lei, or about 3 million euros. Lukoil is the third largest player in the fuel sales market in Romania, estimated to be worth around 13 billion lei annually, or about 2.6 billion euros. Its net profit in Romania increased by 7 percent in 2021, to 160 million lei, or about 32 million euros, up from 149 million lei in 2020. Lukoil owns about 315 gas stations in Romania, a refinery in Ploiesti, and has nearly 3,000 employees in the country. Lukoil's businesses include also a wind farm in Romania and oil storage facilities in both countries. Who might take over Lukoil's assets in Romania and Moldova? Likely buyers of the

businesses in the two countries would include the Anglo-Dutch company Royal Dutch Shell, the most significant player at the European level, or Kazakh group KazMunaiGaz, which in both countries owns a network of Rompetrol gas stations. Shell sold its Russian assets to Lukoil – 114 petrol stations and a lubricant plant in Torzhok – in May 2022. Lukoil's decision to sell assets in Romania and Moldova is yet another step in the company's policy to avoid sanctions, after Vagit Alekperov resigned from the position of CEO. ■

10 January 2023

BELARUS COULD BE USED AS STAGING POST BY MOSCOW FOR NEW OFFENSIVE

Additional Russian troops arrive in Belarus while signs are that Lukashenko's regime could enter the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Officials in Kyiv have warned for months that neighboring Belarus could join Russian forces and serve again as a launching pad for a new attack.

A Belarusian opposition leader says Belarusian authorities may soon begin a mobilization to provide military assistance to Russia in its war against Ukraine. Pavel Latushka, who is based in Warsaw, was quoted on January 7 as saying almost everything is ready for mobilization. Citing sources in Minsk, Latushka claimed in an interview with German media that most of the employees of the internal affairs organizations have been forced to surrender their passports, barring them from leaving the country in the event of

a mobilization. Belarusian doctors have begun to receive "mobilization notices" that ban them from leaving the country, according to some reports. There are also reports of upticks in the number of Russian military equipment and personnel being dispatched to Belarus. About 800 Russian soldiers arrived in Orsha or Vitebsk inside train cars, Belaruski Hayun, a group of activists that record the movement of troops within Belarus, said in a Telegram post on January 5. According to the group, more trains carrying Russian military hardware arrive



SOURCE: ПОСЕЩЕНИЕ ОБЩЕВОЙСКОВОГО ПОЛИГОНА ОБУЗ-
-ЛЕСНОВСКИЙ В БРЕСТСКОЙ ОБЛАСТИ | ОФИЦИАЛЬНЫЙ
ИНТЕРНЕТ-ПОРТАЛ ПРЕЗИДЕНТА РЕСПУБЛИКИ БЕЛАРУСЬ
(PRESIDENT.GOV.BY)

in the city of Baranovichi in western Belarus. Lukashenko on January 5 visited the military base and training area where Russian forces are stationed alongside his country's troops. Another echelon of Russian military personnel consisting of 700–800 people arrived in Belarus late on January 7, according to Belaruski Hayun. Russia and Belarus have beefed up their joint military grouping in Belarus with weapons, soldiers, and specialized equipment, and plan to hold joint aviation drills, Reuters said on January 5, citing the Belarusian defense

ministry. As of December 2022, some 10,200 Russian troops were stationed in Belarus. This is not sufficient to launch a new ground invasion of Ukraine. If the increase is reported in Russian military personnel and equipment in Belarus, perhaps Russia will indeed use Belarus as a launching pad for a new ground assault on Ukraine. Whether it is to target Kyiv or Volhynia is unknown—but the core goal is to distract Ukrainian forces from the key front line in the south and Donbas. ■



SOURCE: GTT GROUP CEASES ITS ACTIVITIES IN RUSSIA (MARINEINSIGHT.COM)

10 January 2023

FRANCE'S GTT CEASES ITS ACTIVITIES IN RUSSIA

French engineering group Gaztransport & Technigaz (GTT) said it was stopping its activities in Russia after analyzing the latest European sanction packages that include a ban on engineering services with Russian firms.

The group said its contract with Russian shipbuilding company Zvezda for 15 ice-breaking liquefied natural gas (LNG) carriers would be suspended and activities limited on the two most advanced ones. The French manufacturer said its order book would no longer include projects in Russia, adding that it

has other orders under construction in Asian shipyards, notably six ice-breaking LNG carriers and two FSUs, which are intended specifically for Russian Arctic projects. GTT is the world leader in cryogenic membrane containment systems used in the shipbuilding industry for the transport of LNG. The containers produced

by the company are necessary for the safe storage of fuel in large volumes at temperatures up to -163 C. Those most in jeopardy following the company's withdrawal are Russia's LNG projects in the Arctic. These include Yamal LNG in northwestern Siberia, which accounted for 5 percent of global LNG exports in 2020,

Arctic LNG-2 worth about \$23 billion, as well as Sakhalin-2. LNG supplies have been widely sought after Gazprom reduced and then halted flows into Europe through Nord Stream 1 in the summer of 2022. During the first nine months of 2022, Europe's LNG imports from Russia increased by 50 percent. ■

12 January 2023

UKRAINE CONTINUES CRACKDOWN ON RUSSIAN- LINKED ORTHODOX CHURCH

Ukraine is now clamping down on Orthodox Church linked to Moscow. Kyiv refused the Russian-controlled church's lease on the part of the Kyiv Pechersk Lavra. The independent Orthodox Church of Ukraine held a Christmas service at the Kyiv Pechersk Lavra. This could be another step towards curbing the influence of churches affiliated to Moscow.

