



Indicators and Thresholds for Russian Military Operations in Ukraine and/or Belarus

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UPDATED JANUARY 14, 5:00pm

Updates to this document since the previous publication on January 13, 5:00 pm are highlighted

New updates to this publication:

Russia

Unknown actors – very likely the Kremlin – conducted the largest cyberattack against the Ukrainian government since 2018 on the late night of January 13-14.¹ The attack targeted over 70 central and regional government websites and disabled many, including the websites of Ukraine’s Cabinet of Ministers, Foreign Ministry, Energy Ministry, Veterans Affairs Ministry, and State Treasury, among others.² The attackers posted a message on hacked Ukrainian government websites (in Russian, Ukrainian, and Polish) stating that Ukrainian users’ personal data was leaked publicly and that all data on users’ personal computers was destroyed. Ukrainian authorities stated that Ukrainian users’ data was not leaked. The hackers’ message also instructed readers to “be afraid and wait for the worst. For your past, present, and future. For Volhynia, for the [Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists – Ukrainian Insurgent Army], for Galicia, for Polesie and for historical lands.” The Ukrainian Insurgent Army was a right-wing insurgency in Western Ukraine that ethnically cleansed Volhynia, Galicia, and Polesie of ethnic Poles in 1943 – 1945.³ The Kremlin accuses contemporary Ukraine of being under the influence of Ukrainian neo-Nazis linked to the Ukrainian Insurgent Army. Ukraine’s foreign ministry spokesperson told *Reuters* it was too early to attribute the attack but said that Russia has conducted similar attacks in the past.⁴

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov reiterated Kremlin demands that the West respond to Russia’s security propositions quickly on December 14.⁵ Lavrov said “[Russia] won’t wait forever” and that US efforts to consult all NATO allies and OSCE members before engaging Moscow are “attempts to drag out the process.” Lavrov said that the Kremlin’s “patience has run out,” that it is “time for [Russia] to go.” Lavrov reiterated that Russia’s security demands are a package deal and characterized NATO’s line vetoes of certain non-starter propositions as a “flagrant violation of the other parts of this inseparable package.” Lavrov said that NATO’s hypothetical construction of military bases in Ukraine, the Sea of Azov, or the deployment of Western military instructors to Donbas would constitute violations of Russia’s red lines.⁶ Lavrov accused the UK of constructing bases in Ukraine and a naval base on the Sea of Azov. Lavrov also accused US, Canadian, and British troops of being permanently stationed in the Baltic states and Northern Europe “under the guise of ‘rotation.’” Lavrov blamed the West for increasing the likelihood of conflict. Lavrov accused the US of undermining the “architecture of international relations based on the UN Charter” and “replacing international law with their ‘rules’ on which they want to force everyone to build a new world order.” Lavrov characterized Ukraine’s government as being run by right-wing extremists, claiming that “nothing [in Ukrainian governance] has changed,” and grouped Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky in the same category with former Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko, Ukraine’s “Right Sector” party, and the Azov Battalion. The Kremlin had not prominently accused NATO of creating “bases in Ukraine” prior to this speech.

Russian State Duma Speaker Vyacheslav Volodin said the US should “stop now before it is too late” and implement a security agreement with the Kremlin on January 14.⁷ Volodin also said that the US should stop threatening Russia with sanctions that will “only destroy relations.”

Russia’s Eastern Military District (EMD) began snap combat readiness inspections involving deployments over long distances on January 14.⁸ Russia’s Ministry of Defense stated these exercises test EMD units’ ability to complete missions after deploying long distances. These exercises are likely cover for the EMD elements that have deployed closer towards Ukraine since early January 2022.

Russian social media users observed likely elements of Russia’s 155th Naval Infantry Brigade (of the Russian Pacific Fleet) in Krasnoyarsk deploying westward on January 14.⁹ Russian social media users posted video of railcars with Nona-S 120mm mortars, T-80BV tanks, MT-LB armored tracked vehicles, and BMP-3 infantry fighting vehicles. The destination of these observed elements is unclear as of January 14. The Russian military is likely deploying elements of the 155th Brigade towards Ukraine.

Russian Southern Military District (SMD) Commander Alexander Dvornikov announced plans to equip unspecified SMD elements with approximately 3,000 pieces of new equipment in 2022.¹⁰ The equipment includes unspecified modern hardware, including 27 aircraft, 37 helicopters, an unspecified number of armored vehicles, five warships and boats, anti-aircraft missile systems, and other specialized equipment. These acquisitions will likely support the development of the Russian 19th Motorized Rifle Division of the 58th Combined Arms Army and the 20th Motorized Rifle Division of the 8th Combined Arms Army; Dvornikov previously announced on January 12 that the SMD will finalize the formation of two new divisions – likely the 19th and 20th – by the end of 2022.

Brigade-sized elements of the 150th Motorized Rifle Division (8th Combined Arms Army) performed live fire exercises at the Kuzminsky and Kadamovsky training grounds in Rostov, Russia, on January 14.¹¹ Over 2,500 personnel (approximately 100 tank crews) of the 150th Division participated in these exercises.

Ukraine’s Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) claimed that Russia’s 8th Combined Arms Army launched a large-scale combat and mobilization readiness inspection of the Donetsk and Luhansk proxy militias on January 14.¹² The GUR claimed that Russian proxy units deployed to training grounds for tactical, engineering, and live fire exercises with tank, combat vehicle, and indirect fire crews. Proxy administrators inspected military equipment storages intended to support proxy militia’s mobilization reserves.

Battalion-sized elements of the 4th Tank Division (1st Tank Army) participated in training in Moscow Oblast on January 13.¹³ Approximately 600 tank personnel practiced standard fire and maneuver tactical tasks. This was likely a routine training exercise for new personnel.

United States

US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken said on January 13 that the US will continue consultations with its allies following US-Russia, NATO-Russia Council, and Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)- Russia summits on

January 10-13.¹⁴ Blinken said that the US did not expect any “breakthroughs” during the summits, instead warning Russian President Vladimir Putin of potential consequences if the Kremlin decides to invade Ukraine. Blinken said that Putin is keeping “his options open” and has not “fully decided on what he is going to do.” Blinken said the US is coordinating with European countries within and outside of the Group of Seven (G7), NATO, and the European Union to shape further measures against Russian aggression.

NATO/EU Activity

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg stated that NATO and Ukraine will sign an agreement on enhanced cyber cooperation “in the coming days” on January 14.¹⁵ Stoltenberg condemned the January 13-14 cyberattacks against Ukraine and framed this agreement as a NATO response. Stoltenberg specified neither the scale or scope of this cooperation agreement nor planned timing of its adoption.

Swedish Chief of Joint Operations Michael Claesson told the *Associated Press (AP)* on January 14 that the Swedish military increased its readiness level in response to increased Russian military activity in the Baltic Sea.¹⁶ Claesson told AP that Sweden “repositioned its troops” and that Swedish forces would “be visible” on Gotland – a strategically significant Swedish island located approximately 300 kilometers from the Russian exclave of Kaliningrad.

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg reiterated that NATO decided in 2008 that Ukraine and Georgia will become NATO members in an interview with Italian newspaper *La Repubblica* on January 13.¹⁷

Ukrainian Political Activity

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky told UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson that the West must be ready to immediately issue a preventative sanctions package to counter Russian aggression on January 13.¹⁸ Zelensky reiterated that the West should not make any decisions about Ukraine without Ukrainian participation and that the West must remain “firm and decisive.” Zelensky reiterated Ukraine’s interests to intensify the negotiation process within the Normandy Format. Ukraine’s readout states that Johnson and Zelensky agreed that the Kremlin uses its Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline as a weapon.

Ukrainian Armed Forces Commander-in-Chief Valeriy Zaluzhny participated in a NATO Military Committee meeting on January 13.¹⁹ Zaluzhny briefed NATO commanders about Russia’s military buildup near Ukraine and the Kremlin’s hybrid war methods using energy pressure, migration crises, and information operations. Zaluzhny said that Russia’s recent military threat to Ukraine and ultimatums to the West require a “consolidated response” from NATO and Ukraine. Zaluzhny said he discussed issues on the “practical implementation of Ukraine’s NATO status with enhanced capabilities and the continuation of mutually beneficial military cooperation” during the meeting.²⁰

Ukrainian Defense Minister Oleksiy Reznikov and Ukrainian defense officials attended an unprecedented meeting with over 30 US defense industry companies on January 12.²¹ Ukrainian officials and unspecified US defense companies discussed increasing cooperation in providing Ukraine advanced defense systems, including automated command and control systems, air defense systems, and specialized ammunition for naval forces, intelligence, and electronic warfare

units. This meeting was the first of its kind and indicates intensified US efforts to augment Ukraine's defense capabilities.

Kremlin Narratives of the Day

January 14

- **Kremlin-sponsored media amplified pro-Russian Ukrainian MP Yuriy Boyko's statement that Kyiv should focus on bringing peace to Donbas rather than joining NATO on January 14.**²² Boyko stated that both the administrations of current Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and previous Ukrainian president Petro Poroshenko stubbornly pushed for NATO membership and neglected the majority will of the Ukrainian people. Boyko said that recent US-Russia, NATO-Russia Council, and Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)-Russia summits are beneficial for Ukraine because leading global powers can resolve the Ukrainian conflict diplomatically. The Kremlin is advancing narratives that Ukraine's capitulation to the Kremlin is the only way to resolve the conflict in Donbas and that Zelensky is the same as Poroshenko.

January 13

- **Russian Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Maria Zakharova accused Ukrainian forces of increasing attacks against Donbas on January 13.**²³ Zakharova accused Ukraine of increasing attacks in Donbas and that the civilian population is suffering. Zakharova condemned the west for providing Ukraine with weapons and accused Ukraine of "sabotaging" the Minsk II Accords and refusing to dialogue with the Kremlin's proxies in Donetsk and Luhansk.

Russia is setting conditions to conduct military operations against Ukraine and/or in Belarus in the coming weeks or months. The Russian Federation has positioned military forces around Ukraine's border and near the border with Belarus able to initiate offensive operations on very short notice with very little warning. Russian officials and media outlets have been setting conditions in the information space to support such operations. This document is not intended as a forecast or an assessment of the likelihood of any such Russian activities, all of which are also consistent with Russian non-military lines of effort against Ukraine, Belarus, the US, and NATO.

Possible Russian military actions:

- 1) Overt deployment of Russian conventional military forces into Belarus on the pretext of defending against planned NATO aggression.
- 2) Overt deployment of Russian conventional military forces into the Donbas region of Ukraine ostensibly to preempt and prevent a Ukrainian attack on the region.
- 3) Invasion of Ukraine beyond occupied Donbas and Crimea with scenarios ranging from limited incursions (possible) to a full-scale mechanized drive on Kyiv (unlikely).

These activities can be mutually reinforcing and are in no way mutually exclusive.

- Russian forces and information operations are postured to support overt deployments into both Donbas and Belarus simultaneously.
- They could conduct those operations and also drive into unoccupied Ukraine simultaneously, although they would likely require more reinforcements on the Ukrainian border than have yet been observed.
- They could alternatively first deploy into Donbas and Belarus and then invade unoccupied Ukraine as a subsequent phase.

ISW has been forecasting since October 2020 that Russia would deploy its own ground forces into Belarus at some point. We have not forecasted that Russia would deploy its own troops into Donbas, but such a development would not be inconsistent with the general trend of our assessments. We have consistently held that an invasion of unoccupied Ukraine is highly unlikely and would not occur without a major change in the situation and a visible Russian information campaign to set conditions for such an action. We stand by that assessment.

This document is not a forecast or an assessment. It lays out the indicators we are using to refine our assessments and forecasts, noting which ones have tripped, which have partially tripped, and which have not tripped. It then presents the dominant narrative from the Kremlin for each day starting on November 22, followed by a run-down of key activities by Ukraine and other states. This is an interim document, which we expect to update regularly. We present this interim assessment and forecast, along with indicators, to help frame ongoing discussions about Russian actions. This is not a finished analytical product.

