

RUSSIA MONITOR

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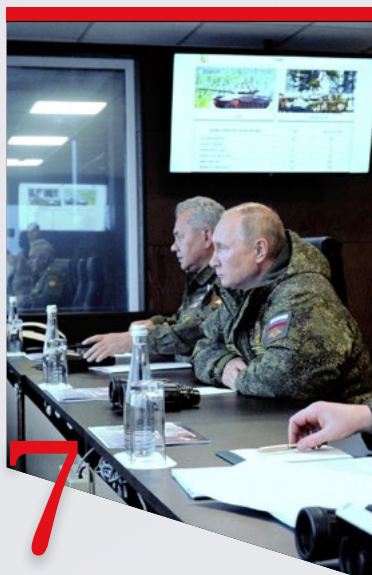
SOURCE: KREMLIN.RU

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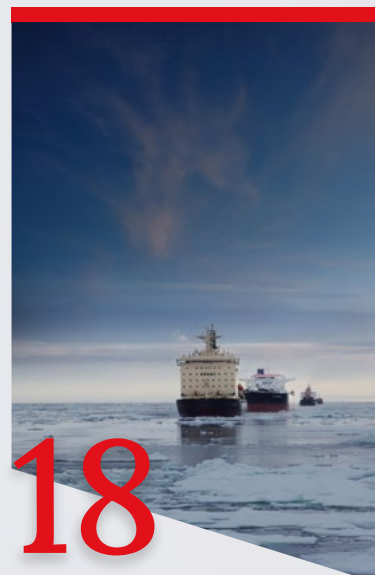
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SOURCE: KREMLIN.RU

17 July 2023

RUSSIA QUILTS BLACK SEA GRAIN DEAL

Russia pulled out of an international agreement that allows Ukraine to export grain through the Black Sea. Thus, Moscow could seek to take revenge on the Turkish president for his decisions that were not favorable for Russia while making attempts to force Western states into concessions.

The last ship to travel under a UN-brokered deal that allows the safe Black Sea export of Ukrainian grain left the port of Odesa early on July 16. A day later, the Kremlin stalled the export of Ukrainian grain and fertilizers, saying its conditions for extending the deal

brokered by the UN and Turkey had not been fulfilled. The grain deal actually involves a set of agreements. To convince Russia to agree to the Black Sea deal, a three-year memorandum of understanding was struck between the UN and Russia on July 22, 2022, in Istanbul, Turkey,

under which UN officials agreed to help Ukraine get its food and fertilizer exports to foreign markets. A separate agreement was brokered by the UN between Russia and Turkey. Russia has halted a breakthrough wartime deal that allows the grain to flow from Ukraine under a memorandum it had signed with the UN. Unlike the Black Sea Initiative, it was signed for three years. In addition, the UN-Russia memorandum is “not an international treaty and does not establish any rights or obligations under the international law.” Russia’s main demands were the resumption of its ammonia exports through a pipeline to the Ukrainian port of Odesa and the reconnection of its state agricultural bank Rosselkhozbank to the SWIFT international payments system. Following the Kremlin’s decision to pull out of the deal, global prices of wheat climbed higher. Russia’s decision has been met with harsh criticism across the globe.

“Hundreds of millions of people face hunger and consumers are confronting a global cost-of-living crisis. They will pay the price,” UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said of Russia’s decision. Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan said that he believed Russian President Vladimir Putin wants the continuation of a deal allowing the export of Ukrainian grain through the Black Sea, after Moscow suspended its participation. President Volodymyr Zelensky was quoted saying that the Black Sea grain corridor can continue to operate even without Russia’s participation. Mykhaylo Podolyak, an advisor to Volodymyr Zelensky, suggested an international armed patrol force could be created to escort ships carrying grain from Ukraine and ensure their safety. He admitted, however, that there may not be many countries willing to create such patrols. ■

17 July 2023

EXPLOSIONS ON KERCH BRIDGE LINKING CRIMEA AND RUSSIA

The bridge linking Russia to Crimea was attacked in an assault that showed Ukraine’s ability to attack strategic assets deep into the Russian-controlled territory. The attack dealt another humiliating blow to the Kremlin’s prestige, and possibly to its ability to supply troops occupying Ukraine’s southern regions. The bridge has been a supply route for food, fuel, and other supplies for Russian troops invading southern Ukraine.

There were reports of explosions, which killed two people, early on June 17. Video and photos showed a section of the road bridge had sheared off. Ukrainian media outlets reported that the SBU — the country’s security

service — and its naval forces were behind the assault. There is, however, no evidence to confirm the reports. Artem Dekhtiarenko, a spokesperson for Ukraine’s SBU, said that details of the operation would only be revealed



SOURCE: KREMLIN.RU

“after our victory”. The extent of the damage was not immediately clear. Kyiv claims that a span has collapsed while according to Russia, the bridge surface has been damaged. The Kerch Bridge was opened in 2018 and enables road and rail travel between Russia and Crimea - a Ukrainian territory annexed by Russia. The bridge is an important resupply route for Russian forces occupying parts of southern Ukraine, notably the Russian-controlled areas of the provinces of Kherson and Zaporizhzhia. The explosion closed the main conduit for Russian supplies to southern Ukraine. The peninsula is used by the Russians as a large logistical hub for moving forces and assets deep into the territory of Ukraine. “Any illegal structures used to deliver Russian instruments of mass murder are necessarily short-lived regardless of the reasons for the destruction,”

Mykhailo Podolyak, Ukraine’s presidential adviser, told journalists. Dmytro Kuleba, Ukraine’s Foreign Minister, has commented on the attack on the Crimean Kerch Bridge. “The truth is that one broken Russian bridge means fewer broken Ukrainian lives,” he said in an interview with CBS. After the assault, Putin held a meeting via a video link. It was attended by Deputy Prime Minister Marat Khusnullin, Transport Minister Vitaly Savelyev, the head of the occupation authorities of Crimea Sergey Aksyonov, Veniamin Kondratiev, the governor of Russia’s Krasnodar Krai, and Volodymyr Saldo, Moscow-installed acting leader of the Russian-controlled parts of Ukraine’s Kherson region. As the last of them also attended the meeting, the Kerch bridge seems vital for the Russians in the eastern part of the Kherson region. ■



SOURCE: МУЛЬТИМЕДИА.МИНОБОРОНЫ.РФ

18 July 2023

WAGNER CLOSES RUSSIAN BASE, SETTLES IN BELARUS

Wagner fighters will likely continue to redeploy from Russia to eastern Belarus in the coming month as the mercenary group has announced the closure of its Molokino military range in the Krasnodar region. Three weeks after a failed mutiny against Russia's military leadership, the Kremlin and Wagner came to terms on how to handle Prigozhin's assets.