SOURCE: СБУ ПРОВОДИТЬ БЕЗПЕКОВІ ЗАХОДИ НА ОБ'ЄКТАХ
УПЦ (МП) У ТРЬОХ ОБЛАСТЯХ УКРАЇНИ (SSU.GOV.UA)



СЛУЖБА
БЕЗПЕКИ
УКРАЇНИ

The independent Orthodox Church of Ukraine on January 7 held a Christmas service at the Kyiv Pechersk Lavra, Ukraine's main Orthodox monastery, for the first time. On January 6, the Orthodox Church of Ukraine received a special permit from the government to hold a Christmas service at the Lavra's Dormition Cathedral on January 7. The Russian-controlled church's lease on a part of the Kyiv Pechersk Lavra expired on January 1, and the Ukrainian government decided not to extend the lease. The UCP leased the church's premises from the Ukrainian state. After the demise of the Soviet Union, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church was canonically linked to the Moscow Patriarchate. In May 2022 the UOC-MP removed all mentions of the Moscow Patriarchate from its statute. However, many priests are still linked to the Russian Church that backs the Russian invasion of Ukraine. In November 2022

Ukraine's Security Service (SBU) conducted a counterintelligence operation at Kyiv's Pechersk Lavra and other locations of the UOC to counter alleged "subversive activities of the Russian special services in Ukraine. The Moscow-linked Orthodox Church was denied the privilege of leasing Kyiv's Pechersk Lavra, which is just a new chapter in a political fuss that has been on in Ukraine since 2019 when the OCU was recognized by the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople as fully independent from Russia, a major diplomatic achievement for Kyiv and a blow to Russian soft power. The Ukrainian government completed the process of transferring control of parts of the Kyiv Pechersk Lavra, which many in Russia saw as an act of betrayal. Indeed, since the Russian invasion of Ukrainian, the whole process sped up. ■

17 January 2023

RUSSIA'S CLAIM TO SEIZE UKRAINE'S SOLEDAR REVEALS RIFTS BETWEEN PRIGOZHIN, SHOIGU

Russia's Defense Ministry said in a statement that its troops had taken control of the town, Soledar but made no mention of the Kremlin-affiliated Wagner private military company, marking a years-long clash between these two. When on January 13 Russian forces claimed that Soledar had fallen to its fighters, pointedly saying that the Wagner mercenary group was not involved. After the statement from Yevgeny Prigozhin, the owner of the private military company, the Russian defense ministry had issued a rare sign of recognition for Wagner Group. Yet Prigozhin has not won the quarrel with the defense ministry.



SOURCE: TELEGRAM ОРКЕСТР БАГНЕРА | WAGNER [HTTPS://T.ME/S/ORCHESTRA_W](https://t.me/s/orchestra_w)

Efforts to seize Soledar are considered a sign of infighting between Wagner Group boss and the Russian defense ministry. For Prigozhin, capturing Bakhmut and also Soledar was a matter of honor so he ordered waves of troops into fighting in the region. The Russian occupiers found some weak spots in the defense of Ukrainian soldiers in the Bakhmut area. Most Wagner fighters and regular troops were transferred from Bakhmut to flank Soledar in the north and south. A Russian claim of victory came after a week of intense combat. Ukraine has denied claims by Russia that its forces are now in control of the bitterly contested town of Soledar. The city itself has little strategic value and is unlikely to significantly change the battle for eastern Ukraine. The city yet seems more important for the public quarrel between Prigozhin and the Russian defense ministry. Wagner Group boss seeks to claim victory to show the superiority of his fighters over

regular troops. The thing is that both fought alongside each other. In addition, those who tipped the scale were regular soldiers including spetsnaz, airborne troops, and the 20th Guards Mechanized Division. Indeed, Prigozhin is winning information warfare and has the support of what is known as “milbloggers”, many of whom are financed either by himself or the FSB. In a nutshell, Wagner Group did not perform as well in the battle of Soledar as Prigozhin would have thought. Wagner Group boss lashed out at Russian generals, considering them enemies of Russia. The question is how the quarrel might influence the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Russia is hoping to stage a major ground assault, where a set of objectives have been specified. Prigozhin is likely to claim victory but whether Gerasimov will allow this is not known. Such disputes within Russia are beneficial for Ukraine. ■



SOURCE: VK.COM GAZPROM [HTTPS://VK.COM/GAZPROM?Z=PHOTO-195193216_457240436%2FWALL-195193216_1820](https://vk.com/gazprom?z=photo-195193216_457240436%2FWALL-195193216_1820)

18 January 2023

CLAIMS OF HIGH OIL AND GAS REVENUES ARE JUST RUSSIAN PROPAGANDA

Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak reviewed the performance of the country's top energy sector in 2022. Moscow has prided itself on its oil and gas revenues that rose by a third from 2021. The thing is the 2022 figures do not include bad results that surfaced in late 2022 and tendencies notched up in January 2023. As Russian oil and gas prices are being affected, federal budget revenues are likely to shrink.

Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak reviewed the performance of the country's top energy sector in 2022. Russia increased its oil production by 2 percent to 535 million tons in 2022. Oil exports went up 7 percent while LNG--8 percent, compared to 2021. Russia's gas supplies to China hit a record 15.5 billion cubic meters, up 48 percent. Russia's budget revenues in 2022 from the oil and gas industry increased by 28 percent or by 2.5 trillion rubles. Novak indeed delivered true figures, but how he interpreted them could raise some doubts. Oil and gas traded high throughout most of last year before totally collapsing in late 2022. An increase in oil output by 10 million tons is a good result, especially amid ongoing sanctions, Novak added, noting also a rise of diesel and gasoline production by 6 percent and 4.3 percent respectively. In addition, the prices went up considerably. Yet it was only in early December that the real sanctions came into force, which did not influence last

year's figures. The European Union embargo on Russian oil came into force on December 5, 2022, setting a price cap of \$60 per barrel. Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a decree banning oil supplies to countries that have introduced price caps on Russian oil. The price cap on Russian oil is costing the Kremlin \$172 million a day and lost revenues will only rise. Between December 15, 2022, and January 14, 2023, Urals traded at \$46.82 per barrel, down 18.5 percent from a month before. Throughout 2022, it traded at \$76.09 on average. In short, the Russian oil price has been on a constant decline since October while oil export is a major lifeline to the federal budget. In addition to oil, other energy commodities have seen a decline in prices. In early January, the price of gas in Europe declined below \$645, down 10 percent, per 1,000 cubic meters, marking the first decrease below the \$650 ceiling since September 2021. ■

18 January 2023

MORE GAS TO CHINA UNLIKELY TO OFFSET EU DIRECTION

Russia's gas giant Gazprom has set a new historical record for the daily export of Russian gas to China. Yet its price is lower than that for the EU, with the supply volume being incomparable, too. Moscow is setting eyes on increasing gas flows to China via a new pipeline – yet Turkmenistan and China have just agreed to launch a new link to boost gas supplies.