Military-Political Indicators

Tripped:

1. An increase of Russian command and control (C2) elements inside Donbas or in southern or western Russia near the Russian-Ukrainian border. – *Likely tripped, inferred from 8th Combined Arms Army (CAA) announcement of command post exercise in Donbas, and Ukrainian claims of increased Russian logistics support activities in Donbas throughout November 2021.*²⁴ *Ukrainian military intelligence additionally reported on December 14 that Russian officers began meeting with units commanders in Russia's proxy 1st and 2nd Corps in Donbas.*²⁵
2. Decreased bandwidth on Russian railways for commercial enterprises since October.²⁶ – *The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) is likely moving lots of hardware.*
3. Mobilization of the Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) and Luhansk People's Republic (LNR) militias. – *Likely tripped given DNR/LNR reserves reportedly mobilized under 8th CAA leadership on November 22.*²⁷
4. Mobilization of artillery elements at the regiment and brigade level. – *Arguably tripped with the Russian acknowledgement of significant mobilizations in the Southern Military District on December 1. The Kremlin confirmed military mobilizations in Opuk, Crimea; many artillery elements of the 58th CAA are likely still located in Opuk after the April 2021 buildup.*
5. Increased rotary and fixed wing deployments near Ukraine – *Arguably tripped. Inferred from a New York Times (NYT) report on January 10 that Russia deployed additional attack and transport helicopters and ground attack fighters closer to Ukraine in an unspecified past time frame, citing anonymous US officials.*²⁸

Partially Tripped:

1. Increased volume of video recordings capturing Russian hardware moving in western Russia towards Ukraine. – *We have observed an increase in video volume in November. Threshold: We still have not seen the same quantity of video as we saw in April, but we are steadily approaching that point.*
2. The Kremlin issues some form of political ultimatum to Kyiv or calls Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky in for senior talks. – *Arguably tripped by notable Kremlin-aligned think tank scholar Fyodor Lukyanov's November 24 article in which he almost says that if NATO does not give Russian President Vladimir Putin a solid promise that Ukraine won't*

join NATO, there will be war similar to the Russia-Georgian war of 2008.²⁹ There is still no formal Kremlin statement of an ultimatum or a call for Zelensky talks.

3. More Russian deployments, mobilizations, or snap exercises at scale (maneuver elements at the brigade, regiment, and/or multiple battalion tactical group level from the 1st Tank Army, and the 20th, 8th, and 41st CAAs).
 1. 20th CAA – Tripped. *We may not see this occur in the open source (OSINT) if/when it occurs. Approximately 700 snipers, likely of the 20th CAA, began conducting reconnaissance and sniper exercises near the Ukrainian border on December 2.*³⁰ *Russia's Western Military District (WMD) announced elements of the 20th Combined Arms Army (CAA) will conduct brigade-level exercises near the Ukrainian border in Voronezh, Belgorod, Bryansk, and Smolensk oblasts on January 11.*³¹
 2. 1st Tank Army – *Likely tripped. The 1st Tank Army is likely establishing an assembly area in Voronezh, Russia. Russian authorities on December 11 issued a Notice to Airman (NOTAM) covering the Pogonovo Training Ground in Voronezh from December 16-22.*³² *The Russian Ministry of Defense stated on December 9 that unspecified tank units (approximately 200 personnel) of the Western Military District conducted live fire training with battalion-sized artillery elements at the Pogonovo and Krintsa training grounds in Voronezh.*³³ *Russian social media users observed approximately two battalions of T-80 and T-72 tanks in Maslovka, Voronezh, on December 8-11,*³⁴ *and also observed Buk air defense systems likely of the 49th Air Defense Brigade of the 1st Tank Army at railheads in Voronezh on December 8.*³⁵ *Social media users observed T-80s, likely of the 4th Tank Division and equipment of the 2nd Tank Division, in Maslovka, Voronezh, in mid-November.*³⁶ *The likely deployment of elements of two divisions and air defense units of the 1st Tank Army indicates significant elements of the army deploying to Voronezh. The deployment of the 1st Tank Army to Voronezh, as opposed to Belarus, indicates that the most dangerous course of action (MDCOA) of a mechanized drive to Kyiv from Belarus is less likely.*
 3. 8th CAA – *Tripped with the DNR and LNR reserve mobilization on November 22 and announcement of large Southern Military District exercises on December 1 and January 14.*³⁷
 4. 41st CAA – *Likely partially tripped. Independent OSINT observers claim they observed more trucks of the 41st CAA deploy via rail from Siberia towards Yelnya on December 1.*³⁸ *Previously observed elements of the 41st CAA are still at Yelnya as of December 1.*³⁹ *The Russian Ministry of Defense additionally announced it formed a new Tank Support Fighting Vehicle (BMPT) company—possibly at Yelnya—on December 1.*⁴⁰
4. Mobilization of Russia's Black Sea naval elements. – *Partially tripped as of December 7. Two large landing ships of the Russian Black Sea Fleet loaded naval infantry for amphibious assault exercises at the Opuk Training Ground in Crimea on December 7.*⁴¹ *The Caesar Kunikov and Novocherkassk large landing ships of the Black Sea fleet onboarded an unspecified number of naval infantry at an unspecified location for future exercises at Opuk on an unspecified future date. More than 500 marines of the Russian Black Sea Fleet began conducting exercises at unspecified Crimean training grounds on December 3.*⁴² *This mobilization does not constitute mobilization at scale but is significant as Black Sea Fleet naval infantry's first public battalion-sized mobilization since the crisis began in October 2021. Black Sea Fleet naval aviation held an exercise of only 10 crews of Su-27 and Su-30 on November 24.*⁴³ *Missile ship Shuya of the Black Sea Fleet conducted an exercise on November 26 in response to the announcement of the USS Arleigh Burke's*

deployment to the Black Sea.⁴⁴ The Black Sea Fleet's S-400 air defense units stationed in Crimea conducted readiness exercises on December 15.⁴⁵

5. Mobilization of Russia's Airborne Forces (VDV) – *Partially tripped with the December 22 announcement of brigade-sized exercises by the 7th Airborne Division in Crimea and Novorossiysk.⁴⁶*
6. MDCOA: Activations/mobilization/heightened readiness of the Russian Strategic Rocket Forces (nuclear weapons). – *We will very likely not see this in the open source if it occurs, but it would be an indicator that an operation is imminent or already underway. Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu has made public statements suggesting that the SRF are at heightened alert, however.⁴⁷ Further partially tripped on January 2 after TASS reported that Russia's nuclear triad will hold command staff exercises in early 2022 as part of Grom exercises. Grom exercises typically occur in the fall, however. Grom exercises in early 2022 could provide cover to actual nuclear forces mobilization.*

Not Tripped:

1. Mobilization of Caspian Sea Fleet elements in the Black Sea near Ukraine. – *We may not see this occur in the open source if/when it occurs. Caspian Sea Fleet elements may still be in the Black Sea left over from the April 2021 buildup. Over 300 naval infantry of the Caspian Flotilla conducted exercises with Southern Military District (SMD) air support at the Adanak Training Ground in Dagestan on December 7.⁴⁸ These exercises do not trip this indicator but are significant as the Caspian Flotilla naval infantry's first battalion-sized exercises since the crisis began in October 2021. At least two Caspian Flotilla landing craft deployed to the Black Sea in fall 2021.⁴⁹*
2. Most Dangerous Course of Action (MDCOA): The Kremlin escalates the migrant crisis in Belarus. *The Kremlin would likely do so in order to set conditions for deployment of Russian ground forces into Belarus.*
3. MDCOA: Kremlin deploys ground forces to Belarus. – *Not tripped yet.*

Information Domain Indicators

Tripped:

1. The Kremlin publicly defines red lines. – *Tripped on December 1 when Putin stated he insists on "legal guarantees" that NATO will not expand further eastward towards Russia and called for formal negotiations with the US.⁵⁰ Partially tripped when Putin defined NATO deployments of "shock weapon systems" to Ukraine as one Kremlin "red line" on November 30.*
2. Belarus claims NATO is building up military forces near Belarus. – *The Belarusian MoD accused Poland of forming a "shock group" near Belarus on November 11 and accused Lithuania and Latvia of building their own groups on November 23.⁵¹ Threshold: Russian media has not been emphasizing this information operation yet. If the Kremlin media bolsters it, then a Russian deployment to Belarus and the MDCOA is more likely.*
3. Russian claims that weapon shipments to Ukraine destabilize the situation. – *Tripped on November 22.⁵² Russian MFA spokesperson Maria Zakharova claimed on December 15 that the presence of 10,000 NATO servicemen in Ukraine impedes the implementation of the Minsk Agreements.⁵³*
4. Kremlin warns about a "repeat of Srebrenica." – *Tripped on December 10. Putin said that the situation in Donbas resembles a genocide on December 9. Putin stated that "Russophobia is the first step towards genocide," and that current events in Donbas are "very reminiscent of a genocide."⁵⁴ The head of Russia Today's Russia and FSU desk resurfaced the Srebrenica*

meme on November 23.⁵⁵ The last time the Kremlin prominently mentioned the Srebrenica meme was in December 2019, when Putin warned that a lack of amnesty for DNR and LNR fighters would result in a second Srebrenica.⁵⁶ News anchors on primetime Kremlin-run TV claimed on December 10 that Ukraine is carrying out a “genocide against the Russian nation.”⁵⁷

5. Intensified Kremlin information operations claiming NATO is deploying forces into Ukraine or creating “NATO bases” inside Ukraine. – *Tripped on December 15 and January 14. Russian MFA spokesperson Zakharova claimed on December 15 that NATO has 10,000 servicemen in Ukraine, including 4,000 Americans.*⁵⁸ Sergey Lavrov accused the UK of constructing bases in Ukraine and a naval base on the Sea of Azov on January 14.⁵⁹

Partially Tripped:

- MDCOA: Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko requests Russian ground forces in Belarus. – *Partially tripped on November 29 with Lukashenko’s statement that Belarus will support Russia during any military escalation in Donbas. Belarusian Defense Minister Viktor Khrenin announced a joint military exercise with Russia on the Belarusian-Ukrainian border on an unspecified future date. Khrenin additionally announced Belarusian forces will begin major exercises on December 1.*⁶⁰
- Russian claims that Kyiv has de facto wholesale abandoned the Minsk Agreements and Russia must therefore act to protect Donbas. – *Overall not tripped, but some memes that buttress this have been circulating.*
 1. Russian claims that “Zelensky cannot be reasoned with” or “Zelensky is abandoning the Minsk Agreements.” – *partially tripped for a long time. Threshold: This meme has been on medium-low burner since spring 2020 after Zelensky rejected the Kremlin’s call to implement the Steinmeier formula – one of the Kremlin’s preferred interpretations of the Minsk Agreements. This would move to fully tripped if there is an invigorated Kremlin media push around a centralized narrative that “Kyiv has completely disregarded the Minsk Agreements.” This push has not occurred, and this narrative has not left the backburner.*
 2. Russian claims that “Germany and France are de facto allowing Kyiv to get away with ignoring the Minsk Agreements.” – *Tripped on November 21.*⁶¹
- Sustained or intensified Kremlin information operations claiming Ukraine is attacking or preparing to attack Donbas. – *Overall, not tripped, but the Kremlin has increased its information operations supporting this narrative throughout December.*
 1. Kremlin claims Ukraine is attacking civilians. – *Not tripped yet.*
 2. Kremlin claims Ukraine is amassing forces near Donbas. – *Tripped on December 1.*⁶²
 3. Kremlin claims Ukraine is attacking “ethnic Russians” or “Russian citizens.” – *Partially tripped as of November 29 when Russian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova said Russia will continue its humanitarian assistance for “Russian citizens” in Donbas.*⁶³ *The Kremlin also admitted a first batch of 100 Russian passport holders in Donbas to join Putin’s ruling United Russia Party on November 30.*⁶⁴ *This development could support a Russian information operation about Ukrainian attacks against “Russian citizens in Donbas.” The Kremlin has not yet claimed Ukraine is attacking ethnic Russians or Russian citizens in Donbas as of November 30.*
 4. Kremlin claims Ukrainian forces are using TB2 drones or Javelins against civilians in Donbas. – *Not tripped as of December 15.*
 5. Kremlin claims Ukraine is violating the demilitarized zones in Zolote, Stanitsa Luhanska, and Petrivske. – *Partially tripped as of November 28. The LNR People’s Militia claimed that Ukrainian Army forces entered the disengagement zone in Zolote, Luhansk, on November 28. The LNR claimed that it observed two soldiers of Ukraine’s 24th Mechanized Brigade inside former Ukrainian-held positions in the frontline*

village of Zolote.⁶⁵ Thresholds for this indicator include separatist claims of Ukrainians violations of the two other Petriuske and Stanitsa Luhanska demilitarized zones (not tripped yet), and large scale violations, such as full battalion deployments to Zolote, Petriuske, and Stanitsa Luhanska. Russian proxy claims that two soldiers were observed in the Zolote demilitarized zone occupies a low place on the threshold scale for this narrative.