Two Wagner convoys with as many as 180 in total vehicles entered Belarus on July 18 alone. Vehicles were headed toward a field camp in the Asipovichy region in eastern Belarus. The convoys included cars, trucks, buses, and tankers-- but no military hardware. Wagner mercenaries had turned over all heavy weapons. According to Ukraine's military intelligence outlet, four columns of Wagner

mercenaries with at least 700 fighters had arrived in Belarus by July 18. Members of the Wagner mercenary outfit on July 18 announced the closure of the group's main base in Molokino in southern Russia. The Molokino training center will suspend operations by July 30 while troops will be redeployed to Belarus. Up to 8,000 Wagner fighters could be accommodated in Belarus. As more Wagner fighters reach

Belarus, the Kremlin and Prigozhin must have finalized their deal. A few days before, the Russian military had seized heavy weapons from Wagner. The Russian defense ministry claims Prigozhin turned over 2,000 pieces of high-end weapons like T-90 tanks, howitzers, and multiple Grad and Uragan launch rocket systems. The base lies 200 km north of the Ukrainian border and some 90 km away from Minsk. It is located close to the Russian border. Kyiv downplayed the presence of Wagner forces in their northern neighbor Belarus. Wagner fighters no longer have the heavy weapons

they used to hold in Ukraine. In addition, they are too few in number. It is doubtful whether 8,000 Wagner fighters will settle in Belarus as some mercenaries will remain in Africa and Syria. Wagner mercenaries in Belarus are more of a political threat. A more likely goal of the stationing of Wagnerites in Belarus is to provide training to the Belarusian military and to be a hub for the group's presence in African countries. The presence of Wagner Group mercenaries in Belarus increases the risk of using hybrid warfare methods against Poland, Lithuania, and Latvia. ■

18 July 2023

SHOIGU, GERASIMOV CONTINUE FIRING SENIOR COMMANDERS

After a failed Wagner mutiny, top Russian military officials Sergei Shoigu and Valery Gerasimov carried out a radical change in Russia's military leadership. That has not impacted Moscow's war in Ukraine. It is known what eventually prevails--consolidated efforts of Russian commanders or the sacking of generals at the expense of people blindly obeying the orders of Gen. Valery Gerasimov, who since January has been in charge of what Russia names its "special operation" in Ukraine.

A number of other news outlets claim "General Armageddon," Sergey Surovkin, is missing. Other officials dismissed in an alleged crackdown are Surovkin's deputy Andrei Yudin, deputy head of military intelligence Vladimir Alexeyev, and Mikhail Mizintsev, the former deputy defense minister, dubbed the "Butcher of Mariupol." Surovkin has not been seen in public for three weeks now. Some sources claim he had been arrested. The others have not been relieved from their duties.

However, dozen of senior Russian officers have been dismissed or detained. Given who they are and their ties to Wagner, it seems unlikely they all have been sacked amid alleged links to Prigozhin. In fact, Gerasimov sacked people whom he considered disobedient in an alleged witch-hunt after an aborted Wagner mutiny. Moscow's forces struggle with ineffective command structures and a lack of trust or transparency through the ranks. Notably, Major General Ivan Popov, commander of the 58th



SOURCE: KREMLIN.RU

Combined Arms Army in Russia's Southern Military District, said he was stripped of his position after raising complaints with the Kremlin from the Ukrainian front lines in the southern Zaporizhzhia region. He said he had been dismissed from his position after criticizing lack of artillery support as well as a high death toll among Russian soldiers. Dozen of senior airborne commanders have been sacked. As part of an ongoing purge of insubordinate commanders by the Russian military command, Major General Vladimir Seliverstov, a Russian

paratrooper commander, was removed from his post as head of the 106th Guards Airborne Division. Media reports also suggested that Major-General Alexander Kornev was removed from command of the 7th Airborne Assault Division. The Russian military command is also planning to dismiss the 31st VDV Brigade Commander, who is reportedly Colonel Sergei Karasev. Colonel-General Mikhail Teplinskiy is also believed to have been dismissed. Teplinskiy in the past criticized Gerasimov for inadequate airborne deployment in Ukraine. ■



SOURCE: NEW RUSSIAN AMBASSADOR TO LIBYA CONFIRMS FULL DIPLOMATIC RETURN
THE LIBYA OBSERVER

19 July 2023

NOT ONLY WAGNER: RUSSIAN OFFENSIVE IN LIBYA

Libya has emerged as Russia's latest expeditionary front and deployment area for private military companies, including Wagner Group. After Wagner failed, the Kremlin began fixing ties with Libya's most important players. Russian oil companies, including Tatneft, are ready to resume oil production in Libya.

After Gen. Khalifa Haftar and his Libyan National Army fought alongside Wagner mercenaries in a failed effort to seize Tripoli, Moscow has established ties with the Government of National Unity (GNU), based

in the country's capital of Tripoli. Russia has restored its diplomatic mission in Libya. There has been no Russian ambassador to Libya since November 2018. Russia's newly appointed ambassador to Libya, Aydar Aganin, headed off

for Tripoli where the Russian diplomatic mission will be restored. Moreover, the chairman of Libya's Presidential Council, Mohamed Al-Menfi, received an invitation from Russian President Vladimir Putin to attend the second Russia-Africa Summit scheduled for July 27-28, 2023, in St. Petersburg. Russia is torn between two rival governments in Libya. Russian officials back Gen. Haftar who controls eastern and southern Libya, where thousands of Wagner fighters are dispatched, while cementing ties with the Tripoli-based Government of National Unity, recognized by Western states. Moscow has been particularly involved with military and financial support for a center of political power in the east, notably Gen. Haftar and the

Libyan National Army (LNA), and the Benghazi government. Wagner is estimated to be in Libya from 1,000 to 2,000 personnel in size. Wagner fighters remain entrenched in and around key military bases and oil facilities at Shahara and oil terminals at Es Sider and Ras Lanuf. Russia has also sent military advisers into Libya and several military aircraft and helicopters, now stationed at the Al Jufra air base in central Libya. Through the restored diplomatic mission in Tripoli Russia is seeking to gain influence in western Libya. Moscow no longer believes the political center in the east could one day seize power in Libya. The Kremlin is also rushing to secure its economic interests on Libyan soil. ■

20 July 2023

ROSGVARDIA RECEIVES HEAVY WEAPONRY AFTER WAGNER'S FAILED REBELLION

Wagner's mutiny made the Russian regime realize how important it is to keep military leaders at bay, also to thwart any rebellion that might spark in the country. It was for that reason that the Russian National Guard (Rosgvardia) was established to combat "terrorism and extremism" within the country.