Russia's gas supplies to China via the Power of Siberia gas pipeline hit a record 15.5 billion cubic meters (bcm) in 2022, Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak said at a meeting headed by Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin. In 2021, Gazprom supplied 10.39

bcm of gas to China via Power of Siberia, up 49 percent. Russian gas flows to China under a deal between Russia's Gazprom and Chinese energy company CNPC. The capacity of the pipeline will be 22 bcm of gas in 2023, thus 61 million cubic meters in January up from



SOURCE: VK.COM GAZPROM [HTTPS://VK.COM/GAZPROM?Z=PHOTO-195193216_457240407%2FALBUM-195193216_00%2FREV](https://vk.com/gazprom?z=photo-195193216_457240407%2Falbum-195193216_00%2Frev)

50 million cubic meters in December. When launched back in December 2019, the pipeline had a daily capacity of 15 million cubic meters. The pipeline is expected to supply China with up to 38 bcm of gas a year once it reaches full capacity in 2025. Opened back in December 2022, a new section links Tai'an in the northern Shandong province to Taixing in the eastern Jiangsu province so that gas could flow to Shanghai. This underwater section of the pipeline across the Yangtze River took 28 months to complete. The northern section from Heihe in the Heilongjiang Province to Changling in the Jilin Province was commissioned in 2019. The middle section from Changling to Yongqing in North China's Hebei Province became operational in 2020. Last December, Russia said it had launched the supply of gas from the Kovykta field, the largest in east Siberia in an effort to ramp up

gas transmission infrastructure towards China. The thirty-year contract to provide 38 bcm of gas each year by 2024 was signed in 2014 by the state-owned gas companies Gazprom and CNPC. Once expanded, the pipeline will span through 8,000 km, of which some 5,000 km in China. Moscow is also seeking to build a second pipeline – the “Power of Siberia 2” – which would double gas exports from Russia to China, to 88 bcm per year, through Mongolia. Building works are set to start in 2024 and will take several years. An additional hurdle is that Russia has no access to Western technology. A recent China-Turkmenistan meeting is bad news for Moscow as the two inked a deal to construct a new gas link. Turkmenistan has unveiled plans to double natural gas exports to China and increase supplies to 65 bcm from 31 bcm each year, making Power of Siberia 2 less likely. ■



SOURCE: MEETING WITH MARIANNA VOLOSHINA AND YEKATERINA KORNELIUK • PRESIDENT OF RUSSIA (KREMLIN.RU)

18 January 2023

UKRAINE REVOKES CITIZENSHIP OF FOUR PRO-RUSSIAN LAWMAKERS

Top Russian-leaning Ukrainian politicians have had their citizenship and deputy powers revoked in a government crackdown on lawmakers and other notable figures suspected of treason.

The Ukrainian parliament has stripped five members of the Verkhovna Rada - Viktor Medvedchuk, Taras Kozak, Andriy Derkach, Renat Kuzmin and Andriy Aksyonov - of the deputy powers. Only the last of them voluntarily revoked his seat while others were stripped

of them. Before, the Ukrainian president had announced his revocation of the citizenship of four Ukrainian lawmakers suspected of treason. Based on materials prepared by Ukraine's security and state migration services and in accordance with the constitution, "I have

decided to terminate the citizenship of four persons,” Zelensky said back on January 11. A leading figure here is Viktor Medvedchuk, a close Putin ally and former leader of the Opposition Platform – For Life party, which is currently banned in Ukraine back in June 2022. Medvedchuk was detained by Ukraine’s SBU and then charged with treason. The Ukrainian tycoon was captured by Ukraine’s special services, after fleeing home arrest when Russia invaded in February 2022. He then asked Russian authorities to be swapped for Ukrainian prisoners of war and Mariupol residents held by the Russians. Medvedchuk was under arrest and facing investigation over possible high treason on accusations of cooperating with Russia over coal supplies from rebel-controlled territories of the Donbas region. Ukraine’s authorities said the fugitive oligarch - through his intense contacts with Russia - undermined Ukraine’s economic security in 2014–2015. Medvedchuk was one of many prisoners handed over to

Russia in September 2022 in exchange for Ukrainian imprisoned soldiers. Kozak, Kuzmin, and Derkach left Ukraine after Russia invaded the country. Their whereabouts are currently unknown. Kozak - a former member of the parliament committee on finance, taxation, and customs policy—was the listed owner of a few Ukrainian TV channels, notably News One, ZIK, and 112 Ukraine. The channels were sanctioned in 2021 while the Russian-leaning businessman and politician was accused by the SBU of being financed by Moscow. Another to be blacklisted, Kuzmin “placed propaganda materials to the detriment of Ukraine” in the media on the eve of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The others to lose their Ukrainian citizenship include Andriy Derkach—an alleged Russian agent and wealthy former member of the Ukraine parliament. In December 2022, he was blacklisted by the United States for allegedly meddling in the U.S. presidential election. U.S. intelligence outlets believe him to work for the FSB. ■

18 January 2023

RUSSIAN AIRSTRIKES DID NOT DAMPEN UKRAINIAN SPIRIT

Russia has openly acknowledged targeting Ukraine’s energy infrastructure with waves of missile and drone strikes since the start of last October. Moscow’s strategy seeks no military breakthrough, instead hoping to inflict damage and pain to Ukraine’s economy and civilians amid harsh winter.

More than 2.4 million Ukrainians live in homes and apartment blocks damaged or ruined as a result of Russia’s aggression, Infrastructure Minister Oleksandr Kubrakov said on January 12. Such figures were released

last fall while the number of such people might have risen. But where to get the money for people who suffered in Russian airstrikes? Kyiv hopes to seize Russian assets and get some help worldwide. Ukraine’s economy fell 30.4 percent