- Senior Kremlin officials and Russian media pundits increasingly discuss the conditions under which Russian intervention in Ukraine is necessary, acceptable, or desirable. – *Partially tripped on December 27 when Russian State Duma Deputy Vladimir Zhirinovskiy called for Russian strikes against Ukraine and the West on New Year's Eve.*⁶⁶
- Official statements that Russia is “prepared to intervene if necessary” to prevent humanitarian catastrophe in Ukraine or secure Russian interest vis-à-vis NATO. – *Partially tripped after Sergey Lavrov gave an interview on December 31 in which he accused Ukraine of perceiving NATO support for Ukraine as “carte blanche for a military operation” against Donbas and stated that Russia will take “all necessary measures” to protect “Russian citizens” in Donbas.*⁶⁷

Not Tripped:

1. The Kremlin/Russian media stops denying a buildup around Ukraine – *Not tripped yet.*
2. Kremlin claims that actual or likely humanitarian catastrophe in Ukraine necessitates overt Russian intervention. – *Not tripped yet.*⁶⁸
3. Kremlin claims that Russians who oppose direct action in Ukraine are “Western agents” or victims of Western propaganda. – *Not tripped yet.*⁶⁹
4. Senior Kremlin officials openly advocating for overt intervention in Ukraine. – *Not tripped yet.*⁷⁰
5. A fear campaign warning of an impending humanitarian catastrophe in Ukraine targeting ethnic Russians or Russian citizens outside occupied Donbas. – *Not tripped yet, though Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov gave an interview on December 31 in which he accused Ukraine of perceiving NATO support for Ukraine as “carte blanche for a military operation” against Donbas and stated that Russia will take “all necessary measures” to protect “Russian citizens” in Donbas.*⁷¹
6. Russian media entities supporting these narratives with a high volume of messaging in a centrally directed manner to create a propaganda echo chamber in Russia’s domestic information space. – *Not tripped yet.*⁷²
7. MDCOA: A concerted Russian information operation to demoralize the Ukrainian population ahead of a likely Russian offensive against Ukraine. – *Overall, not tripped, but the Kremlin has increased its information operations supporting this narrative throughout December.*
 1. Overt threats that Russia would intend to capture Kyiv, Kharkiv, Mariupol, and other significant Ukrainian cities. – *Not tripped yet.*
 2. The high costs that war with Russia would entail for Ukraine. – *Not tripped yet.*
 3. The inevitability of decisive Russian Victory in such a war. – *Partially tripped on December 31.*⁷³
 4. The West will not support Ukraine in such a war. – *Not tripped yet.*
 5. Political capitulation to the Kremlin would preempt the war. – *Not tripped yet.*
 6. Ukraine is not really a sovereign state is controlled by the West. – *Partially tripped on December 31.*⁷⁴
8. MDCOA: Titushki (paid provocateurs) actions in Kyiv, Odesa, Kharkiv, Mariupol, Sumy, or other significant Ukrainian cities. – *Not tripped yet.*

Kremlin Narratives / Memes of the Day

January 14

- **Kremlin-sponsored media amplified pro-Russian Ukrainian MP Yuriy Boyko's statement that Kyiv should focus on bringing peace to Donbas rather than joining NATO on January 14.**⁷⁵ Boyko stated that both the administrations of current Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and previous Ukrainian president Petro Poroshenko stubbornly pushed for NATO membership and neglected the majority will of the Ukrainian people. Boyko said that recent US-Russia, NATO-Russia Council, and Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)-Russia summits are beneficial for Ukraine because leading global powers can resolve the Ukrainian conflict diplomatically. The Kremlin is advancing narratives that Ukraine's capitulation to the Kremlin is the only way to resolve the conflict in Donbas and that Zelensky is the same as Poroshenko.

January 13

- **Russian Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Maria Zakharova accused Ukrainian forces of increasing attacks against Donbas on January 13.**⁷⁶ Zakharova accused Ukraine of increasing attacks in Donbas and that the civilian population is suffering. Zakharova condemned the west for providing Ukraine with weapons and accused Ukraine of "sabotaging" the Minsk II Accords and refusing to dialogue with the Kremlin's proxies in Donetsk and Luhansk.
- **Russian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova accused the US and NATO of significantly "enlarging military development" in Ukraine by allocating \$200 million in defense funding to Kyiv in December 2021 on January 13.**⁷⁷ Zakharova said the Kremlin has concerns that US and NATO also promote "aggressive militaristic rhetoric" and plan joint military exercises within Ukraine. Zakharova said that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's readiness to participate in the Normandy Four "looks simply populist" because Ukraine did not abide by the Minsk Accords.⁷⁸ Zakharova said that the West supports Ukraine's violation of the Minsk Accords. The Kremlin continues to push the narrative that the West manipulates the Ukrainian government to advance the West's crusade against Russia.
- **Kremlin-sponsored media amplified a segment of Polish Foreign Minister Zbigniew Rau's speech about the elevated chance of war at the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) summit with Russia on January 13.**⁷⁹ Rau said that "the risk of war in the OSCE region today is much greater than ever in the last 30 years" in reference to the Kremlin's non-starter security demands and threats against Ukraine and NATO.⁸⁰ The Kremlin media did not include this context likely to push a narrative that the West seeks to conduct a war against Russia or reinforce the narrative about the inevitability of war if the West does not meet Russia's demands.
- **Russian State Duma Vice-Speaker Petr Tolstoy said that Russia should restore the borders of the Russian Empire and said that the Baltic states and Finland would voluntarily "crawl back" to Russia within the next ten years on January 13.**⁸¹ Tolstoy did not specify how the Kremlin would achieve this conquest.

January 12

- **Russian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova attacked US Under Secretary for Political Affairs Victoria Nuland's January 11 briefing on January 12.**⁸² Zakharova responded to Nuland's hypothetical statement that if Nuland were a Russian citizen, she would invest money spent on fielding military units near Ukraine on Russian domestic infrastructure and healthcare.⁸³ Zakharova retorted that the US could fix its own declining infrastructure by reducing US military bases in Europe and ceasing all financial

support for color revolutions and opposition leaders like Belarusian opposition leader Svetlana Tikhanouskaya.⁸⁴ Kremlin-sponsored media amplified Nuland's statement that Washington is influencing Germany and the European Union (EU) to delay the approval of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline on January 11.⁸⁵ Russian media is pushing a narrative that the US disregards EU interests in the American effort to advance US efforts against Russia.

- **Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov accused US officials of issuing “aggressive statements” about the US-Russia strategic security dialogue on Russian security guarantees on January 12.**⁸⁶ Peskov said that Russia will continue conducting military exercises because they are transparent and are not related to negotiations with the West.⁸⁷ Peskov additionally falsely stated that Russia “does not shower [dialogue partners] with threats and ultimatums,” unlike the US.⁸⁸

January 11

- **Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov's compared threats of US sanctions against Russia as an American “information artillery barrage before negotiations” on January 11.**⁸⁹ The Kremlin is likely pushing a narrative to depict the US as inflexible on security negotiations for Russia's domestic audience.
- **Kremlin-sponsored media outlet *Izvestia* amplified retired Norwegian Lieutenant General Robert Mood's article to falsely imply that a Norwegian officer proposed to admit Russia to NATO on January 11.**⁹⁰ Mood published an article on January 9 in which he asked a rhetorical question of whether it is possible to envisage a “more defensive NATO that is open to everyone, including Russia,” given that admitting former adversaries, like Germany, into NATO helped liberalize those states.⁹¹ Kremlin media miscontextualized Mood's article and suggested that an active Norwegian officer advocated admitting Russia into NATO to fix all current foreign policy problems between Russia and the West.⁹² The Kremlin is likely supporting a narrative that there is rift between European Union and NATO countries on relations with Russia.
- **Russian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova said that White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki is “incompetent” and undermines US leadership on Russian state television on January 11.**⁹³ Zakharova's comments followed Psaki's claim that Russian media is misreporting the outcomes of the January 10 US-Russia strategic dialogue summit. Russian television often derides Psaki's character and intelligence likely to create a recognizable antagonist figure for Russia's domestic audience.
- **The Russian Foreign Ministry used increasingly irreverent rhetoric towards a tweet from a Polish member of the European Parliament on January 11.** Former Polish Foreign Minister and current Polish member of the European Parliament Radoslaw Sikorski tweeted that Russia is a “serial rapist” and that NATO will kick “Russia in the balls” on January 10.⁹⁴ Russian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova responded that Russia is feminine and insinuated that Sikorski “fell victim to the concept of gender diversity.”⁹⁵ Zakharova has made similar irreverent statements in the past, but the tone of her statement is uncharacteristic of the Foreign Ministry's current serious tone following the US-Russia strategic stability talks on January 9-10. Zakharova's statement could be an early indicator of a Russian information operation to create contempt for the West among Russia's domestic audience.

January 7

- **TASS miscontextualized Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov's statements following January 10 talks with US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman to suggest that Ryabkov was concerned about a Ukrainian or joint US-Ukraine invasion of Russia.**⁹⁶ TASS reported that Ryabkov was concerned about Ukrainian missiles striking Russia and Ukrainian soldiers “marching on Red Square.” Ryabkov

simply referred to a concern of Ukrainian or joint US-Ukrainian provocations against Donbas, not an attack against Russia proper.

- **Kremlin-sponsored media misrepresented Ukrainian Deputy Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration Olga Stefanishina's statement on maintaining diplomatic channels with Russia to avoid military escalations on January 10.**⁹⁷ Russian media implied that Kyiv “confirmed its desire to cooperate with Moscow” after NATO declared “its readiness for a military conflict with Russia in case of failed Eastern European security assurances negotiations.” Russian media is likely advancing an information operation to imply that Ukraine is a collapsing state that wants to resume relations with Russia to avoid devastating consequences from a Western-waged war against Russia.
- **Kremlin-sponsored media amplified claims that Ukraine is facing “African hunger” and “economic and social collapse” under its current government and is introducing food stamps on January 10.**⁹⁸ Russian media claimed that Ukraine's food industry could collapse with rapidly increasing gas prices. The Kremlin is likely advancing a narrative that Ukraine is a collapsing state in need of Russian energy support.
- **Kremlin-sponsored media claimed that Ukrainian Ambassador to Germany Andriy Melnik issued an ultimatum to Berlin, demanding that Germany abandon Russia's Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline on January 10.**⁹⁹ Russian media claimed that Melnik demanded that Germany reverse its veto on providing Ukraine with weapons. The Kremlin continues to advance narratives to drive wedges between NATO and EU members and suggest that that the West will ultimately abandon Ukraine.
- **Kremlin-sponsored media quoted former Ukrainian Defense Minister Anatoly Hrytsenko calling on Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky to give up on regaining Crimea on January 10.**¹⁰⁰ Russian media quoted Hrytsenko saying that there is a “Russian spirit” in Donbas and that 80 percent of Donbas residents want to unite with Russia. The Kremlin is likely advancing a narrative on Zelensky's inevitable capitulation to Russia targeted at Russia's domestic population.
- **Bloomberg reported on January 10 that Kremlin-sponsored media deescalated its negative portrayal of Ukraine since early December in a pattern “almost identical” to Russian information operations during the Russian troop buildup near Ukraine in April 2021.**¹⁰¹ Bloomberg claimed that Russian anti-Ukraine narratives decreased in early December 2021 following the confirmation of the US-Russia and NATO-Russia summits planned for mid-January 2022. Bloomberg also noted that negative Russian media coverage of Ukraine decreased in April 2021 after the announcement of the June 2021 Geneva summit between US President Joe Biden and Russian President Vladimir Putin.

January 7

- **Kremlin-sponsored media misconstrued the Estonian defense minister's concern over the Collective Security Treaty Organization's deployments to Kazakhstan, stating that Estonian fears of Russian deployments are completely baseless on January 7.**¹⁰² Russian media claimed that Russian troops in Kazakhstan do not pose a threat to the Baltics because Kazakhstan is geographically far from the Baltics. Estonia's defense minister said that Russian actions have not been transparent and that the fog of war creates insecurity. This advanced an existing Russian media narrative that Russia does not pose a military threat to Ukraine or any other state.
- **Kremlin-sponsored media dismissed White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki's concern over the legality of the Collective Security Treaty Organization peacekeeping deployment to Kazakhstan on January 7.**¹⁰³ Russian media has refrained from alleging US involvement in the protests in Kazakhstan ahead of mid-January US-Russia and NATO-Russia summits as of January 7.