Not incidentally, Meanwhile, at a meeting with Wagner officers at the Kremlin on June 29, Putin also received the director of the Russian National Guard, (Rosgvardia), Viktor Zolotov. Wagner fighters could join Rosgvardia rather than the regular army. There are other consequences of Prigozhin's mutiny. A new bill introduced on July 17 to the Russian State Duma will give the Russian National Guard

Service the right to have military equipment, including heavy armored vehicles and tanks. In an interview with Russian state media outlets after a Kremlin ceremony praising military efforts to stop the mutiny, Viktor Zolotov, the director of Rosgvardia, said the bill had been approved by Vladimir Putin beforehand. Those changes will be beneficial for Ramzan Kadyrov-- not only for the sake of his close ties



SOURCE: KREMLIN.RU

with Zolotov. In fact, top Chechen paramilitary groups are included in Rosgvardia. The guards, he said back on June 27, will in future be equipped with heavy weaponry. Rosgvardia will also see many Wagner mercenaries who refuse to sign any contract with the defense ministry. Moreover, the “Grom” special units of the Russian Federal Drug Control Service (of the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs) were officially transferred to the control of the Rosgvardia. The transfer of “Grom” units to Rosgvardia, as well as the decision to provide

Rosgvardia with heavy combat equipment, supports the previous assessment that the Kremlin is continuing efforts to consolidate its internal security apparatus around Rosgvardia’s structures. “Grom” units were established within the Federal Human Trafficking Control Service, dissolved in 2016 and incorporated into the Federal Drug Control Service. Its military personnel are well-trained officers who have gained combat experience in a number of agencies, including the FSB, SVR, GRU, and the interior ministry. ■



SOURCE: FLICKR

20 July 2023

TENSIONS RUN HIGH IN THE BLACK SEA

Kyiv's defense ministry said in a statement that such vessels “may be considered by Ukraine as carrying military cargo with all the corresponding risks. The move comes as a response to Moscow withdrawing from a U.N.-brokered deal allowing passage to cargo ships carrying grain from Ukrainian ports.

The Russian defense ministry said that from July 20 all ships going across the Black Sea to Ukrainian ports would be considered “potential carriers of military-purpose cargoes.” “The countries whose flags those ships will fly will be seen as involved in the Ukrainian conflict

on the side of the Kyiv regime,” it said. Moscow's refusal to extend the Black Sea Grain Initiative agreed a year ago means the withdrawal of navigation safety guarantees in some areas of the Black Sea. Russia also began targeting Ukraine's port infrastructure west of Crimea.

After Russian safety guarantees expired in the Black Sea on the night of July 19 and 20, Moscow hit Mykolaiv and Odesa with more than 20 Kh-22, Oniks, Kalibr, Iskander missiles, and suicide drones. “Our information indicates that Russia laid additional sea mines in the approaches to Ukrainian ports,” a White House National Security Council spokesperson told journalists. The UK defense ministry said in a statement that the Russian Black Sea Fleet would likely now take a more active role in disrupting any trade. Now, Russia is attempting to restrict traffic to Ukraine’s Black Sea ports. Ukraine said it would respond to any aggression.

Ukraine’s Defense Ministry said on July 20 it would consider all ships traveling to Russian ports on the Black Sea that are occupied by Moscow as potential carriers of military cargo from July 21. The ministry also said that navigation in the northeastern part of the Black Sea and the Kerch Strait of Ukraine was banned as dangerous. The whole issue is political as the Russian fleet controls the area. However, Ukraine is now capable of targeting Russia more often than before, including vessels and facilities, one example being an attack on the Crimean bridge that links Russia and Moscow-occupied Crimea. ■

21 July 2023

RUSSIAN ATTACK IN NORTHERN UKRAINE DID NOT CRUSH UKRAINIAN SPIRITS

Ukraine’s counteroffensive against Russian forces has not yet gained the momentum that some overly optimistic observers anticipated. Ukrainian forces seek to minimize losses while weakening the enemy by depleting its artillery stocks and targeting facilities behind the front line. And yet the Russian assault on the Kupyansk sector shows Ukraine being close to breaking off a section of the front line—an effort its forces have made continuously since early June. Otherwise, the Russian military command would not have dispatched poorly trained troops to target Ukraine’s fortified positions.

Serhiy Cherevaty, the spokesperson for the Eastern Group of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, on July 20 confirmed that Russia had made a failed attempt to launch an assault along the northern section of the front line. “Russian forces cannot take the lead along the Kupyansk-Lyman section in northeastern Ukraine,” he added. Russia has launched an

assault near the Russian-Ukrainian border to draw Ukrainian troops away from Bakhmut and western Zaporizhzhia—as both are critical to the ongoing offensive. Ukraine’s Deputy Defence Minister Hanna Malyar on July 17 said the Russian goal was to halt a Ukrainian offensive on the Bakhmut direction so the enemy’s military launched an assault



SOURCE: FACEBOOK

towards Kupyansk. On July 20, the commander of Ukraine's ground forces, Oleksandr Syrsky, said a Russian contingent in Bakhmut is what he referred to as a "quasi-environment". Ukrainian forces are advancing "slowly but surely" on the front lines in the north and southeast of Bakhmut. Russian forces on July 19 were pushed out from their positions near the village of Orikhovo-Vasylivka, lying northwest of Bakhmut. Sitting atop the hills, Ukrainian forces are capable of targeting Russian troops and their supply routes. Ukrainian soldiers have not yet reclaimed much territory. They successfully seized some swathes of territory around