SOURCE: АРМИЯ РОССИИ (ФОТОВЗГЛЯД) : МИНИСТЕРСТВО ОБОРОНЫ
РОССИЙСКОЙ ФЕДЕРАЦИИ (STRUCTURE.MIL.RU)

in 2022 following the Russian invasion. Russia's invasion caused over \$350 billion in direct damages to Ukraine, according to the World Bank. Russian forces' widespread and repeated targeting of Ukraine's energy infrastructure appears as a number one problem for Ukraine now. Ukraine is facing major power outages while there is a high demand for energy as temperatures drop. The national grid operator, Ukrenergo, said emergency power cuts had been introduced in nine Ukrainian regions. The Ukrainian energy grid is unable to cover the energy demand issues due to Russian damages to infrastructure. The authorities in charge of the energy grid are no longer able to promptly restore the functionality of the system. Russia

has been systematically destroying Ukraine's power infrastructure with regular waves of missiles and drones aimed at power stations, transmission lines, and other key infrastructure objects--while the Ukrainians struggle to restore the grid. Russia is destroying Ukraine's critical infrastructure once it is again made operational. Despite colossal damages to Ukrainian infrastructure, the Ukrainians have not changed their attitude towards the war. They pledged support to Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky, claiming Ukraine should fight Russia until recapturing all of its lands seized by Russia after the invasion and before--so also Crimea and some territories in Donbas. ■



SOURCE: SCF GROUP – SAFETY AND QUALITY (SOVCOMFLOT.RU)

20 January 2023

TRAFIGURA SELLS STAKE IN INDIAN REFINERY

Trafigura has sold its stake in an Indian oil refinery joint venture with Russia's Rosneft. Earlier, Trafigura had sold its stake in Russia's giant Vostok Oil project. Meanwhile, it continues to take European assets of Russian oil companies.

Trafigura's equity investment in Indian refinery Vadinar, which processes 20 million tons of oil each year, was worth about \$166 million. Nayara Energy Limited operates one of the largest refineries in India and more than 6,000 petrol stations. Rosneft and Kesani Enterprises each have a 49.13 share

in the refinery. Trafigura and Russia's United Capital Partners hold each a 49.6 percent stake in the company--the latter is run by Ilya Shcherbovich, a Russian businessman having links to the Kremlin. Trafigura has sold its 24.5 percent stake in Nayara Energy to Rome-based Hara Capital Sarl, a subsidiary

of Italy's Mareterra Group Holding owned by Swiss-based Susi Partners. Trafigura has said it no longer trades Rosneft crude or refined products and sold its stake in Russia's giant oil project Vostok Oil. Yet Russia's Lukoil has agreed to sell its Italian refinery, ISAB, to a Cypriot private equity firm G.O.I. Energy and Trafigura itself. They paid about €1.4 billion to acquire the facility that can process roughly 355,000 barrels of oil a day. The deal will allow

the plant to avoid nationalization or closure after EU sanctions cut it off from Russian oil supplies. GOI is an arm of Argus New Energy Group, a private equity fund primarily backed by Israeli investor. Swiss-based Vitol and U.S.-based Crossbridge Energy Partners had been in on-off talks with Lukoil for several months. The Israelis behind the deal have been involved in many deals in Russia and in cooperation with Russian businesses.. ■

20 January 2023

RUSSIAN OIL IS GETTING MIXED IN SINGAPORE

Facing sanctions for its invasion of Ukraine, Russia is looking further afield to find customers for its crude oil. Russian oil being is blended in Singapore and then re-exported globally as traders reap huge profits, according to Bloomberg.

SOURCE: WIKIPEDIA.ORG [HTTPS://RU.WIKIPEDIA.ORG/WIKI/%D0%A2%D0%B0%D0%B-D%D0%BA%D0%B5%D1%80#/MEDIA/FILE:GEORGY_USHAKOV_\(2\).JPG](https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D0%A2%D0%B0%D0%B-D%D0%BA%D0%B5%D1%80#/media/File:Georgy_Ushakov_(2).JPG)



Singapore has turned into a key hub to legally avoid trade restrictions against Russia. Oil traders fill tank storage in the city by mixing cheap fuel supplies from Russia with shipments from other sources before trading them off globally. Traders enjoy a good profit margin from mixing Russian components—up to twice as much. Demand for oil storage tanks in Singapore is skyrocketing, with most tank spaces being reserved for the entire year, Bloomberg reported. Singapore oil-receiving terminals took in more than double the volume of Russian oil in December 2022 as compared to a year ago. Within just a month, Singapore took a combined 3.4 million barrels a day of Russian crude and products. Singapore has not banned the import of Russian oil or petroleum products, although financial institutions based in the island state are prohibited from financing

or dealing with Russian goods and companies. But trading Russian oil is a sensitive topic for many buyers who wish to obscure its origin. Profits from mixing Russian oil with shipments from other sources have room to increase when the EU's ban on Russian oil product exports enters into force on February 5. Russia began to trade more oil to Asia and the Middle East after Western countries refused to purchase shipments following Moscow's invasion of Ukraine. Some of this blended fuel may go into the bunker fuel in Singapore or the Emirate of Fujairah, or be traded off globally. That should intensify in the coming months. By mixing and reselling cheap Russian fuel, traders make a lot of money—those that also reap benefits are Russia, seeking to trade its fuel after losing Western markets, and customers throughout Asia. ■

23 January 2023

SOUTH AFRICA, RUSSIA'S BIGGEST AFRICAN ALLY

Due to its location and its role in African politics, let aside from its membership in the BRICS group, South Africa is a valuable partner for Moscow. The country's ruling party, the African National Congress, is following a policy that favors Russia, which matters now as Russia continues to shell Ukraine.

South Africa's military announced that it plans to hold joint training exercises off its coast next month with Russia and China on February 17–27. The drills are being called “Operation Mosi,” which means smoke. It said the exercises would take place in the port cities of Durban and Richards Bay, some 180 km north. The scenario involves artillery weapons and air defense systems. The next month's exercise

will involve two Russian vessels. However, the South African army said this is the second joint drill it is holding with Russia and China, the first being in November 2019 in Cape Town, close to the Cape of Good Hope. South Africa's reluctance to condemn Russia's invasion of Ukraine and its decision to advance a pro-Russian agenda is one thing, but joint military drills as Russia continues to bomb Ukraine is a