January 5

- **Some Kremlin-sponsored media outlets began claiming that the West initiated “color revolution” protests and a coup in Kazakhstan to destabilize Russia ahead of US-Russia and NATO-Russia summits in mid-January on January 5.**¹⁰⁴ The Kremlin has not launched a coordinated information campaign on this narrative yet, however. Senior Kremlin officials and new sources have not yet referred to the protests in Kazakhstan as a color revolution. Some Russian media implied that the Kremlin must think about saving ethnic Russians in Kazakhstan in the event of a coup.¹⁰⁵
- **Russian State Duma Deputy Konstantin Zatulin claimed that Kazakh protests have an unspecified “common planning center” on January 5.**¹⁰⁶ Zalutin said unspecified initiators orchestrated numerous protests throughout Kazakhstan involving young suburban people who are “susceptible to nationalist propaganda.” Zalutin said that the West is not involved with organizing the protests, however Kazakh officials must promptly respond to prevent future Western provocations in Kazakhstan and Russia¹⁰⁷
- **Russian State Duma Vice-Speaker Boris Chernyshov said that protests in Kazakhstan are following the scenario from the 2004 Ukrainian Orange Revolution on January 5.**¹⁰⁸ Chernyshov implied that the United Kingdom and United States orchestrated political protests following successful Russia-Kazakhstan talks at the Commonwealth of Independent States on December 28.¹⁰⁹ Chernyshov claimed that protests could not advance from high gas prices to political riots without a “reason.” Kremlin-sponsored media will likely attribute emerging Kazakh protests to Western provocations ahead of US-Russia and NATO-Russia summits in mid-January.
- **Kremlin-sponsored media advanced a narrative on January 5 that German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock seeks dialogue with the Kremlin to resolve tensions at the Ukrainian border ahead of her planned visit to Washington on January 5.**¹¹⁰ Russian media included Baerbock’s statement that NATO’s power lies in diplomacy rather than military capability. The Kremlin likely seeks to sow division among European Union (EU) members, NATO members, and the US by advancing a narrative that the United States disregards EU security interests.
- **Kremlin-sponsored media claimed that the European Union (EU) “expressed dissatisfaction” towards the United States and NATO for excluding the EU from upcoming US-Russia and NATO-Russia talks, citing Western publications on January 5.**¹¹¹ The Kremlin likely seeks to drive wedges between NATO and EU members by advancing a narrative that the US is destroying Western blocs by disregarding EU security concerns.

January 4

- **Kremlin-sponsored outlet *RIA Novosti* claimed that the US and NATO seek to turn Finland into a new “Ukraine-like” buffer state with Russia on January 4.**¹¹² *RIA Novosti* claimed Finland is reserving the right to join NATO because Helsinki is neglecting the real threat of Finland losing its sovereignty and neutrality to the culturally different “Anglo-Saxon” NATO alliance.
- **Kremlin-sponsored media claimed on January 4 that Ukrainian forces detained and charged a Luhansk People’s Republic (LNR) officer in Luhansk on December 27 to support a Ukrainian information operation.**¹¹³ Ukrainian government officials detained and criminally charged a LNR militant after he attempted to cross the line of demarcation on December 27.¹¹⁴ Russian media claimed that SBU likely hoped to capture a Russian volunteer for a Ukrainian information campaign. Russian media claimed this detention was a planned Ukrainian Security Service (SBU) operation given Ukrainian media’s rapid coverage, lack of information about the Ukrainian unit that detained the militant, and the

alleged lack of military equipment on the detainee. Russian media further claimed that Ukraine cut water supply from a water station to the LNR on January 2.¹¹⁵

- **A Russian State Duma Deputy from Crimea said if Ukraine invades Crimea or Donbas, then the “Ukrainian Army will face an unenviable fate” on January 4.**¹¹⁶ The deputy said that a Ukrainian offensive will result in many Ukrainian prisoners of war, desertions among the Ukrainian military, and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky charged under an international tribunal. Russian officials are increasingly publicly discussing how a Russian war with Ukraine would result with a decisive Russian victory.
- **Kremlin-sponsored media emphasized that Ukraine faced the lowest levels of Russian gas transit in the past two years on January 4, 2021.**¹¹⁷ Russia’s Foreign Ministry stated that Russia has no obligation to transfer all Europe-bound gas through Ukraine.¹¹⁸ Russian media is setting conditions to push the narrative that “Ukraine will freeze in the winter” without Russian gas.
- Kremlin-sponsored media quoted former US President Donald Trump’s Advisor Cory Mills on January 4 to imply that current US President Joe Biden will be “weak” in upcoming talks with Moscow based on Biden’s “foreign policy failures” in Afghanistan and Taiwan.¹¹⁹

January 2

- **Russian State Duma Deputy Vyacheslav Volodin called on the European Union, Council of Europe, and Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe to denounce Ukrainian marches celebrating the birthday of Ukrainian nationalist figure Stepan Bandera on January 2.**¹²⁰ The Kremlin continues to push the narrative that Western institutions are supporting the rise of neo-Nazism and Russophobia in Ukraine. This narrative can support future Kremlin information operations about Ukrainian nationalist threats against Donbas that necessitate Russian military intervention.

December 31

- **Kremlin-sponsored media reported that Russia’s military can “defeat Ukraine in less than ten minutes” citing an interview from the ex-head of the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry’s Information Department Oleg Voloshin on December 31.**¹²¹ Voloshin said that Ukrainian Armed Forces are not prepared for “modern high-tech war.” Russian media cited Voloshin’s previous statements that the Russian military could defeat Ukraine in a week because it would be unprofitable for Kyiv to maintain a war. Russian media is increasingly pushing a narrative suggesting a decisive Russian victory in a war against Ukraine.

December 28

- Kremlin-sponsored media amplified a former Ukrainian Minister of Economy’s statement on December 28 encouraging Kyiv to refrain from calling Russia an “aggressor” in a bid to promote dialogue between Kyiv and Russian President Vladimir Putin.¹²²

December 26

- Russian State Duma Member Mikhail Delyagin on December 26 said we should expect a Ukrainian attack against Crimea, Rostov-on-Don, Belgorod and Bryansk in February or March 2022.¹²³ Delyagin said that the West is preparing Ukraine for this attack.
- Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said further NATO expansion is “a matter of life and death” for Russia in a TV interview on December 26.¹²⁴ Peskov said if Ukraine intensifies military activities against Donbas, then “there will be a question of Ukrainian statehood.”¹²⁵

December 24

- Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said that NATO enlargement and strike missile systems deployments to Ukraine will provoke “serious military risks” and a “large-scale conflict in Europe” on December 24.¹²⁶
- Kremlin-sponsored media quoted a former Ukrainian Security Service (SBU) officer on December 24 stating that Ukrainian Armed Forces will use chemical weapons to attack schools, hospitals, and mass gatherings in Ukrainian-controlled eastern Ukraine.¹²⁷ Russian media is continuing to spread Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu’s claim that Ukrainian forces and US private military companies will use chemical weapons to attack Donbas.

December 23

- **Kremlin media outlets amplified former Central Intelligence Agency officer Philip Giraldi’s “prediction” that US efforts to train Ukrainian forces would result in “disastrous consequences” for both the US and Ukraine on December 23.**¹²⁸

December 21

- **Pro-Kremlin media outlets amplified US Pentagon Spokesperson John Kirby’s December 20 statement that the US Air Force will not curtail its activities in the Black Sea.** Russian media condemned Kirby’s statement that US forces will continue to operate where international law allows the US to do so.¹²⁹ This information operation can support Russian efforts to claim that the US has violated or wholesale rejected the Kremlin’s demanded “red lines” on security guarantees.¹³⁰

December 15

- **Russian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova accused the United States and NATO of aggravating the situation in Ukraine by supplying Kyiv with weaponry and training on December 15.**¹³¹ Zakharova said that the presence of 10,000 NATO servicemen in Ukraine – 4,000 of which are American – does not help create conditions for the implementation of the Minsk agreements. The Kremlin is escalating its narrative that western support for Ukraine is preventing Kyiv from implementing the Minsk Agreements.

December 10

- **Anchor on primetime Russian state TV claim a “genocide against the Russian nation” is occurring in Ukraine on December 10.**¹³² Kremlin media is increasingly claiming that Ukraine is carrying out a “genocide” against ethnic Russians in Ukraine. The Kremlin could leverage these false claims as a justification for overt military deployments in Donbas or military action against Ukraine.

December 10

- **Kremlin-sponsored media misquoted Former Ukrainian Foreign Minister Pavlo Klimkin that the West mistrusts Ukraine—likely to push the narrative of Western abandonment of Ukraine—on December 10.**¹³³ Klimkin said that the West does not know if Ukraine has a concrete national security plan, causing uncertainty among Western partners. Russian media misconstrued Klimkin’s statements to imply that the West does not trust an unstable Ukrainian government. The Kremlin is advancing a narrative that the West will not defend Ukraine in the case of a military confrontation due to Ukrainian domestic concerns.
- **A known Russian information operations asset in Ukraine suggested on December 10 that Ukraine and the West will conduct a joint military provocation against Russia in 2022.**¹³⁴ Former pro-Russian Ukrainian Member of Parliament Ilya Kiva

said a joint military provocation between Ukraine and the West against Russia would allow the West to block Nord Stream 2.¹³⁵ Kiva is a known Russian asset who has participated in information campaigns designed to undermine faith in the Ukrainian government and provoke violent protests in Ukraine.¹³⁶

December 9

- **Putin said that the situation in Donbas resembles a genocide on December 9.** Putin stated that “Russophobia is the first step towards genocide,” and that current events in Donbas are “very reminiscent of a genocide.”¹³⁷ This is a significant Kremlin rhetorical inflection and is the first time Kremlin leadership has framed events in Ukraine as a genocide since the crisis began in October 2021. This likely marked the beginning of a new Kremlin information operation to support Russian efforts to justify future Russian military activities in Ukraine. The Kremlin and its media apparatuses have not yet wholesale pushed the “genocide” meme as of December 11.
- **Russian Chief of the General Staff Valery Gerasimov threatened Ukraine on December 9 that Russia will suppress any Ukrainian “provocations” in Donbas.** Gerasimov said, “any provocations of the Ukrainian authorities to resolve the problems of Donbas by force will be suppressed.”¹³⁸ The Kremlin has not yet fully accused Ukraine of deciding to use force in Donbas as of December 11.
- **Kremlin Spokesman Dmitry Peskov accused NATO of increasing its military presence in Greece to contain Russia on December 8.**¹³⁹ Peskov said that NATO and US forces are shipping weapons through the Port of Alexandroupolis and concentrating in Greece to create new NATO bases to contain Russia.
- **Russian Southern Military District (SMD) Commander Alexander Dvornikov said that NATO’s military buildup near Russian borders is among the SMD’s main security threats on December 9.**¹⁴⁰ Dvornikov also included the possibility of an escalation in Ukraine, Nagorno-Karabakh, and the ongoing war in Syria among the SMD’s main priorities.
- **Kremlin and proxy republic narratives about alleged Ukrainian weapon deployments closer to Donbas began unifying around December 9.** Zakharova reiterated the Kremlin accusation that Ukraine is deploying heavy equipment and artillery to Donbas on December 9.¹⁴¹ The LNR militia accused Ukraine’s armed forces of deploying four BTR-80 armored personnel carriers near the outskirts of Voitovo Village, Luhansk, and seven BTR-80s to Raygorodokon, Luhansk, on December 9.¹⁴²
- **Zakharova said on December 9 that negotiations with Ukraine for a peaceful settlement have “reached an impasse.”**¹⁴³ Zakharova said the regular Trilateral Contract Group meeting held on December 7 and 8 ended in vain. The Kremlin is likely setting information conditions to claim that Ukraine has wholesale abandoned the Minsk Agreements.
- **Russian Permanent Representative to the Organization for Security Cooperation Europe (OSCE) Alexander Lukashevich alleged that Ukraine is militarizing in violation of the Minsk Agreements on December 9.**¹⁴⁴ Lukashevich said that Ukraine is outfitting its forces in Donbas with Turkish Bayraktar TB2 drones. Lukashevich also accused Turkey, the United States, Germany, the European Union, and France of supporting Kyiv’s militarization efforts by providing weapons, financing weapons purchases, or participating in international military exercises.

December 8

- **Zakharova said Russia issued a protest note to the US embassy in Moscow on December 8 in response to US jets “endangering civil aircraft” in the Black Sea on December 3.**¹⁴⁵ Zakharova denounced NATO’s expansion to Russian borders and its threat to international passenger airways.

December 7

- **Kremlin-sponsored media coordinated a response to US Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs Victoria Nuland’s Senate testimony on December 7.** Peskov denied that Russia seeks to restore the Soviet Union.¹⁴⁶ Kremlin media manipulated Nuland’s discussion of Russian military expansion to imply that the Russian army has “significant superiority” over Ukraine.¹⁴⁷ The Kremlin notably did not release a coordinated narrative regarding US President Joe Biden and Putin’s videoconference immediately following their call on December 7.
- **Russian news agency TASS published an article on December 7 claiming that Zelensky may strip Donbas residents of their Ukrainian citizenship.**¹⁴⁸ The article speculated that a potential Ukrainian policy change on dual citizenship regulations that Zelensky discussed on December 1 could enable Zelensky to deprive Donbas residents of opportunities to obtain Ukrainian citizenship.
- **Russian media falsely claimed the OSCE observed Ukraine deploying tanks and howitzers to Donbas on December 7.**¹⁴⁹ The OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine observed 30 Ukrainian tanks and 17 Ukrainian howitzers at two railway stations in Ukrainian government-controlled areas of Donetsk and Luhansk on December 6.¹⁵⁰ The OSCE stated this hardware was in compliance with withdrawal lines.