Bakhmut and in the direction of Melitopol and Berdyansk in southern Ukraine. Despite heavy fighting, there has been no major change on the Kupyansk, Lyman, Bakhmut, Avdiivka, and Marinka axes. Fierce fighting has continued in the lower Dnipro River since early July, not only around the Antonivka bridge. Using hi-tech speed boats and drones, Ukrainian naval special forces are conducting operations along the islands of the Dnipro River. With a spike in hostilities around the Dnipro River, Russia now has a dilemma whether to ignore that section or bring more troops and weaponry from elsewhere. ■



SOURCE: DUMA.GOV.RU

25 July 2023

RUSSIAN STATE DUMA RAISES MAXIMUM AGE FOR MILITARY RESERVISTS

Russian President Vladimir Putin has signed a law raising the maximum age of people in the military reserves. Russian lawmakers are making continuous efforts to expand Moscow's pool of military reserves.

The maximum age of soldiers, sailors, sergeants, petty officers, warrant officers, and midshipmen in Russia's military reserve forces will rise by five years. When the staged changes are complete in several years, the military will be able to call up senior officers

from reserve up to the age of 65, and junior officers up to 60. Reservists of all other ranks will be subject to mobilization up to the age of 55. For high-ranking reserve officers, the age limit of mobilization remains unchanged at 70. All Russian military reservists are included in

three age groups. Those placed in Group 1 are most eligible for being called up for service. The oldest military reservists in Group 3 are least likely to be called up for service. Putin approved a bill raising the upper age limit for military conscription, from 35 to 40, 45 to 50, and 50 to 55, in three age groups, respectively. The amendments also allow the Russian military to contract foreign citizens in the country up to the age of 52. The amendments to Russia's law on military duty and military service introduce a four-year transition period – between 2024 and 2028 – during which the reservist age limit will be gradually raised. In 2024, Russian nationals aged by 51 will remain in military reserve—and by 52 in 2025. Lawmakers on July 18 adopted the third reading of the bill introduced back in November 2022. On July 21, the State Duma defense committee endorsed

the amendments to raise the age limits for this compulsory military service to 18-30 starting in January 2024. The latest draft is expected to be one of the last before new rules that raise the conscription age limit take effect in spring 2024. “The redaction of the draft law has changed due to numerous calls from citizens,” said Andrei Kartapolov, head of the Duma defense committee. Russian nationals allegedly prefer to be called up for service at young age to then focus on education and job. Amendments to the laws allow State Duma lawmakers to raise paramilitary units with regional and federal funding to protect some areas. These will be specialized state unitary enterprises, Kartapolov said. Consequently, they will enjoy both assets and a hierarchy-based management structure. ■

25 July 2023

PRICE CAP FIASCO FOR RUSSIAN OIL?

Despite the G-7-imposed price ceiling on Russian oil, it is actually being sold at a price higher than the established level of \$60 per barrel. Such situations have occurred before, while in July this has already taken a permanent form. This forces one to question the effectiveness of the price ceiling instrument itself, or at least strengthens the arguments of proponents of lowering the maximum price for a barrel of Urals even further.

The \$60 per barrel ceiling was set in December 2022. It prohibits shipping and insurance companies from trading Russian oil if it is sold at a price above \$60. The G-7, led by the U.S. and the EU, together control 95 percent of the marine insurance market and more than half (at the time of the cap) of Russian oil supplies. The idea was to reduce Russian budget revenues without depriving

the world market of Russian oil. The U.S. and EU have failed to take full advantage of their position in the oil transport and marine insurance markets to put pressure on Russia. July 2023 was the first month in which both the Russian Finance Ministry and Western analysts officially recognized that Russian oil on average traded above the \$60 per barrel price ceiling. The price of a barrel of Urals



SOURCE: MEDIA.GAZPROM-NEFT.COM

in July was \$64.37. This is nearly nine dollars more than in June and only \$16 less than the average July price of a barrel of Brent. This is the first time since the spring of 2022 that the price difference between Urals and Brent has fallen below 20 percent. The price of Russian oil rose faster than Brent (from \$74.71 in June to \$80.07 in July), the Russian Bell portal points out. The price ceiling did not work because of Russia's sharp turnaround of its oil exports from Europe to Asia. India, which did not join the price ceiling agreement, became the main new buyer of Russian oil, and Russian oil companies began to quickly create a "shadow fleet" capable of replacing European (mainly Greek) crude carriers. By the second quarter of

2023, sanctioned oil was being transported by five times as many ships as at the end of 2021, and 80 percent of these tankers carried Russian oil, the Wall Street Journal notes. The same thing is happening with insurance: before the cap, all Russian oil shipments were insured by companies from the US, Europe and Japan; by April 2023, that share had fallen to 50 percent. - writes "WSJ." However, the originators of the price ceiling claim that it is having some effect, forcing Russia to pay more and more for its oil exports. First, Asian buyers are buying Russian crude at a steep discount. Second, building alternative export infrastructure ("shadow fleet," pipelines) also costs billions of dollars. ■



SOURCE:SOVCOMFLOT.RU

25 July 2023

RUSSIA ANNOUNCE VOLUNTARY OIL EXPORT CURB, CRUDE ANALYSTS DOUBT

Russia will cut oil exports by 500,000 barrels per day in August, Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak said on July 3. Russia did not reveal the baseline for its cut. Furthermore, Asian states, notably India, are expected to have strong demand for Russian oil while some Russian refineries are off due to seasonal maintenance works. Analysts yet doubt that Russia would fully deliver on those pledged cuts.

“ Within the efforts to ensure the oil market remains balanced, Russia will voluntarily reduce its oil supply in the month of August by 500,000 barrels per day by cutting its exports by that quantity to global markets,” Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak said. However, he did not provide any details nor did he reveal the baseline for Russian cuts. The Russian decision came on the same day that Saudi Arabia said it would cut output by 1 million barrels per day by August. Whether Russia actually cuts oil exports remains unknown. Russia has seen high and resilient crude exports so far this year, both to sanctions and the price cap. China and India purchase cheap Urals crude while in June Russian oil exports rose by 250,000 bpd from their February levels. India imported a record volume of crude from Russia in June. Daily volumes climbed to 2.2 million barrels a day in June, rising for a tenth consecutive month, Viktor Katona, the head of crude analysis at Kpler told Bloomberg.