SOURCE: TALKS WITH PRESIDENT OF SOUTH AFRICA CYRIL RAMAPHOSA • PRESIDENT OF RUSSIA (KREMLIN.RU)

drastic step. This is a serious cause for concern. The naval drill was questioned by South Africa's biggest opposition party. Kobus Marais, shadow defense minister for the opposition party, Democratic Alliance, has questioned the motivations for going through with the plan, saying the arrangement will give the impression that South Africa is not only "neutral but being biased to one side." "Clearly it can alienate us from other important trade partners, the west," he added. The opposition has condemned joint naval exercises between South Africa and Russia. The US, Germany, Japan, and the UK are South Africa's most important trading partners, while Russia is not even in the top 15. South Africa will use its role as the 2023 chair of the BRICS grouping of nations to advance the

interest of Africa as a whole, according to South African President Cyril Ramaphosa, notorious for his pro-Russian sympathies. South Africa is also using it to advance the interest of Russia. South Africa's governing party--the African National Congress, or ANC--is seeking to fine-tune its policies and admit new members to the bloc in 2023. The party has criticized NATO states over their support of Ukraine. The draft document suggested that South Africa should strengthen relations with Cuba and Venezuela and called for the lifting of "punitive and violent sanctions" against them as well as Iran, Syria, and Zimbabwe. The ANC is also in favor of a referendum to reunite the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. In short, this is a policy that favors Russia while despising the West. ■



SOURCE: FACEBOOK GENERAL STAFF OF THE ARMED FORCES OF UKRAINE [HTTPS://WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/PHOTO/?FBID=511268101186273&-SET=PCB.511268357852914](https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=511268101186273&_set=pcb.511268357852914)

23 January 2023

SITUATION AT FRONT LINE IN UKRAINE REACHES DEADLOCK

For two months, the frontline between occupying Russian troops and Ukrainian soldiers has not advanced much. Indeed, the city of Soledar fell to the Russians, but it is not going to have a strategic impact on the war itself, albeit being part of the effort to capture Bakhmut. The situation on the frontline in Ukraine is generally in a state of stalemate. No major advancements in Kherson and Zaporizhzhia while in Luhansk, fierce fighting is taking place along the Svatove-Kreminna line. Chances are that the situation will remain in a deadlock until a new major offensive is launched by either side, perhaps this spring.

Many believed a “winter warfare” would break out in January and February on frozen soil. A full-scale ground offensive is unlikely to take place before the spring thaw, somewhat around late March or April. Who

benefits most? Many believed in the past that any deadlock is a nuisance for Ukraine that launched a full-stage offensive, recapturing Kharkiv, some territories in Donbas, and the western Kherson region. Russian troops were

in defensive mode, seeking to prevent a disaster, by throwing mobilized troops to the front before their chaotic retreat to the left bank of the Dnieper River. Thousands of experienced Russian troops were dispatched to Luhansk, halting for many weeks a Ukrainian offensive from Kharkiv. After all, if Ukrainian forces had crossed the Svatove–Kreminna line, they would have advanced towards Severodonetsk and Lysychansk and gained an opportunity to go further inside the Luhansk region. Russian forces have sought to stage a counter-attack there, albeit in vain, as Ukrainian forces defend fiercely Kreminna and nearby settlements. Russia's capture of Soledar had no major impact on the situation in Luhansk, but it is bad for Ukrainian forces around Bakhmut. This section, which is of particular importance for Wagner proxy forces, is unlikely to see any breakthrough anytime soon. Besides, even the retreat of the Ukrainians from Bakhmut, if necessary, will not significantly affect the strategic situation in Donbas. This would, of course, be a propaganda defeat for Kyiv, bigger than Soledar, but the threat to Kramatorsk

and Sloviansk would not be greater, because the fierce defense of Bakhmut and Soledar gave Ukraine time to build a second line of defense a dozen kilometers farther west, and based largely on the Siverskyi Donets–Donbas waterway. No breakthrough on the front line is plausible either in Donbas and in the country's south—let alone a possible attack from Belarus and directly from Russia. Both warring parties are bracing for a spring offensive. Western allies of Ukraine advised refraining from launching an offensive before Kyiv gets more weapons while its troops will get the necessary training. Russia, on the other hand, will still take at least a few more weeks to move tens of thousands of trained and armed troops from the fall mobilization to the front. The great offensive, perhaps even from three directions, which not only Kyiv has warned against, is still a matter of probably at least a month and a half. The question is whether Ukraine will not be the first to stage an offensive, to both recapture large swathes of territory and thwart a major spring offensive. ■

24 January 2023

RUSSIA EXPELS ESTONIAN AMBASSADOR

The Estonian ambassador in Russia has been ordered to leave the country, the Estonian foreign ministry said in a statement. Many ambassadors will now be replaced with a chargé d'affaires – a diplomat of a lower rank acting in place of an ambassador. That is a new chapter in souring ties between the Baltic states and Russia following Moscow's invasion of Ukraine.

The Estonian ambassador in Russia has been ordered to leave the country by 7 February, the Russian foreign ministry said on January 23. The Russian side decided to downgrade the diplomatic representative in

both countries to chargé d'affaires ad interim. Vladimir Lipayev has been appointed to Estonia since last February. In a statement, the Russian foreign ministry said Estonia had “purposefully destroyed” relations with Moscow. Moscow was



SOURCE: FOREIGN MINISTRY REDUCES THE NUMBER OF RUSSIAN EMBASSY STAFF IN ESTONIA | VÄLISMINISTEERIUM (VM.EE)

told to reduce its embassy from 17 to eight by the end of January to reach parity with the size of its staff in Moscow. The Estonian Embassy in Moscow currently has six employees. In addition to Ambassador Margus Laidre (since 2018), the diplomatic representation includes deputy head of the embassy Jana Vanamölder, press diplomat Kirsti Viljamaa, consular affairs director Tarmo Punnik, consul Laura Lilleväli, and assistant Marina Grigoryeva. “Total Russophobia, the cultivation of hostility towards our country have been elevated by Tallinn to the rank of state policy,” the statement from the Russian foreign ministry read. Moscow has responded to a firm policy Estonia has followed over years by expelling Russian spies working under cover of diplomatic staff in a local embassy. By downgrading

diplomatic representation, Russia is seeking to punish Estonia for its aid to Ukraine. The small Baltic state is at the helm of Western countries in terms of military assistance it delivers to Ukraine if compared to its total defense potential. Estonian recently announced its biggest military aid package for Ukraine, amounting to €113 million. The Estonian package consists of all 155mm howitzers the state has and thousands of rounds of 155mm artillery ammunition. Military assistance to Ukraine has grown to €370 million, or slightly more than 1 percent of Estonia’s gross domestic product. Latvia will become the only Baltic state to have an uninterrupted diplomatic presence in Moscow. In early April 2022, Lithuania downgraded diplomatic relations with Moscow, while Estonia followed suit. ■



SOURCE: RELEASE (MIL.AM)

25 January 2023

RUSSIA REMAINS IDLE IN NAGORNO-KARABAKH CRISIS

Since December, Azerbaijan has blocked only land connection between Armenia and the ethnic Armenian Nagorno-Karabakh region in Azerbaijan. No transport link by air has been established for three decades. Russian “peacekeeping” do nothing about Azerbaijani militants sent by the government in Baku to prevent traffic on the only road linking the province to Armenia. As Moscow remains idle, Armenia no longer believes in Moscow’s allied commitments while Western states are eager to take advantage of that.