December 6

- **Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) Deputy Secretary General Valeriy Semerikov said NATO’s provocations are unnoticed by international organizations in an interview on December 6.**¹⁵¹ Semerikov stated that NATO, “under a far-fetched pretext,” is expanding military infrastructure and deployments in Eastern Europe. Semerikov added that NATO exercises near CSTO member states increased in other regions.¹⁵²

December 5

- **Kremlin-sponsored media accused Ukrainian Armed Forces of deploying 17 tanks and two armored personnel carriers to three Ukrainian government-controlled settlements in eastern Ukraine on December 5.**¹⁵³ Russian media only specified that Ukraine deployed the T-64 tanks to Artyomivske, Donetsk Oblast. Russian media also claimed that Ukraine deployed the 20th Electronic Warfare Battalion to Ukrainian government-controlled eastern Ukraine to suppress Organization for Security and Cooperation Europe (OSCE) unmanned aerial monitoring in Zolote, Novoivanovka, and Orekhovo, Luhansk Oblast, on December 4.¹⁵⁴ The OSCE did not report any Ukrainian deployments in the region on December 4-5.¹⁵⁵
- **Zakharova accused NATO of endangering civilian aircraft over the Black Sea on December 5.**¹⁵⁶ Russia’s Federal Air Transport Agency claimed that a Russian airline Aeroflot flight from Tel Aviv to Moscow had to change directions over the Black Sea because of a NATO

reconnaissance aircraft on December 3.¹⁵⁷ Zakharova denounced increased NATO activity near Russian borders.¹⁵⁸

- **Zakharova responded to White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki's characterization of the Kremlin as a "provocateur" on December 5.**¹⁵⁹ Zakharova chastised Psaki and referenced the United States' military actions in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Vietnam, Belgrade, Baghdad, the depositions of Saddam Hussein and Muammar Gaddafi, and alleged US participation in color revolutions worldwide.

December 3

- **Kremlin-sponsored media manipulated Norwegian Foreign Minister Anniken Huitfeldt's November 30 interview to falsely suggest that Norway opposes any NATO force presence near any Russian border on December 3.**¹⁶⁰ Huitfeldt said that it is in Norway's security interests for Norwegian vessels to accompany NATO ships and planes when NATO conducts exercises near Russia's northern sea border with Norway.¹⁶¹ Russian media falsely said Norway condemned all NATO operations along Russian borders.

December 2

- **Zakharova decried the NATO foreign ministerial meeting which occurred in Riga on December 2.**¹⁶² Zakharova said on December 2 that the Kremlin has defined Ukraine's accession to NATO as a long-term "red line." Zakharov stated that NATO's increased cooperation with Ukraine is the "de facto beginning of NATO's assimilation of [Ukraine's] military infrastructure" to support NATO military operations against Russia. Zakharova reiterated that NATO must halt its eastward expansion to resolve the current situation.
- **Kremlin-sponsored media conducted a coordinated information campaign stating that military action is "highly likely" in Donbas and Crimea following Zelensky's speech to the Ukrainian Parliament on December 1.**¹⁶³ Peskov said that the "Kyiv regime is determined to use all opportunities, including force, to encroach on [Crimea]," on December 2.¹⁶⁴ Peskov stated that the likelihood of Ukrainian military activity in Donbas is "still high."¹⁶⁵ Kremlin media that targets Western audiences is supporting this meme.¹⁶⁶ A centralized intensified Kremlin information operation claiming Ukraine will attack Donbas or Crimea would indicate that Russian military operations in Donbas are likely imminent. The Kremlin has not elevated this meme to reach that threshold as of December 2.
- **Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said on December 1 that Russia knew about a claimed Ukrainian deployment of 125,000 troops near Donbas for a while.**¹⁶⁷ Lavrov's December 2 statement buttresses a meme about a claimed Ukrainian deployment of 125,000 troops to Donbas that first appeared in the Russian information space on December 1.¹⁶⁸ Lavrov stated that Ukraine accumulated troops under the guise of seasonal troop rotation. Lavrov accused the West of concealing the Ukrainian troop movements.

December 1

- **Zakharova said that Ukraine undermined the Minsk Agreements by deploying 125,000 troops to Donbas on December 1.**¹⁶⁹ Zakharova stated that NATO states are preparing to send military personnel to Ukraine and claimed that London intends to send 600 British servicemen to the "Ukrainian civil war." Zakharova said Kyiv is using a bill passed in August to forcefully return Donbas to Ukraine and exit the Minsk Agreements. Zakharova said Western media created mass "hysteria" about a potential Russian invasion in a bid to cover Ukrainian military developments in the east.

November 30

- **The Russian Foreign Ministry (MFA) issued a rebuttal to NATO's statement that NATO poses no threat to Russia on November 30.**¹⁷⁰ The MFA said NATO threatens Russia because the alliance seeks to expand in Russia's "eastern flank," is "uncontrollably" expanding in Europe, and breaches treaties. The MFA said Russia is acting in a "purely defensive nature" against NATO's purposeful provocations executed via "large-scale" and "unplanned" exercises in the Black Sea. The Kremlin will increase information pressure against NATO in tandem with Russia's military buildup against Ukraine in winter 2021-2022.
- **Lavrov said the United States "surrounded" Russia with its military bases during a November 30 speech.**¹⁷¹ Lavrov said Russia observes daily Western troop and equipment deployments near Russia under the guise of being in response to Russian military exercises. Lavrov said NATO lied for 30 years about not expanding towards Russian borders. Lavrov said that the United States intervenes in other states' domestic affairs under the guise of "spreading democracy," refuses international cooperation, and disregards their obligations in the United Nations.

November 29

- **Kremlin-sponsored media mischaracterized an annual Ukrainian exercise authorization bill to claim Zelensky is violating the Minsk Agreements by allowing foreign troops to participate in training exercises in Ukraine in 2022.**¹⁷² Zelensky registered an annually recurring bill to authorize foreign military deployments to Ukraine for training exercises to Ukraine's Parliament on November 29.¹⁷³ Russian media falsely framed Zelensky's bill as Ukrainian preparations to attack Donbas.¹⁷⁴

November 28

- **Peskov accused "Anglo-Saxon media" of driving false "hysteria" about a Russian attack against Ukraine on November 28.** Peskov said "this hysteria, which is now being whipped up in the Anglo-Saxon media, in the Ukrainian media and is supported by Ukrainian politicians headed by the head of state—we consider it absolutely unacceptable."¹⁷⁵ Peskov said that accusations against Russia may be an attempt for Ukraine to conduct a military offensive against Donbas: "...we have already said that this escalation may be an attempt to hide [Ukraine's] own preparations for a military solution to the Donbas problem."¹⁷⁶
- **The LNR People's Militia claimed that Ukrainian Army forces entered the disengagement zone in Zolote, Luhansk, on November 28.** The LNR claimed that it observed two soldiers of Ukraine's 24th Mechanized Brigade inside former Ukrainian-held positions in the frontline village of Zolote.¹⁷⁷ Zelensky ordered Ukrainian forces to withdraw from Zolote in November 2019 as part of an experimental disengagement.¹⁷⁸ Ukrainian disengagement from Zolote (and two other frontline positions at Stanitsa Luhanska and Petrivske) was very likely a Kremlin condition for the December 2019 Normandy Format talk in Paris, France. Kremlin and Kremlin proxies have not claimed Ukrainian violations of Stanitsa Luhanska and Petrivske demilitarized zones as of November 28.

November 27

- **Russian propaganda is increasingly targeting the US and "US propaganda" about a Russian invasion in Ukraine.** Russian Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) Director Sergey Naryshkin said on November 27 that the United States is trying to inflame the conflict in Donbas by spreading false propaganda alleging a planned Russian invasion of Ukraine.¹⁷⁹ "The [Americans'] goal is to try to push the poorly-controlled Kyiv authorities to rekindle the conflict...with renewed vigor." Naryshkin continued to deny any Russian invasion plans. A

central Russian information operation is pushing this meme. Naryshkin made this statement on Rossiya 1 (primetime tv news) and mainstream Kremlin outlets (*Sputnik, Izvestia, RIA Novosti, TASS*, and others) are recirculating it. This is likely the key narrative of the weekend for the Russian domestic information space. Conditioning Russian citizens to perceive all reports of a Russian invasion as being American propaganda is likely a key Kremlin information objective for the weekend of November 27-28.

November 26

- **Russia's representative to the OSCE, Alexander Lukashевич, accused Kyiv of conducting a disinformation operation about a Russian offensive to justify NATO's expansion in Ukraine and near Russian borders on November 26.** Lukashевич said Kyiv is spreading falsehoods about Russian aggression to “justify the current build-up of NATO's potential and activity near the Russian borders, to create the preconditions for the enhanced military development of the territory of Ukraine by the alliance, and finally to justify Kyiv's sabotage of the Minsk Agreements.”¹⁸⁰

November 25

- **Zakharova focused on framing Kyiv as an increasingly belligerent aggressor in Donbas at the MFA briefing on November 25.** She said the Ukrainian government is fueling the situation in Donbas and “pushing for military (force) resolution of the conflict inside of Ukraine,” as the Ukrainian government feels it can do so unpunished.¹⁸¹ Zakharova also talked about Ukraine increasingly using prohibited weapon systems in Donbas.
- **Lukashевич accused Ukraine of attacking freedom of speech in Ukraine on November 25.** Lukashевич cited the recent staff firings at the *Kyiv Post* and Zelensky's ban of pro-Russian opposition media outlets in February 2021.¹⁸² This meme can support efforts to reinforce the narrative that Kyiv is targeting Russian entities.

November 24

- **Shoigu says Russia's nuclear capabilities and armed forces need to maintain combat readiness in light of the increased activity of NATO countries near Russia's borders.**¹⁸³
- **Peskov says that Secretary of the Russian Security Council Nikolai Patrushev's narrative on November 23 about Ukraine potentially facing a migration crisis was “well-reasoned.”**¹⁸⁴
- **Reserve Colonel Oleg Zhdanov said, “the United States is deliberately escalating tension around the situation on the Russian-Ukrainian border.”**¹⁸⁵
- **Fyodor Lukyanov—a prominent Kremlin foreign policy thinker—published an article in which he almost says that if NATO does not give Putin a solid promise that Ukraine will not join NATO, there will be war similar to the Russia-Georgian war of 2008.**¹⁸⁶

November 23:

- **Peskov said, “the lack of progress in the implementation of the Minsk Agreements is a significant irritant and trigger that leads to the level of tension in Europe as a whole,” on November 23.**¹⁸⁷

- **Secretary of the Russian Security Council Nikolai Patrushev stated that Ukraine might face a refugee crisis.** He blamed the West for de facto establishing a protectorate in Ukraine and destroying Ukraine's economy, and stated that "any moment the situation [in Ukraine] can explode and millions of refugees will run to seek shelter in other places."¹⁸⁸
- **Shoigu stated that the US Global Thunder-22 exercises included ten strategic nuclear bombers postured against Russia.**¹⁸⁹ The Pentagon responded on November 24 and said, "These missions were announced publicly at the time, and closely planned with [Strategic Command], [European Command], allies, and partners to ensure maximum training and integration opportunities as well as compliance with all national and international requirements and protocols."
- **Chairman of the State Duma Defense Committee Andrei Kartapolov announced the risk of a repeat of the Afghan scenario in Ukraine.** Kartapolov said "All US efforts to 'help' Ukraine are leading it to an abyss." Kartapolov urged people to recall "how the American adventure in Afghanistan ended."¹⁹⁰

November 22:

- **The press bureau of Russia's Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) issued a statement claiming that Washington is spreading false information about Russian preparations for an attack against Ukraine.** "The provocative policy of the United States and the European Union, which deliberately strengthens Kyiv's sense of permissiveness and impunity, is of extreme concern. We observed a similar situation in Georgia on the eve of the 2008 events."¹⁹¹