Russian purchases once again exceeded the combined shipments of Saudi Arabia and Iraq. State-owned Indian Oil has been the biggest buyer of Russian crude over the past two months, followed by Reliance Industries Ltd. The situation in Russia might matter for Novak’s pledge to curb oil exports. According to Reuters estimates, Russia will have more refining capacity in July than initially planned, Reuters has estimated, which could mean that Moscow may not deliver the 500,000-bpd crude oil export cut it has promised for August. Some big Russian refineries have extended their respective periods of maintenance into July, which resulted in higher-than-anticipated idle refining capacity this month. May and June saw more refining capacity offline than in July, due to maintenance, but Russia’s crude oil shipments in those months reached multi-month highs and were much higher than in February. ■

26 July 2023

GUINEA-BISSAU INVITES RUSSIAN FIRMS TO INVEST IN OIL SECTOR

African leaders have left two days of meetings with Russian President Vladimir Putin on the sidelines of the Russia-Africa summit in St. Petersburg. The leader of Guinea-Bissau, Umaro Sissoco Embaló, hoped Russian oil company Lukoil will invest more in the country’s oil sector.

“ There is a Russian company, the LUKOIL energy consortium that is an expert on oil. It is involved in geological prospecting in our country. We would like the Russian government

to encourage your businesses to step up their involvement in oil production in our country. You have vast experience and we are ready and open to such cooperation with your oil



SOURCE: KREMLIN.RU

businesses,” the president of Guinea-Bissau told his Russian counterpart. “We are not just friends. We are brothers,” he added, arguing that his country “wants to be Russia’s door to the African market.” In response to Embalo’s remarks, Putin said bilateral trade, economic, and investment ties between Russia and Guinea-Bissau have great potential, which has not yet been tapped. The Russian president vowed his country would continue to back the African nation. Other African officials also raised the issue of energy cooperation. Ibrahim Traoré, the chief of the military junta in Burkina Faso, also appealed to Russia to help his country establish a nuclear plant to meet its energy needs. He expressed particular concern over the energy shortage in the Sahel. “I think that if Russia strengthens its position in this region, it will be able to generate energy

for the whole sub-region,” Traoré was quoted as saying. Nigeria’s Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Petroleum Resources, Gabriel Aduda has said that Russia can power African countries with new oil and gas projects. Lukoil, which for years has run operations in Nigeria, has been one of Russia’s biggest companies to invest in the oil and gas industry throughout Africa. The firm has stakes in the Marine XII license near the Republic of Congo as well as operates Lukoil Upstream Production Nigeria LTD, a Nigeria-based subsidiary. Lukoil also has left its footprint in Ghana and Egypt. Lukoil’s expansion in Africa is in line with the Kremlin’s active policy pursued on the continent. In addition to the armaments deal, Russia is investing in the economy of other African countries, mainly through extracting minerals, or is tightening security cooperation. ■



SOURCE: NOVATEK.RU

27 July 2023

RUSSIA'S NOVATEK BOOSTS GAS OUTPUT AND EXPORTS

Russia's second-biggest gas firm Novatek saw an uptick in hydrocarbon production by 1.5 percent in Q2 2023 while it boosted gas output by 0.8 percent in the first six months of 2023. Novatek also sold more gas abroad.

Novatek increased gas production by 0.8 percent to 41.23 billion cubic meters in the first half of 2023, the Russian gas producer said in a statement. The indicator gained 0.5 percent in the second quarter and totaled 20.25 billion cubic meters. Novatek saw a rise in gas sales, including liquefied natural gas, by 6.3 percent, to 40.63 billion cubic meters, in the first six months and by 53.1 percent, to 6.21 billion cubic meters (liquefied natural gas). Gas

sales in Russia ticked up by 0.7 percent, to 34.42 billion cubic meters, in the first six months. In the second quarter of 2023, preliminary total natural gas sales volumes totaled 18.31 billion cubic meters, up 7.7 percent year-on-year. Novatek boosted gas sales in Russia by 1.8 percent, to 15.06 billion cubic meters, and sold more liquefied natural gas abroad, up 47.3 percent, to 3.24 billion cubic meters. "Novatek's hydrocarbon production totaled 158.9 million

barrels of oil equivalent (boe), including 20.35 billion cubic meters of natural gas and 3.0 million tons of liquids (gas condensate and crude oil), with the total hydrocarbons production increasing by 2.3 million boe or by 1.5 percent year-on-year,” the company said in a statement. The company’s hydrocarbon production totaled 321.9 million boe in the first half of 2023, including 41.23 billion cubic meters of natural gas and 6.1 million tons of liquids, an

increase in total hydrocarbons produced by 5.3 million boe, or by 1.7 percent year-on-year. In the second quarter of 2023, preliminary total natural gas sales volumes, including volumes of LNG sold, aggregated 18.31 billion cubic meters, up 7.7 percent compared to a year ago. The natural gas volumes sold in Russia were 15.06 billion cubic meters, up 1.8 percent compared to a year ago. ■

28 July 2023

RUSSIAN JETS REPEATEDLY HARASS U.S. DRONES OVER SYRIA

A huge dam in the Russian-controlled area of southern Ukraine has been destroyed, unleashing a flood. It was a Russian operation that crippled a Ukrainian counteroffensive operation along the Dnieper River on the Kherson section of the front line.