The mountain road linking Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia was blocked on December 12, 2022. Now, officials say the Russian peacekeeping convoys and Red Cross relief vehicles are the only ones that are able to pass. But it is nowhere near enough to

replace all goods that used to arrive daily from Armenia to the enclave cut off from the rest of the world. The humanitarian situation in the enclave grows dire. Since the early 1990s, the breakaway region has been inside Azerbaijan's internationally recognized borders but held by its ethnic Armenian majority. Some 100,000 people living there under effective blockade were left with supplies of food, medicines, and other essentials running low. Residents are often deprived of electricity, gas, and Internet as infrastructure links to Armenia run through Azerbaijan-controlled areas. Officials in Yerevan have grown increasingly angry at Russia for not doing more to end the blockade, especially since Russian peacekeepers are deployed in the corridor. Russia told Azerbaijan on January 17 that a key road leading into the disputed region of Nagorno-Karabakh must be quickly cleared of protesters. Baku remained unmoved and Moscow has no intention of making any further steps. The issue is becoming a major irritant in Armenia. Yerevan has refused to

host military drills by the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) while protesters, gathered outside the base in the northern town of Gyumri, were demanding that Russian peacekeepers unblock the Lachin corridor. Consequently, Western states take the lead as Armenia--so far allied with Moscow--has been setting eyes on Western assistance. It was the European Union that emerged as a major player in Armenia-Azerbaijan negotiations to bring lasting peace. Last year, Nancy Pelosi, the speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, arrived in the Armenian capital, while a few days ago U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken spoke with Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan. What is worrisome for Moscow is that Armenia is seeing a thaw in its ties with Turkey. Since the early 1990s, the borders to the west (Turkey) and east (Azerbaijan) have been closed since the First Karabakh War. Isolated, Armenia was doomed to an alliance with Russia that is now losing ground in the Caucasus, no longer being a major player in the region. ■

26 January 2023

IRANIAN, RUSSIAN SPEAKERS MEET, CALLING FOR STRATEGIC COOPERATION

Russian State Duma speaker headed to Tehran, a more powerful sign of cooperation between Russia and Iran than just a parliamentary cooperation commission. Volodin is a hawk with strong ties to Vladimir Putin. Perhaps he traveled to Iran to consolidate his position in the “party of war” and open a new chapter in Russian-Iranian ties.

For Russia, Iran is a major ally that provides it with both drones and ballistic missiles, with the former being used in its war against Ukraine, as well as some strategies on how to

survive amid Western sanctions. Top Russian officials have made more trips to Iran since Moscow's invasion of Ukraine. The Russian parliamentary delegation headed by State



SOURCE: ПРЕДСЕДАТЕЛЬ ГД ВСТРЕТИЛСЯ С ПРЕЗИДЕНТОМ ИРАНА (DUMA.GOV.RU)

Duma speaker Vyacheslav Volodin arrived in Tehran on an official visit on January 23. The Russian official met there with his Iranian counterpart, Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, and Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi. The two speakers also discussed a wide range of issues, including efforts to cement energy and trade cooperation. They must have also discussed defense cooperation. Moscow and Tehran have reportedly inked a deal that would allow Russia to purchase and produce Iranian-designed drones. In November, Russia imported hundreds of Iranian Shahed kamikaze drones and surface-to-surface missiles. In return, Moscow has apparently provided Tehran with stolen weapons from the West as well as cash.

What has made Iran and Russia allies are joint enemies: supporters of democracy at home and the United States abroad. Tehran has asked Russia for help to quell the popular uprising after the death of a young Kurdish woman detained by Iran's so-called morality police last fall. Their rapprochement is powered by common goals regionwide. In Syria, they both have pledged support to the Assad regime while thwarting U.S. influence in the region. A new common threat has emerged as Turkey is seeking to make gains both in Syria and in the Caucasus. Tehran has raised concern over a weaker Armenia and a more powerful Azerbaijan as the latter receives substantial assistance from Turkey. ■



SOURCE: МАСОВІ ЗАТРИМАННЯ У КРИМУ: У СПИСКУ 34 КРИМСЬКИХ ТАТАР – МЕДЖЛІС (QTMM.ORG)

26 January 2023

RUSSIAN CRACKDOWN ON CRIMEAN TATARS

Russia is stepping up a campaign of repression against Crimean Tatars, undoubtedly fearing Ukraine's effort to reclaim the peninsula forcibly annexed back in 2014. A small ethnic group has spoken out against Moscow's takeover of the peninsula. In addition, Turkey is an official guarantor of their rights. Russian crackdown on Crimean Tatars could sour ties between Russia and Turkey.

On January 25, the searches were conducted at the homes of more than 20 Crimean Tatars. Six people were arrested on charges of plotting to seize power and

organizing the activities of a terrorist group in an apparent blow to the Muslim community in Crimea. Emine Dzhaparova, Ukraine's deputy foreign minister, said on January 11 that five

Crimean Tatar political prisoners, in custody since 2019, had been sentenced to 13 years in prison. These include Servet Gaziev, Dzhemil Gafarov, Erfan Osmanov, Alim Karimov, and Seyran Murtaza. A day later, a court in Russia's southwestern city of Rostov-on-Don sentenced Crimean Tatar activist and religious cleric Raif Fevziyev to 17 years in prison on charges of plotting to seize power and organizing the activities of a terrorist group. He was sentenced, with the first three years of his term to be spent in a prison cell and the remainder in a penal colony. In August 2022, Fevziyev was detained on charges of being members of the Hizb ut-Tahrir religious group that is banned in Russia but is legal in Ukraine. Russia took control of Crimea from Ukraine in March 2014

after sending in troops, seizing key facilities, and staging a referendum dismissed as illegal. Moscow's takeover of the peninsula was vocally opposed by many Crimean Tatars, who are a sizable minority in the region (12–15 percent of the population). The Sunni Muslims, who are of Turkic origin, consider Crimea their home—they speak a language similar to Turkish and have historical and cultural links to Turkey. Turkey's foreign ministry voiced its concern over the sentence of Crimean Tatars in a statement. The communique noted Ankara expects the “necessary steps to be taken as soon as possible for the freedom of all our compatriots imprisoned in Crimea for political reasons.” ■