Updates on Key States' Activities

Russia

Unknown actors – very likely the Kremlin – conducted the largest cyberattack against the Ukrainian government since 2018 on the late night of January 13-14.¹⁹² The attack targeted over 70 central and regional government websites and disabled many, including the websites of Ukraine's Cabinet of Ministers, Foreign Ministry, Energy Ministry, Veterans Affairs Ministry, and State Treasury, among others.¹⁹³ The attackers posted a message on hacked Ukrainian government websites (in Russian, Ukrainian, and Polish) stating that Ukrainian users' personal data was leaked publicly and that all data on users' personal computers was destroyed. Ukrainian authorities stated that Ukrainian users' data was not leaked. The hackers' message also instructed readers to "be afraid and wait for the worst. For your past, present, and future. For Volhynia, for the [Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists – Ukrainian Insurgent Army], for Galicia, for Polesie and for historical lands." The Ukrainian Insurgent Army was a right-wing insurgency in Western Ukraine that ethnically cleansed Volhynia, Galicia, and Polesie of ethnic Poles in 1943 – 1945.¹⁹⁴ The Kremlin accuses contemporary Ukraine of being under the influence of Ukrainian neo-Nazis linked to the Ukrainian Insurgent Army. Ukraine's foreign ministry spokesperson told *Reuters* it was too early to attribute the attack but said that Russia has conducted similar attacks in the past.¹⁹⁵

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov reiterated Kremlin demands that the West respond to Russia's security propositions quickly on December 14.¹⁹⁶ Lavrov said "[Russia] won't wait forever" and that US efforts to consult all NATO allies and OSCE members before engaging Moscow are "attempts to drag out the process." Lavrov said that the

Kremlin's "patience has run out," that it is "time for [Russia] to go." Lavrov reiterated that Russia's security demands are a package deal and characterized NATO's line vetoes of certain non-starter propositions as a "flagrant violation of the other parts of this inseparable package." Lavrov said that NATO's hypothetical construction of military bases in Ukraine, the Sea of Azov, or the deployment of Western military instructors to Donbas would constitute violations of Russia's red lines.¹⁹⁷ Lavrov accused the UK of constructing bases in Ukraine and a naval base on the Sea of Azov. Lavrov also accused US, Canadian, and British troops of being permanently stationed in the Baltic states and Northern Europe "under the guise of 'rotation.'" Lavrov blamed the West for increasing the likelihood of conflict. Lavrov accused the US of undermining the "architecture of international relations based on the UN Charter" and "replacing international law with their 'rules' on which they want to force everyone to build a new world order." Lavrov characterized Ukraine's government as being run by right-wing extremists, claiming that "nothing [in Ukrainian governance] has changed," and grouped Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky in the same category with former Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko, Ukraine's "Right Sector" party, and the Azov Battalion. The Kremlin had not prominently accused NATO of creating "bases in Ukraine" prior to this speech.

Russian State Duma Speaker Vyacheslav Volodin said the US should "stop now before it is too late" and implement a security agreement with the Kremlin on January 14.¹⁹⁸ Volodin also said that the US should stop threatening Russia with sanctions that will "only destroy relations."

Russia's Eastern Military District (EMD) began snap combat readiness inspections involving deployments over long distances on January 14.¹⁹⁹ Russia's Ministry of Defense stated these exercises test EMD units' ability to complete missions after deploying long distances. These exercises are likely cover for the EMD elements that have deployed closer towards Ukraine since early January 2022.

Russian social media users observed likely elements of Russia's 155th Naval Infantry Brigade (of the Russian Pacific Fleet) in Krasnoyarsk deploying westward on January 14.²⁰⁰ Russian social media users posted video of railcars with Nona-S 120mm mortars, T-80BV tanks, MT-LB armored tracked vehicles, and BMP-3 infantry fighting vehicles. The destination of these observed elements is unclear as of January 14. The Russian military is likely deploying elements of the 155th Brigade towards Ukraine.

Russian Southern Military District (SMD) Commander Alexander Dvornikov announced plans to equip unspecified SMD elements with approximately 3,000 pieces of new equipment in 2022.²⁰¹ The equipment includes unspecified modern hardware, including 27 aircraft, 37 helicopters, an unspecified number of armored vehicles, five warships and boats, anti-aircraft missile systems, and other specialized equipment. These acquisitions will likely support the development of the Russian 19th Motorized Rifle Division of the 58th Combined Arms Army and the 20th Motorized Rifle Division of the 8th Combined Arms Army; Dvornikov previously announced on January 12 that the SMD will finalize the formation of two new divisions – likely the 19th and 20th – by the end of 2022.

Brigade-sized elements of the 150th Motorized Rifle Division (8th Combined Arms Army) performed live fire exercises at the Kuzminsky and Kadamovsky training grounds in Rostov, Russia, on January 14.²⁰² Over 2,500 personnel (approximately 100 tank crews) of the 150th Division participated in these exercises.

Ukraine's Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) claimed that Russia's 8th Combined Arms Army launched a large-scale combat and mobilization readiness inspection of the Donetsk and Luhansk proxy militias on January 14.²⁰³ The GUR claimed that Russian proxy units deployed to training grounds for tactical, engineering, and live fire exercises with tank, combat vehicle, and indirect fire crews. Proxy administrators inspected military equipment storages intended to support proxy militia's mobilization reserves.

Battalion-sized elements of the 4th Tank Division (1st Tank Army) participated in training in Moscow Oblast on January 13.²⁰⁴ Approximately 600 tank personnel practiced standard fire and maneuver tactical tasks. This was likely a routine training exercise for new personnel.

Russian Representative to the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Alexander Lukashevich threatened aggressive Russian action if the OSCE does not provide a "constructive response" to Russian security demands "within a reasonable time" following the Russia-OSCE Meeting on January 13.²⁰⁵ Lukashevich threatened that if Russia does not hear a "constructive response to the proposals made within a reasonable time, and the aggressive line of behavior against Russia continues," then Russia would "draw appropriate conclusions and take all necessary measures to ensure a strategic balance and eliminate unacceptable threats to [Russian] national security."²⁰⁶ The Russian Foreign Ministry published a statement on January 13 claiming that the OSCE faces a dilemma to either accept Russia's demands "or slide into a confrontation along the lines of the Cold War, a new arms race, a threat-counterthreat competition with obvious risks for all OSCE participating states" that can have "irreversible consequences."²⁰⁷ Lukashevich said that the "coordinated position of the so-called collective West pushes us to where [Russia] will not receive a constructive reaction to our proposals."²⁰⁸ Lukashevich said that Russia's security demands are "not a menu from which you can choose convenient elements" and said they are of a "packaged nature."²⁰⁹ Lukashevich said that the OSCE is in a "depressing state of affairs" and that US and NATO policy to "contain Russia" is evident in the OSCE's "systemic degradation." Lukashevich accused the US of sabotaging the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (ABM), Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF), Open Skies Treaty, and not ratifying the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe, all with the "tacit consent of [NATO]."

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov said Moscow would not schedule a second round of talks on security guarantees in Europe "in the near future" because the US and NATO are not ready to meet Russia's demands on January 13.²¹⁰ Ryabkov stated that the US and NATO are not ready to meet Russia's "key demands for non-expansion of NATO, for curtailing the alliances' infrastructure [in Eastern Europe], and returning to its borders as of 1997."²¹¹ Ryabkov accused NATO of being selfish and said that "it doesn't occur to anyone in the Western camp that anyone [outside the West] has their own security interest."²¹² Ryabkov accused the US Congress of falling victim to "total anti-Russian hysteria" and said that Russia would find alternatives and not succumb to "blackmail" if the US government issues new sanctions against Russia.²¹³ This is a rejection of US and NATO's January 12 offer to hold more discussions on arms control and transparency parameters on military exercises. US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman previously stated on January 12 that the Russian delegation was not ready to commit to NATO's proposed discussions but did not reject the possibility of holding those discussions. Ryabkov's statement indicates the Kremlin rejected the US and NATO offer.

Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov characterized the January 9-13 summits as “unsuccessful negotiations” and said that the Kremlin will perceive US sanctions against Russian President Vladimir Putin as an “outrageous measure that is comparable to a break of relations” on January 13.²¹⁴ Peskov responded to questions about new US Senate bill against Russian high-profile officials.²¹⁵ Peskov said that if the US imposed sanctions against Putin, then it would be equivalent to “an initiative to break the [US-Russia] relationship.”

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said that the US “promised to try to provide an answer” to Russia’s demanded security guarantees “next week” (the week of January 16 – 22) on January 13.²¹⁶ Lavrov described the West’s position at the January 12 Russia-NATO Council meeting as “sufficiently tough, arrogant in some places, uncompromising,” and stated the West stated its positions “calmly” and “in a businesslike manner.”²¹⁷ Lavrov also stated that NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg also volunteered to give a response on NATO’s behalf at an unspecified date (implied to likely also be the week of January 16 – 22).

Over 1,000 signalmen of the 49th Combined Arms Army began conducting signals exercises in Stavropol Oblast on January 13.²¹⁸ Signalers deployed 30 kilometers to an unspecified training ground and deployed field command posts and radio and communication stations.

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Grushko threatened a “military-technical” response against further NATO expansion and signaled NATO must make concessions or face military consequences following the Russia-NATO Council meeting on January 12.²¹⁹ Grushko participated in an extraordinary Russia-NATO Council meeting with US Assistant Secretary of State Wendy Sherman in Brussels on January 12. Grushko said that the Kremlin is not discussing any compromises and said that Moscow is waiting for NATO’s response to Russia’s security demands.²²⁰ Grushko said that Russia will take “all measures, political and military-technical, ... to prevent any infringement of legitimate Russian security interests.”²²¹ Grushko said that NATO’s expansion “seriously worsens [Russian] security and creates unacceptable risks... which we will confront.”²²² Grushko stated that “further [NATO] expansion is fraught with risks that will outweigh [the benefits] of further expansion.”²²³ Grushko said de-escalation requires NATO to stop all military assistance to Ukraine, stop supplying weapons to Ukraine, recall all NATO personnel from Ukraine, and for Ukraine to adhere to the Minsk II Accords.²²⁴ Grushko accused NATO of becoming antagonistic towards Russia and turning to “the old NATO” and “1949 Cold War schemes” aimed at containing Russia; Grushko said that NATO abandoned its previous positive agenda on cooperating with Russia on Afghanistan, counterterrorism, counternarcotics, and anti-piracy issues.²²⁵ Grushko accused the US of destroying the arms control system in Europe and lowering the threshold for the use of nuclear weapons, and reiterated that Russia’s proposed treaty bans the deployment of “strike systems” to areas where it is possible to strike the territory of other signatories.²²⁶ Grushko expressed support for restoring Russia’s diplomatic presence in NATO if NATO “turns around” and accepts “collective efforts to build security.”²²⁷ Grushko framed Russia as a “guarantor of peace in the Euro-Atlantic space” and stated that NATO must work with Russia to achieve peace in Europe.²²⁸

NATO collectively denounced Russia’s “non-starter” security demands but proposed holding future unspecified discussions on areas of mutual cooperation at the Russia-NATO Council meeting in Brussels on January 12.²²⁹ US Deputy

Secretary of State Wendy Sherman reiterated that NATO will not compromise on Russian demands on restricting eligible states from seek NATO membership, holding negotiations without Ukraine, returning to NATO's 1997 borders, or ending all NATO expansion. Sherman stated that NATO told the Russian delegation that escalation does not create optimum conditions for diplomacy and reiterated that the US provided Russia with ideas where the two states could take reciprocal actions to improve strategic stability. Sherman and NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg supported holding another NATO-Russia Council meeting "soon" to have deeper discussions on unspecified areas of mutual cooperation (likely arms control and reciprocal exercise transparency) to strengthen security for all states. Sherman added that the Russian delegation was not ready to commit to NATO's proposed discussions, but did not reject the possibility of holding those discussions. Sherman reiterated that Russia's Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline will not be allowed to become operational if Russia renews aggression against Ukraine. Sherman also stated that the US coordinated with Group of Seven (G7) members on January 11 to plan economic measures to undermine the Russian economy and financial system if Russia further invades Ukraine. Sherman reiterated that the Kremlin must make a choice between "de-escalation and diplomacy or confrontation and consequences" and that NATO is collectively preparing for every eventuality.

Russian State Duma Speaker Vyacheslav Volodin claimed that "removal of tension in the world right now" depends on the US decision to accept Russian security demands on January 12.²³⁰ Volodin added Washington will "take the responsibility for the possible consequences" if Washington fails to provide a timely response to Russia's demanded security guarantees. Volodin made these statements before the Russia-NATO Council meeting concluded.

The Conflict Intelligence Team (CIT) OSINT group observed likely elements of the 5th Separate Tank Brigade of the Russian Eastern Military District deploying in the western direction, possibly towards to Ukraine, in early January.²³¹ The 5th brigade elements' destination is unclear as of January 12. Russian social media users additionally posted videos of unidentified Russian military elements moving on railways in eastern Russia's Amur, Khabarovsk, and Buryatia regions throughout early January.²³² These elements could indicate a Russian effort to generate forces to deploy to near Ukraine or Belarus.