Back in March, Army General Erik Kurilla, head of U.S. Central Command, warned during congressional testimony against an increase in the frequency of Russian provocations. Armed Russian jets violated the US airspace over the Tanf base in Syria 25 times in March. In June, U.S. F-22 Raptor fighter jets were deployed to Jordan in a show of strength amid escalating tensions between U.S. and Russian forces. Little has resulted from these efforts. Russian fighter jets harassed American drones over Syria for three days in a row

between July 5 and 7. In the first incident, which took place on July 5, Russian Su-35 fighters closed in on a Reaper, and one of the Russian pilots moved their aircraft in front of a drone and engaged the Su-35’s afterburner. The jet blast from the afterburner can potentially damage the Reaper’s electronics and it reduced the drone operator’s ability to safely operate the aircraft. A day later, a Russian fighter jet flew “dangerously close” to a US drone over Syria and damaged it with flares. On July 7, three MQ-9 drones were once again harassed by Russian



SOURCE: KREMLIN.RU

fighter aircraft while flying over Syria. On July 16, A Russian fighter jet flew very close to a U.S. surveillance aircraft over Syria, forcing it to go through the turbulent wake and putting the lives of American crew members in danger. On July 26, a Russian fighter approached an MQ-9, damaging the aircraft's left wing in several places. A similar incident had occurred on July 23, forcing an American drone to return to the base. Russia and Iran are trying to pressure U.S. troops that cooperate with Kurdish forces to leave Syria. U.S. troops and the Syrian

Democratic Forces, or a coalition of Kurdish-dominated militias, managed to push ISIS militants into defensive positions. There are about 900 U.S. forces in the country, and others move in and out to conduct missions targeting Islamic State group militants. In May, Russian and Iranian military officials met in Syria to discuss possible strikes to target U.S. military personnel in the country. Iran and Russia agreed to establish a coordination center in Syria in November 2022 to coordinate attacks. ■



SOURCE: DUMA.GOV.RU

29 July 2023

RUSSIAN OPPOSITION FIGURE NAVALNY STANDS NEW TRIAL

Imprisoned Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny stands a new trial. The prosecution had demanded a 20-year prison sentence on charges of extremism. The trial took place behind closed doors.

The verdict in the trial is due to be announced in a makeshift courtroom in the Penal Colony No. 6, where Navalny is being held, about 250 kilometers east of Moscow. Navalny was already serving a nine-year term for alleged fraud and contempt of court. Russia's number one political prisoner could be handed down up to thirty years in

prison. State prosecutors have requested that a Russian court sentence jailed opposition politician Alexei Navalny to another 20 years in a penal colony. The materials filed in the case included some 200 volumes while a new trial was announced in April. More details came to light in May. Court papers showed the new charges relate to six different articles of the

criminal code, At first, the court records only listed one new felony charge against Navalny: creating an extremist organization (up to 12 years in prison). Later, five other charges were added to the same case: inciting extremism (up to 5 years in prison), establishing a nonprofit for infringing on citizen rights, financing extremism (up to 10 years in prison), recruiting minors to take part in dangerous activities, and

vindication of Nazism (up to 3 years in prison). The assigned judge, Andrey Suvorov, has previously considered the cases of Frode Berg, a Norwegian national accused of espionage, the former U.S. Marine Paul Whelan, and former CEO of Inter RAO Karina Tsurkan. Navalny is due to hear the verdict on August 4. Supporters of the imprisoned opposition figure believe the verdict will be harsh as the trial is political. ■

30 July 2023

RUSSIA'S NOVATEK PLANS TO LAUNCH NEW LNG FACILITIES

Production of liquified natural gas is expected to start later this year for Novatek's Arctic LNG-2. It is the second LNG facility Novatek seeks to construct once it has launched Yamal LNG. Novatek also plans to build a third facility in the Murmansk area.

SOURCE: NOVATEK.RU



Mikhelson said that the first line of Arctic LNG 2 will reach its estimated capacity in January-March 2024 with the first LNG to be produced in 2023, according to Leonid Mikhelson, the CEO of Novatek. The Murmansk area is home to the first factory in the world for mass-producing natural gas liquefaction trains on gravity-based structures (GBS), which will be utilized in Arctic LNG. It was delivered through the Northern Sea Route to its future location of production on the Gydan peninsula. Arctic LNG 2's three lines will each have a production capacity of 6.6 million tonnes of LNG and 1.6 tons of gas condensate per year. The plant will utilize natural gas from the nearby Utrennoye field on the Gydan peninsula. The second and third lines will be made operational in 2024 and 2026, respectively. Novatek, with a 60 percent stake, leads Arctic LNG 2. Other shareholders include French energy major TotalEnergies, China's CNPC, CNOOC, and Japan Arctic LNG -

who each hold a 10 percent stake - as well as a consortium of Mitsui & Co, Ltd. and JOGMEC. In August 2024, Novatek plans to launch construction works at Murmansk LNG once its Center for the Construction of Large-Tonnage Offshore Structures (CSCMS) completes works at the second stage of Arctic LNG-2. "After the second platform departs a dock, which will happen in 12 months, in late August, that dock will become available for a liquefaction line for Murmansk LNG," Leonid Mikhelson was quoted as saying. Novatek plans to build a new large-capacity LNG project in the Murmansk region, consisting of three liquefaction lines with a capacity of 6.8 million tons each. The launch of the first line is scheduled for 2027 and the second one--for 2029. The LNG facility in Murmansk will use electricity surplus from the Kola nuclear power plant. The firm hopes to use its own resource base for the project. ■

31 July 2023

OIL AND GAS COOPERATION HIGH ON RUSSIA-AFRICA SUMMIT AGENDA

Representatives of Russia boasted joint energy project in Africa on the sidelines of the second Russia-Africa summit, held this year in St. Petersburg. The first edition took place in 2019 in Sochi. African delegates urged Russian energy firms to expand cooperation in exploring and mapping hydrocarbons in their countries.

“Over the past two years, Russia’s exports of crude oil, petroleum products, and liquefied natural gas to Africa have seen a 2.6-fold increase,” Russian President Vladimir Putin

told the meeting at the Russia-Africa summit in St. Petersburg. “More than 30 promising energy projects with Russia’s participation in sixteen African countries are at various stages



SOURCE: KREMLIN.RU

of development now,” Putin added. Other African states also evince interest in forging ties with Russian companies. Equatorial Guinea would like to see Russian companies as full-fledged partners, and not service contractors for projects in the areas of oil and gas and mining, Antonio Oburu Ondo, who serves as the country’s hydrocarbon minister, said on the sidelines of the summit. He voiced hope Russia’s Lukoil and other major Russian oil and gas firms would invest in the African country. The official informed talks were underway to establish cooperation. Doto Mashaka Biteko, Tanzania’s mineral resources minister, also invited Russian firms to invest in his country’s energy sector. Representatives of Tanzania

Petroleum Development Corporation held talks with Gazprom and Lukoil officials on the margin of the summit. Russian oil company Tatneft also looks to Africa to broaden its energy influence. “Tatneft is eager to consider joint oil and gas projects with African states and deliver petrochemical and diesel supplies,” Nurislam Syubayev, Deputy-General Director-Strategic Development at Tatneft, told the meeting. He said his company was willing to forge a long-term strategic partnership to develop oil and gas fields, upgrade pipelines, build refineries, and modernize energy infrastructure. He also pledged to invest in renewable energy. ■



SOURCE: STRUCTURE.MIL.RU

31 July 2023

RUSSIA HITS UKRAINIAN GRAIN EXPORT INFRASTRUCTURE

Russia has halted a breakthrough wartime deal that allows grain to flow from Ukraine to countries in Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. However, it has launched attacks on Ukrainian ports, striking civilian infrastructure associated with grain exports and threatening to assault all ships heading to Ukrainian ports.