28 January 2023

ROSNEFT, NOVATEK GAINS, GAZPROM LOSES

The figures for the Russian gas sector in 2022, in particular an increase in liquefied natural gas output, show that Gazprom is weakening while two other companies—Novatek and Rosneft—are rising in power. Rosneft has boosted output while Novatek is now producing more liquefied natural gas. In an attempt to wean the country from its dependence on the European gas market, Russia has increased gas exports to China, where its three biggest energy companies compete.

Russian liquefied natural gas supplies to China climbed to 6.5 million tons, up 43.9 percent. Russia earned more than \$6.74 billion, climbing 2.5-fold from its 2021 figures. Consequently, Russia has already become the fourth largest LNG supplier to China (behind

Australia, Qatar, and Malaysia). Moscow is also sending more piped gas to China. Russia more than doubled its rail exports of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) to China in 2022 as part of the Kremlin's drive to diversify its energy export sales outside Europe. Russian oil giant



SOURCE: ПАО НОВАТЭК ПРЕСС-ЦЕНТР : ФОТОГАЛЕРЕЯ (NOVATEK.RU)

Rosneft is seeking a slot for its gas reserves to be exported to China via a planned second route of the Power of Siberia. Rosneft's chief executive Igor Sechin, considered a close ally to Vladimir Putin, has asked the Russian president in a letter that Rosneft be considered as a potential supplier of gas to the Power of Siberia 2 pipeline with its gas resources in Irkutsk Oblast and Krasnoyarsk Krai. In late December, Putin instructed in December Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak to work out the issue with the Rosneft request together with Gazprom. Gazprom is unlikely to be interested in receiving gas from third parties for the future pipeline to China. The company's

gas resources in Siberia are sufficient to fill up the pipeline while Gazprom is not eager to give up its piped gas monopoly. Rosneft has been seeking to pump its gas supplies through Power of Siberia since 2014 while in 2017 the firm requested to sell its gas to Europe. Perhaps it is only with a breakthrough in Russia's gas export policies that Sechin is likely to achieve the goal. Russia's invasion of Ukraine has highly impacted Gazprom. In 2022, Rosneft and Novatek rose their output to 69 bcm and 83.6 bcm of gas, respectively. Consequently, Rosneft will no longer be obliged to buy gas from Gazprom to meet its obligations to Inter RAO, a state-run energy firm. ■



SOURCE: (6) ANDRIY YERMAK ON TWITTER: „POLISH PT-91 TWARDY MBTS ARE IN UKRAINE. A FRIEND IN NEED IS A FRIEND INDEED

31 January 2023

POLAND READY TO DEPLOY MORE TANKS TO UKRAINE

Poland will send an additional 60 tanks to Ukraine on top of the 14 German-made Leopard 2 tanks it has already pledged, Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki was quoted as saying. Poland is ready to send other tanks that are Polish-made battle tanks developed from the Soviet-era T-72 range. Western battle tanks could be a game changer, but only if there is proper six-week training and if they arrive soon.

Poland has sent some 250 T-72M and T-72 M1 tanks to Ukraine as the country defends itself against a Russian invasion. Additionally,

Ukraine will receive 14 Leopards, 30 Soviet-era T-72M1R, and a batch of 30 PT-91 tanks developed from the Soviet-era T-72 that came

into service in the 1990s. Earlier, Germany had approved the export of fourteen Leopard battle tanks to Ukraine from its own stocks as well as from third-party allies. Twelve countries have agreed to supply Ukraine with Leopard tanks while others may join. A total of 150 Leopard tanks will be deployed to Ukraine, with more to come. In addition, a dozen of Britain's Challenger 2 battle tanks and 31 U.S.-made Abrams will also be in Ukrainian hands for use against Russian forces. Ukrainian forces could then be able to form a robust armored battalion to break off the front anywhere. Surely, Western tanks will outperform their Russian counterparts. But Ukraine is racing

against time. The Leopards, the Abrams, and the Challengers will take two months to be formed into two brigades. Consequently, a major Ukrainian offensive could begin no sooner than in April, which is what Russia is well aware of. Its forces may thus rush to stage an offensive or hamper Ukrainian forces with persistent shelling as was the case in Soledar or Bakhmut. Another batch of 60 tanks, half of which were built in the 1990s, will build up Ukraine's defensive skills along the Svatove-Kreminna line, Bakhmut, Avdiivka, Vuhledar (Donetsk Oblast), and Orikhiv (Zaporizhzhia Oblast). ■

31 January 2023

WILL FRANCE BE REPLACED BY RUSSIA IN ANOTHER AFRICAN COUNTRY?

The new military junta in Burkina Faso is making effort to team up with Russia, a sign that Russia is becoming a major player in Africa after the Central African Republic and Mali. Possibly, Wagner Group, a shadowy paramilitary group, will serve a key role in Burkina Faso – as it already has in the two African states.