Russian Southern Military District (SMD) Commander Alexander Dvornikov announced on January 12 that the SMD will finalize the formation of two new divisions by the end of 2022.²³³ Dvornikov likely referred to finalizing the formation of the 19th Motorized Rifle Division of the 58th Combined Arms Army and the 20th Motorized Rifle Division of the 8th Combined Arms Army. Dvornikov said that both divisions will have at least one motorized rifle regiment and one tank battalion without providing further details. The Kremlin may use elements from the central or eastern military districts to generate forces for these new divisions. The Kremlin will likely downplay the formation of new Russian units near Ukraine by framing the new units as simply being based at their "permanent garrisons" without mentioning that these units previously did not exist near Ukraine.

Russian Baltic Fleet minesweeper *George Kurbatov* permanently transferred from the Russian Baltic Fleet to the Russian Black Sea Fleet on January 12. The *George Kurbatov* arrived at the Black Sea Fleet's main base in Sevastopol and formally joined the Black Sea Fleet on January 12.²³⁴

Over 10,000 troops of the Russian Southern Military District (SMD), Black Sea Fleet, and Caspian Flotilla began battalion tactical group exercises on January 12.²³⁵ Unspecified elements of the SMD, Black Sea Fleet, and Caspian Flotilla are conducting exercises in battalion tactical groups at unspecified training grounds. The battalion tactical groups will practice reconnaissance tasks, fires, counter-battery fire, aviation strikes, and sniper tasks. Pre-exercise training for these exercises occurred in over 20 training grounds across the SMD in Crimea, and Kuban, Rostov, Stavropol, Volgograd, Astrakhan, North Ossetia, Chechenia, Karachay-Cherkessia, Ingushetia, Dagestan, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Armenia.

Naval infantry and sapper elements of the Russian Black Sea Fleet and artillery elements of the 22nd Army Corps began conducting battalion-sized exercises in Crimea on January 11.²³⁶ Over 500 servicemen deployed to unspecified training grounds in Crimea for the exercises.

The Kremlin demanded the US quickly advance security negotiations on January 11, in a likely attempt to pressure the US into concessions through a sense of urgency. Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said that the Kremlin expects a “prompt, prompt response” from Washington on Russia’s demanded security guarantees and said “the ball in the [US] court” on January 11.²³⁷ Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said, “we are absolutely not satisfied with the endless delay of this process,” and characterized US-Russia security negotiations as “not a process for the sake of a process” on January 11.²³⁸ Peskov also accused the United States of using threats of new sanctions as preparing “information artillery” against Russia ahead of negotiations.²³⁹ The Kremlin did not immediately state this adversarial position directly following the US-Russia strategic stability dialogue’s conclusion on January 10.

Russia’s Western Military District (WMD) announced elements of the 20th Combined Arms Army (CAA) will conduct brigade-level exercises near the Ukrainian border in Voronezh, Belgorod, Bryansk, and Smolensk oblasts on January 11.²⁴⁰ Approximately 3,000 troops of the 3rd and 144th motorized rifle divisions will conduct fire and maneuver exercises with T-72 tanks, BMP-2 infantry fighting vehicles, and small arms. Unit participants will participate in a simulated battle with tanks and infantry fighting vehicles striking targets at ranges up to 1,200 meters.

Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu temporarily restricted Russian military personnel from taking official business trips and vacations outside of Russian territory on January 11.²⁴¹ Shoigu made the announcement during an MoD conference call. Shoigu did not specify the parameters of restricting travel for military personnel besides stating “there is a need to temporarily reduce business trips and vacations outside the country” to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the Russian military. Shoigu announced the restriction alongside several other measures to combat COVID, including additional staffing at Russian medical universities and increasing testing capacity. This action may truly be intended to limit the spread of COVID-19, which has spiked in Russia with the Omicron variant. However, retaining military personnel within Russia could be an indicator of military mobilization preparations.

Russian President Vladimir Putin chaired a Russian Security Council meeting on “security and infrastructure problems” in Russia’s border regions on January 11.²⁴² The Kremlin readout did not provide any additional details.

The *New York Times* (NYT) reported on January 10 that Russia deployed additional attack and transport helicopters and ground attack fighters closer to Ukraine in an unspecified past time frame, citing anonymous US officials.²⁴³ The NYT reported that Russian ground forces' movements towards Ukraine have slowed in an unspecified past time frame, likely December 2021. The NYT reported that US intelligence officials assess that Russian President Vladimir Putin has not yet decided whether to conduct offensive operations against Ukraine. The NYT reported that anonymous US officials said that Russia has “just under 60 battalion tactical groups on the ground” and between 85,000 to 100,000 troops near Ukraine.

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov denied Russian plans to attack Ukraine but insisted that the US and NATO make political concessions to avoid “a worsening security situation” during strategic stability talks with US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman in Geneva on January 9-10.²⁴⁴ Ryabkov claimed that the US did not need to threaten Russia with potential sanctions because the Kremlin does not plan to invade Ukraine if negotiations fail.²⁴⁵ However, Ryabkov also reiterated that Russia's demands are firm and threatened that, “if [the West] is unable to [be flexible], then [the West] will face a worsening situation in the area of their own security.”²⁴⁶ The Kremlin will likely not reach a policy decision until after the last meeting on January 13 concludes. Ryabkov characterized the US-Russia talks as “difficult, long, very professional, deep and specific” and “without attempts to sugarcoat anything,” but stated that Russia will have to determine its next policy steps after further meetings with NATO and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) on January 12 and 13, respectively.²⁴⁷ Ryabkov called on the US to stop ignoring Russia, stated there are no planned US-Russia presidential meetings, and insinuated that Ukraine or the US could conduct a military provocation against Donbas.²⁴⁸ Ryabkov stated that Russia will continue conducting military exercises, said NATO has an “active deployment” to Ukraine, and characterized US media reports of a Russian military buildup near Ukraine as disinformation.²⁴⁹ US Director of Operations of the Joint Staff James Mingus and Russian Deputy Defense Minister Aleksandr Fomin accompanied Sherman and Ryabkov to the bilateral talks.

US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman did not concede the Kremlin's desired security demands but stated openness to negotiating missile placement and reciprocal military exercise parameters.²⁵⁰ Sherman stated that the US was “firm” in pushing back on Russian security proposals that are “simply non-starters;” Sherman stated the US will not forego bilateral cooperation with sovereign states and that NATO will not end its policy of allowing eligible states to seek NATO membership. Sherman also stated that both sides are open to discussing ways to set reciprocal limits on the size and scope of military exercises and improve exercise transparency. Sherman stated that she and Ryabkov discussed missile placement in Europe and that the US is open to discussing the future of “certain missile systems in Europe... along the lines of the now-defunct [Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF)] Treaty.” Sherman pushed back on the Kremlin's efforts to hastily negotiate diplomatic deals, stating that though the Kremlin seeks to negotiate “swiftly,” the Kremlin must give the US the time and space that complex arms control issues require. Sherman stated that there will be “significant costs and consequences well beyond what [Russia] faced in 2014” if Russia attacks Ukraine again.

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov emphasized that the US should prepare for compromises and show flexibility in negotiations with Russia in an interview with *Perviy Kanal* on January 9.²⁵¹ Ryabkov reiterated that Russia's position is firm, and that the West should make concessions. Ryabkov said that Russia has been

accepting Western impositions for 30 years and that diplomacy now requires Western flexibility.²⁵² Ryabkov threatened the West that Western security would deteriorate if the West is unable to make concessions.

Russia's Southern Military District (SMD) announced on January 10 that SMD forces will conduct exercises at 20 training grounds across the SMD at an unspecified time in winter 2022.²⁵³ Unspecified SMD elements will conduct exercises to test companies' ability to mobilize as a new element in a larger battle formation. The exercises are likely intended to prepare individual Russian companies for rapid mobilization that may crosscut Russian unit boundaries, integrating the additional units that continue to deploy to the Ukrainian border. Army aviation helicopters will also conduct electronic warfare exercises to block enemy UAV signals. These exercises will occur in unspecified training grounds in Crimea, Rostov, Kuban, Stavropol, Adygea, Dagestan, North Ossetia, Chechnya, Astrakhan, Volgograd, and at Russian military bases in Armenia, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia. The SMD has not decreased its force posture near Ukraine as of January 10, 2022.

Russia's Caspian Flotilla announced on January 10 that over 1,000 Flotilla personnel will conduct exercises throughout January 2022.²⁵⁴ The Caspian Flotilla also announced that its naval infantry units began preparing for small arms, artillery, and combat vehicle live fire exercises at the Adanak Training Ground which will occur on a future unspecified date, likely in January 2022.

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov said that NATO needs to return to its 1997 borders on January 9.²⁵⁵ Ryabkov told *TASS* that the West must abandon NATO expansion and eliminate unspecified existing military infrastructure in Eastern Europe. *Reuters* quoted Ryabkov saying that NATO must eliminate "everything that the alliance has created since 1997."²⁵⁶ Current NATO members Poland, Romania, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Czechia, Hungary, Bulgaria, Slovakia, Slovenia, Albania, and Croatia, Montenegro, and North Macedonia were not NATO members in 1997.

Russia's Black Sea Fleet and elements of the 4th Air Force and Air Defense Army conducted air defense exercises with S-400 and Pantsir-S air defense systems in Crimea on January 9.²⁵⁷ Air defense units practiced detecting and tracking aircraft at low altitudes.

State Duma Committee Chairman for Commonwealth of Independent States Affairs Leonid Kalashnikov said on January 7 that it is unlikely that the West triggered the protests in Kazakhstan ahead of security talks with Russia in mid-January.²⁵⁸ The Kremlin likely has decided to not conduct a full-fledged information operation to frame protests in Kazakhstan as a Western hybrid war as of January 7. Kalashnikov previously said he would support a hypothetical decision for a permanent Russian deployment to Kazakhstan on January 6.²⁵⁹

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov claimed Moscow has not yet seen any US willingness to compromise on US-Russia strategic stability talks over the past six months on December 6.²⁶⁰ Ryabkov specified curtailing eastern NATO enlargement, not admitting new NATO members, not deploying certain weapons in unspecified countries, and not conducting proactive exercises as "absolutely necessary inalienable elements" of its demanded security guarantees.

Fifteen surface ships in Russia's Caspian Flotilla conducted snap combat readiness drills at the flotilla's base in Dagestan on January 5.²⁶¹ Approximately 200 servicemen participated in the exercise.

Ukraine's Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) reported on January 4 that Russian forces reinforced the advanced positions of its Donetsk and Luhansk proxy forces in occupied Donbas during the New Year holidays.²⁶² GUR reported that Russian forces deployed more reconnaissance systems and sniper pairs to the front lines in Donbas and conducted artillery exercises.

The five nuclear-weapon states of Russia, the United States, the United Kingdom, China, and France issued a joint statement on preventing nuclear war and avoiding an arms race on January 3.²⁶³ The joint statement reaffirms the five nuclear-weapon states' commitment to avoiding a nuclear war and their commitment to their Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty obligations.

The Russian Ministry of Defense announced on January 3 that Northern Fleet naval aviation pilots will conduct training in Crimea at an unspecified future date.²⁶⁴ Su-33 and MiG-29K pilots of the Northern Fleet will deploy to Crimea for these exercises.

TASS reported on January 2 that Russia's nuclear triad will hold strategic command and staff exercises in early 2022.²⁶⁵ TASS reported that a "source close to Russia's Defense Ministry" said that the exercises would occur as part of Russia's recurring "Grom" exercises in the beginning of 2022. The Russian military usually does not conduct Grom exercises early in the year; Grom typically occurs in September or October.²⁶⁶ Russia holding Grom nuclear readiness exercises in early 2022 could help obfuscate an actual Russian nuclear forces mobilization in the event of a Russian military operation against Ukraine.

Russian gas company Gazprom continued suspending gas transit through the Yamal-Europe gas pipeline for 12 consecutive days as of January 2.²⁶⁷ The Kremlin likely reduced gas transit to Europe to increase energy pressure against Europe as the Kremlin seeks to complete the certification of the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline and political concessions on security assurances from NATO.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov gave an interview to *Russia Today* on Ukraine and Russia's demanded security guarantees on December 31.²⁶⁸ Lavrov said that the draft documents published on December 17 are aimed at creating a new system of legal agreements based on the principles of "indivisibility of security" and the "abandonment of attempts to achieve military superiority," which Lavrov claims Euro-Atlantic states imposed in Europe the 1990s. Lavrov said that Russia may reach "other agreements" on conventional arms control in Europe, but specified these agreements would not resemble the "long-outdated" Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty. Lavrov reiterated Kremlin demands that senior US and NATO military officials participate in negotiations with Russia. Lavrov accused Ukraine of perceiving NATO support for Ukraine as "carte blanche for a military operation" against Donbas and stated that Russia will take "all necessary measures" to protect "Russian citizens" in Donbas.