A trio of civilian cargo ships—one each from Israel and Greece plus one with Turkish-Georgian registration—ran the Russian blockade. The ships have indicated they were heading to Ukrainian ports, according to openly shared Automatic Information System (AIS)

data. Why did Russian forces refrain from stopping the vessels? After all, since leaving the grain deal on July 17, Moscow has warned that ships sailing to Ukraine's Black Sea ports will be viewed as military targets. It was perhaps about their flags. Russia would have

never targeted Turkish-flagged vessels as Putin seeks to maintain decent ties with Erdogan although they soured amid recent events. While the blockade of Ukraine's Black Sea is not that efficient, Russian forces continue to destroy grain facilities in Odesa and the Danube ports in Ukraine. Russian air strikes destroyed an estimated 180,000 metric tons of grain crops in the space of nine days this month, Ukraine's foreign ministry informed on July 31. In the two weeks since Russia's withdrawal from the grain deal, Russian attacks have destroyed 26 port

infrastructure facilities and five civilian vessels. National Bank of Ukraine Deputy Governor Sergiy Nikolaychuk said he expected the Black Sea grain corridor to remain closed until the end of Russia's full-scale invasion. "Ukraine has become entirely dependent on alternative European Union routes for its grain exports," he added. Kyiv has limited air defense to protect civilian infrastructure associated with grain exports. Russia attacked Ukraine's ports of Mykolaiv and Odesa with a range of cruise and hypersonic missiles. ■

31 July 2023

NOT ONLY CLUSTER MUNITIONS: WESTERN STATES PLEDGE MORE WEAPONS FOR UKRAINE

NATO allies offered more weapons, ammunition, and other support to Ukraine at the alliance's summit in Vilnius. Importantly, France delivered its long-range cruise missiles to Ukraine. Kyiv now hopes that the United States follows suit and send its ATACMS guides missiles to the war-torn country. In this way, Ukraine could advance its counteroffensive with the cluster bombs provided by the United States.

Ukraine's foreign partners pledged over 1.5 billion euros in military aid for Kyiv while attending the meeting. The aid package included Leopard tanks, Marder infantry fighting vehicles, drones, Patriot air defense systems, and artillery rounds. France has begun delivering SCALP cruise missiles to Ukraine, with a range of up to 250 km. This is an analogue of the British Storm Shadow missile, which is already used by Ukrainian

forces. "Ukraine would benefit from the U.S. provision of ATACM long-range missiles, with a range of 300 km," President Joe Biden's nominee to become the Army's chief of staff, General Randy George, told a Senate committee on July 12. Kyiv has long requested the U.S. to provide Ukraine with the ATACMS long-range missiles, with a range of 300 km. Earlier, France and the UK had begun delivering their cruise missiles Storm Shadows and SCALP



SOURCE: FACEBOOK

to Ukraine. Both cover a similar range. The Biden administration on July 7 announced that it would send cluster munitions as part of a new military aid package worth \$800 million. The capabilities in this package included 155mm howitzers, Bradley Infantry Fighting Vehicles, Stryker Armored Personnel Carriers, and aerial munitions. DPICMs would be useful especially against dug-in Russian positions on the battlefield. Ukrainian Defense Minister Oleksiy Reznikov said the military would not use cluster munitions in urban areas and would use them only “to break through the enemy defense lines.” Cluster munitions would be valuable in breaking through minefields and Russian trenches. Gen. Syrskyi on July 18 confirmed that US cluster munitions had now arrived in Ukraine and

would be ready to use within days. On July 13, Bulgaria agreed to provide the Ukrainian army with some 100 armored personnel carriers. Bulgaria so far has provided Ukraine with ammunition. On the same day, the European Parliament took a major step in approving plans to boost its production of ammunition and missiles to tackle Ukraine’s shortages. The Pentagon announced a new \$1.3 billion package of long-term military aid to Ukraine on July 19. The capabilities in the latest announcement include National Advanced Surface-to-Air Missile Systems (NASAMS), 152mm artillery rounds, Tube-Launched, Optically-Tracked, Wire-Guided (TOW) missiles, Phoenix Ghost and Switchblade unmanned aerial systems, and 175 tactical vehicles, among other weapons. ■