Military-ruled Burkina Faso suspends accord with France, and orders troops to leave within a month. Burkina Faso suffered its second military coup d'état last year, and the streets have seen Russian flags waving and anti-French slogans. It is not surprising as military officers in Mali have links to Burkina

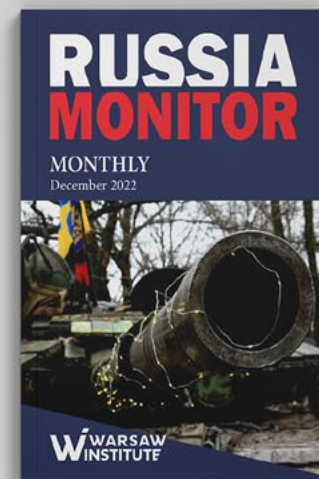
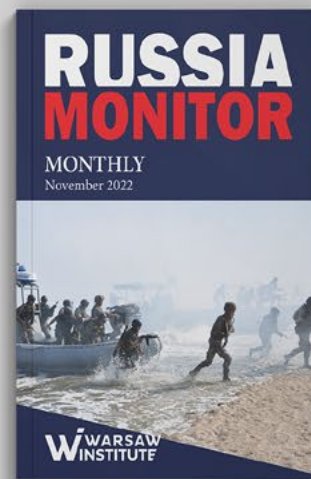
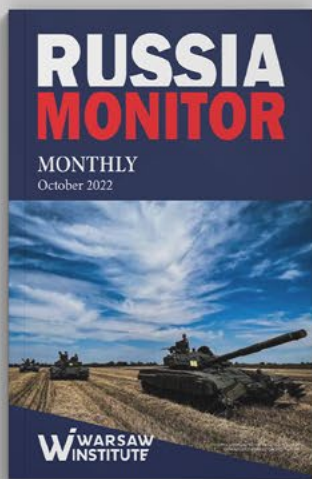
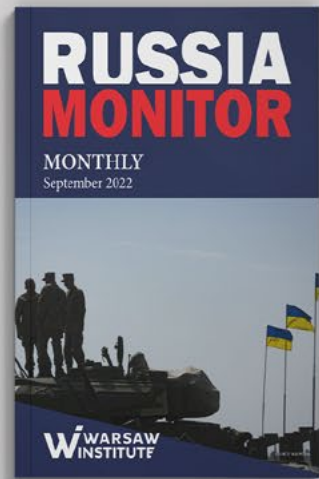
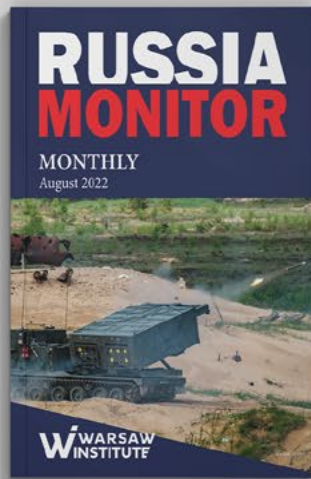
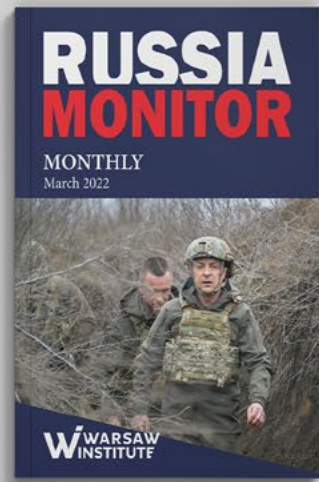
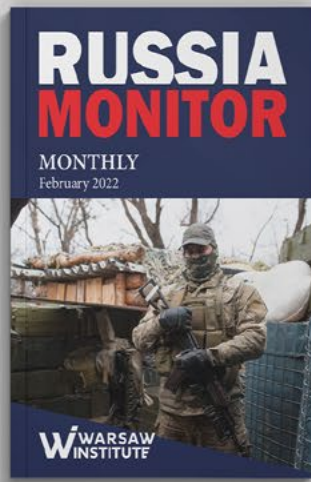
Faso's junta, currently in power. Wagner Group insurgents have been stationed in Mali for over a year. France has some 400 special forces soldiers stationed in Burkina Faso, which is battling groups affiliated with al-Qaeda and ISIL. Mali, also a former colony of Paris, had ordered French troops out of the country. Both



SOURCE: 27 ФЕВРАЛЯ — ДЕНЬ СИЛ СПЕЦИАЛЬНЫХ ОПЕРАЦИЙ : МИНИСТЕРСТВО
ОБОРОНЫ РОССИЙСКОЙ ФЕДЕРАЦИИ (XN--90ANLFBEBAR6I.XN--P1AI)

military juntas are exploiting France's flaws in its anti-jihadist campaign to install Russian mercenaries instead. But Wagner insurgents do not fight jihadists—they terrorize civilians instead, which makes the matter worse. Many demand cooperation between Burkina Faso and Russia, but also the strengthening of friendship and of cooperation with Guinea and Mali. Those in power in the two countries are people favorable to Moscow. In December 2022, Burkina Faso's transitional Prime Minister Apollinaire Joachimson Kyelem de Tambela traveled to Moscow. Forced to withdraw troops from Burkina Faso, France is suffering bitter setbacks in the African country. That might thwart France's anti-jihadist campaign

if French troops are pushed to neighboring Niger. In addition, the country loses influence in its former colony as Russia is likely to have a more powerful role in the region. Moscow has long approached other African countries—from Sudan to Mali. Thus the Kremlin builds ties with African countries, strengthening economic and military cooperation. Russia sends thousands of military specialists under the cover of "advisors", including the notorious Wagner Group, to the country that throws support to Russia and allows it concessions for mining natural resources. Typically, those granted a concession are companies linked to Wagner Group founder Yevgeny Prigozhin. ■



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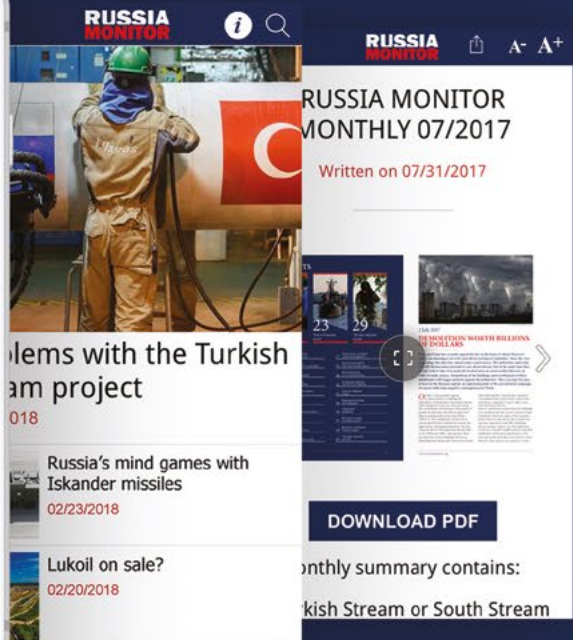
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