SOURCE: PRESIDENT.GOV.UA

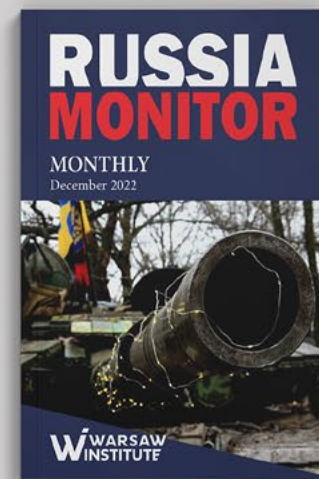
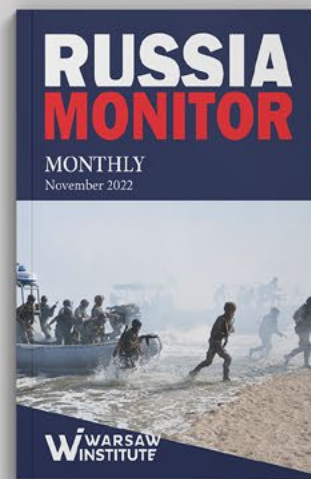
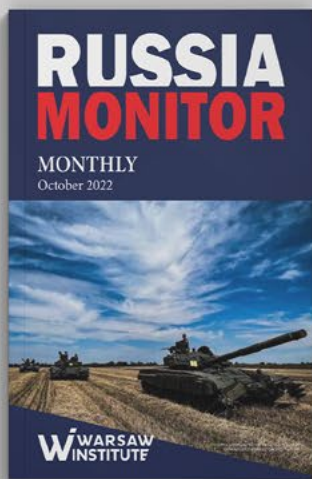
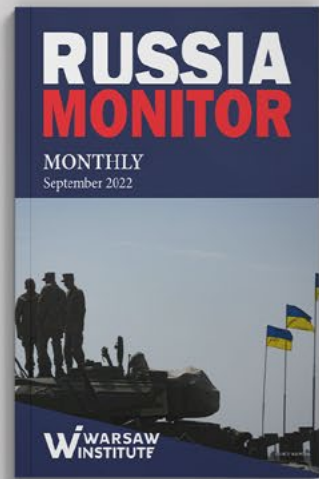
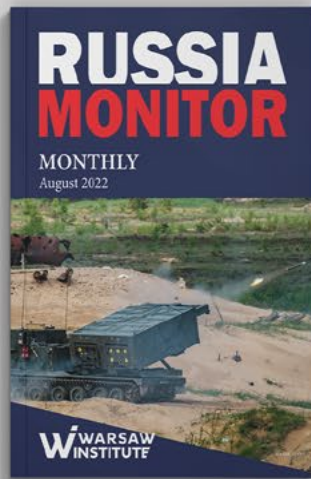
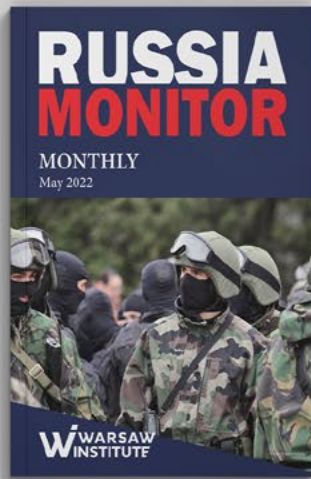
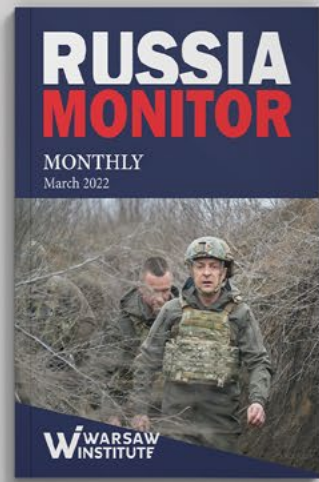
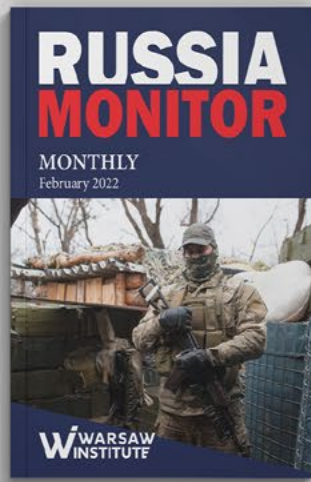
31 July 2023

AZOVSTAL COMMANDERS RETURN TO UKRAINE FROM TURKEY EXILE

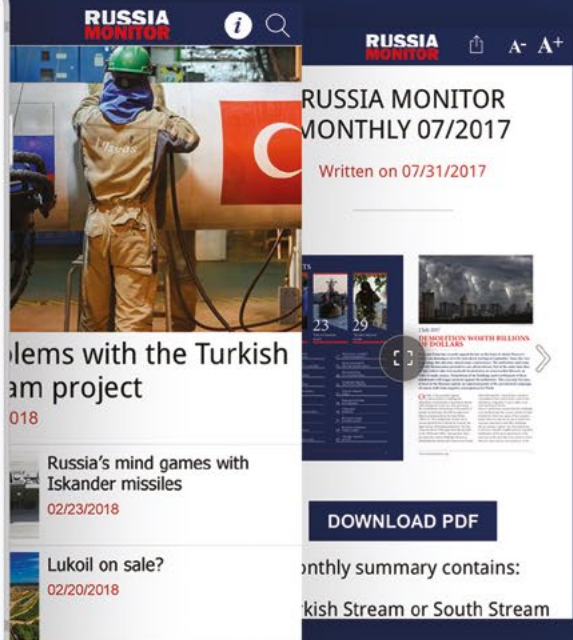
The government in Ankara has maintained a delicate balance in maintaining its diplomatic ties with Russia while making continuous efforts to establish friendly ties with the United States and European nations. One example is that Turkish President Recep Erdogan received his Ukrainian counterpart in Turkey and allowed Mariupol commanders return to Ukraine.

After three-month fighting, Azovstal defenders were finally ordered to surrender in May last year. They were taken prisoner by Russia. In September, Ukraine announced the release of 215 of its soldiers, including fighters who led the defense of Mariupol's Azovstal steelworks. Five of them were exiled in Turkey until the end of the war, as agreed in talks with Russia, where Turkish President Recep Erdogan played his part. President Volodymyr Zelenskiy brought home from Turkey on July 7 five former commanders of Ukraine's garrison in Mariupol. Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov claimed Ukraine and Turkey "violated" prisoner exchange agreements. Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan said on July 12 in Vilnius that Russia had changed its stance on the release of former commanders of Ukrainian prisoners of war. It became apparent when Zelenskiy

arrived in Turkey for the first time since Russia invaded Ukraine last year. Ukraine deserves to have NATO membership, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said, following talks with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy. Both leaders also agreed to cooperate on the development of strategic technologies such as unmanned aerial vehicles. Ukraine expects that it will receive a delivery of Turkish-made T-155 Firtina self-propelled howitzers. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov told his Turkish counterpart, Hakan Fidan, that the course of continuing weapons supplies to Ukraine is "destructive," the Russian foreign ministry said on July 9 of their phone call. By quitting the Turkey-brokered grain deal, Russia retaliated against Erdogan's decision to release Azovstal defenders and allow Sweden to join NATO. ■



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