At least two Caspian Flotilla landing craft deployed to the Black Sea in fall 2021.²⁶⁹ New satellite imagery from November and December 2021 observed two Caspian Flotilla landing craft in the Black Sea near Novorossiysk. Caspian Flotilla landing craft also deployed to

the Black Sea in April 2021. These landing craft likely redeployed to the Caspian Sea in summer 2021 and then deployed again to the Black Sea in fall 2021.²⁷⁰

Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova discussed upcoming negotiations with the US and responded to Josep Borell's comments on EU involvement in security discussions on December 30.²⁷¹ Zakharova confirmed Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Ryabkov and US First Deputy Secretary of State Sherman will lead the Russian and US delegations in Geneva on January 10. Zakharova reiterated Russia's main demands are "the non-advancement of NATO to the east and the non-deployment of weapons systems that threaten Russia at the borders of our country." Zakharova additionally responded to Josep Borell's comments on December 29 that the EU must have a part in security discussions with Russia. Zakharova decried the "polyphony" among Western states regarding policies towards Russia, and stated Russia will only conduct European security discussions with NATO and the OSCE. Zakharova blamed the EU for Russia's security concerns and claimed the EU is fully subordinate to NATO on security topics.

Russia's ambassador to Germany claimed NATO discussions about providing weapons to Ukraine serve as "proof" of Russia's need for security guarantees on December 29.²⁷² Russian Ambassador Sergey Nechaev claimed the "militarization of Ukraine" is counterproductive and demonstrates Russia needs security guarantees from the West enshrined in international law. Nechaev made these claims in response to a statement by future Christian Democratic Union (CDU) Chairman Friedrich Merz that Ukraine's requests for weapons are "without a doubt legitimate in view of the Russian army's massive build-up of troops on its eastern border."

Russian gas giant Gazprom declined to ship gas through the Yamal-Europe pipeline for the ninth day in a row on December 29.²⁷³ Gazprom claims European customers have not submitted reservations for gas and accused Germany of reselling gas purchased from Russia under long-term contracts at a higher price. European gas prices reached an all-time high of \$2,000 per thousand cubic meters in mid-December. The Kremlin is likely halting gas sales to Europe to coerce European states, primarily Germany, into concessions at upcoming security talks in January.

Commander of the Russian Airborne Forces (VDV) General Andrey Serdyukov published an essay on the VDV's capabilities and confirmed the establishment of a VDV regiment permanently based in Crimea on December 29.²⁷⁴ Serdyukov's essay appeared in Russian military newspaper Red Star. Serdyukov stated the VDV carried out more than 2,500 training events in 2021, primarily during Russia's Zapad-2021 exercise in Belarus. Serdyukov stated the VDV formed an airborne assault regiment in Crimea in 2021, referring to the 56th Air Assault Regiment. The Kremlin redeployed the 56th VDV brigade from its permanent base near Volgograd to Feodosia in Crimea in March 2021, and announced the brigade would transform into a regiment by the end of 2021.²⁷⁵

Unspecified signal elements of the 58th Combined Arms Army conducted signals defense exercises at the Tarskoye Training Ground, North Ossetia, on December 28.²⁷⁶ Signal elements protected communications infrastructure from simulated enemy electromagnetic and chemical weapon attacks.

An unspecified number of Southern Military District Su-25SM fighter-bombers conducted 360 bombing runs and rocket launch exercises in Stavropol on December 28.²⁷⁷

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov demanded on December 28 that high-ranking NATO military officials attend the US-Russia talks on January 10 and Russia-NATO talks on January 12 to add a “professional dimension.”²⁷⁸ Ryabkov added that Russia will “put a barrier” on NATO expansion.²⁷⁹

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov confirmed Russia’s participation in two separate talks with the United States and NATO in early January on December 27.²⁸⁰ Lavrov said Russia seeks two agreements: US-Russian agreement on legal security guarantees and a NATO-Russia deal on limiting “risks and threats in the European theater.”

Russian Deputy Defense Minister Alexander Fomin said that alleged NATO provocations have a “high risk of escalation into an armed confrontation” on December 27.²⁸¹ Fomin alleged that NATO’s use of reconnaissance aircraft in the Black Sea increased by more than 60 percent in the last year.

Russian State Duma Deputy Vladimir Zhirinovskiy called for Russian strikes against Ukraine and the West on New Year's Eve in a TV interview on December 27.²⁸² Zhirinovskiy stated that joint NATO and Ukrainian exercises are evidence of Western preparations for a “real war.” Zhirinovskiy is a Kremlin-controlled actor but not an influential Kremlin policymaker. His overt call for military action against Ukraine is significant, however, and could foreshadow a future Russian information operation which would explicitly call for military action against Ukraine.

Over 500 personnel of the Russian Black Sea Fleet, including electronic warfare elements, conducted exercises in Crimea on December 27.²⁸³ Electronic warfare specialists practiced collecting radio signals intelligence and suppressing targeted radio communication channels of a field communications center.

Approximately 2,000 Caspian Flotilla naval infantry began platoon exercises at the Adanak Training Ground on December 27.²⁸⁴ Platoon commanders are practicing managing subordinate units and attached reinforcement equipment. The naval infantry are practicing command and control, reconnaissance, engineering, fire, and maneuver combat tasks.

Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov said that Chechnya is ready to deploy infantry forces to prevent the West from building military bases in Ukraine on December 27.²⁸⁵

Russia’s Southern Military District (SMD) announced that it completed exercises with over 10,000 troops on December 25.²⁸⁶ Several Russian state-owned, Russian opposition, and Western media outlets inaccurately framed this announcement as 10,000 Russian personnel near Ukraine withdrawing and redeploying away from Ukraine.²⁸⁷ The SMD stated that over 10,000 personnel of unspecified SMD units finished exercises in Rostov, Kuban, Crimea, Astrakhan, Volgograd, Stavropol, “in the Republics of the North Caucasus,” and in Armenia, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia, and would redeploy to their permanent garrisons. Russia likely has not decreased its force posture around Ukraine, however. Units permanently stationed in Crimea, Rostov, and Kuban returning to their permanent garrisons are still default postured against Ukraine. This announcement does not address the significant Russian buildup near Ukraine with Central and Western Military District elements in

Voronezh and Yelnya. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky told US members of Congress that Russian forces have not withdrawn from near Ukraine on December 24.²⁸⁸

Russian Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Maria Zakharova gave a briefing on Ukraine on December 24.²⁸⁹ Zakharova said Kyiv “seems to be preparing for a military solution” for Donbas. She called NATO members’ support for Ukraine’s “crusade against their own population” deeply regrettable. She condemned a growing foreign military presence in Ukraine and claimed there are approximately 10,000 foreign military instructors in Ukraine, 4,000 of which are Americans. She said Ukraine has joined a “US-inspired information campaign” to accuse Russia of building invasion forces near Ukraine and condemned the US sending weapons to Ukraine.

The Russian Foreign Ministry (MFA) accused an unidentified individual of conducting a terrorist attack against the Russian consulate in Lviv, Ukraine, on December 24.²⁹⁰ The MFA claims an unknown person threw a Molotov cocktail at the entrance of the consulate. The MFA accused Kyiv of failing to fulfill its obligations to provide security to Russian diplomatic facilities.

Russian Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Maria Zakharova accused Western observers of distorting Russia’s security guarantee demands on December 25.²⁹¹ Zakharova accused unspecified actors in the United States and “Western countries” of making statements that NATO will not discuss NATO curtailing eastern expansion in talks with Russia. Zakharova said that NATO’s non-expansion and not deploying weapon systems that threaten Russian borders are the main issues in the upcoming negotiations with the United States and NATO.

Approximately 50 personnel of the Baltic Fleet conducted air defense exercises with Pantsir-S air defense systems on December 25.²⁹² Black Sea Fleet naval aviation and UAVs acted as simulated targets.

A Russian soldier posted a video on TikTok with the hashtag “we are being deployed to Ukraine” on December 23.²⁹³ It is unclear if the TikTok post is accurate. If accurate, this video is one of the first publicly available Russian soldier-generated social media posts on Russian deployments towards Ukraine since the crisis began in October 2021.

Russian President Vladimir Putin held his annual marathon press conference on December 23.²⁹⁴ Putin typically holds an annual press conference. Most of the 2021 press conference focused on domestic issues, but Putin additionally made several statements on Ukraine. Putin accused Ukraine of “squeezing Russians and the Russian-speaking population out of their historical territory.” Putin accused Ukraine of not implementing the Minsk Accords and forming an “anti-Russia” which receives Western weapons and “brainwashes” the Ukrainian population to hate Russia. Putin said that Ukraine undermined the ceasefire by giving Ukrainian field commanders operational clearance to conduct strikes, as opposed to the decision-making being centrally controlled in Kyiv. Putin said Ukraine has not made constitutional amendments stipulated by the Minsk Accords and refuses to talk to proxy representatives. Putin accused Ukraine of trying to solve the conflict in Donbas with force twice in the past. Putin said that Russian actions depend on the “unconditional provision of Russia’s security today and in the historical perspective.” Putin argued the US would react similarly to Russia if Russia attempted to place missiles in Canada or Mexico as NATO has placed weapons in Romania and Poland. Putin accused the US of “cheating” and “blatantly deceiving” Russia about not expanding NATO further east in the 1990s. Putin reiterated that he requested that

the US and NATO negotiate ending NATO's eastern expansion and stated that NATO and the US "should answer us with something." Putin said that US officials are giving a "positive reaction" and claimed that US officials said they are ready to start discussions in Geneva "at the beginning of the year." The US has not officially confirmed any planned talks.

Russia sent a "humanitarian aid" convoy to the Luhansk People's Republic on December 23.²⁹⁵ The convoy arrived in the LNR on December 23 and is Russia's 105th so-called humanitarian convoy to Donbas to date.²⁹⁶ Russia's Emergency Situations Ministry claimed the convoy carried more than 185 tons of medicine and medical equipment.²⁹⁷ This convoy likely carried weapons and ammunition given documented past Russian weapon shipments to Donbas under the guise of "humanitarian aid convoys."

More than 1,000 servicemen – likely of the 439th Artillery Regiment – and a tank battalion of an unspecified motorized rifle unit likely of the 8th Combined Arms Army conducted fires exercises at the Prudboy Training Ground on December 23.²⁹⁸ The exercises practiced command and control cohesion in destroying targets and adjusting fires using unmanned aerial vehicles.

Satellite imagery published on December 23 shows a unit likely to be the 136th Motor Rifle Brigade of the 58th Combined Arms Army at the base of the 133rd Logistics Brigade of the Black Sea Fleet in Bakhchysarai, Crimea, on December 13.²⁹⁹

The Russian Ministry of Defense announced on December 22 that brigade-sized airborne exercises would occur in Novorossiysk and Crimea from December 21-24.³⁰⁰ Over 1,200 airborne personnel of the 7th Airborne Division and possibly elements of the 56th Airborne Regiment will participate in battalion tactical exercises at the Raevsky and Opuk training grounds in Novorossiysk and Crimea, respectively, on December 21 to 24. Russia's military will also deploy Mi-35 helicopters for amphibious assault and to provide air cover for attacking troops. This is the first brigade-sized airborne forces exercise that the Kremlin has announced since the crisis began in October 2021.

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov met with the Head of the European Union Delegation to the Russian Federation Markus Ederer to discuss Russia's demanded security guarantees from NATO and the US on December 23.³⁰¹

Unspecified elements of the 150 Motorized Rifle Division conducted air defense exercises with Igla man-portable air-defense systems (MANPADS) in Rostov on December 23.³⁰²

Independent Russian news outlet Meduza reported on December 22 that Russian recruiters are mobilizing mercenaries for operations in Donbas.³⁰³ Meduza reported that recruiters associated with the Russian Interior Ministry, Russian National Guard, Ministry of Defense, and Union of Donbas Volunteers have been making offers to both professional mercenaries and generic Donbas war veterans since November 2021. The report states that a former Wagner Group mercenary who fought in Syria received a call from Russian mercenary recruiters in fall 2021 for a "new project" that included a deployment to a training facility in Vesyloly, Rostov-on-Don, as part of this new recruitment drive. The mercenary stated that the Russian military mobilized Russian mercenaries who fought in eastern Ukraine in 2014 at this training ground in Vesyloly. The Meduza report also claims there is a

recruitment drive to create two military formations in the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics consisting of former Russian convicts. Meduza's sources did not know whether the newly recruited detachments would be sent on offensive combat missions or simply deploy to Donbas to perform security tasks.

Russia deployed an unknown number of Su-34 bombers from Novosibirsk to Lipetsk on December 22.³⁰⁴ Lipetsk is approximately 300 kilometers from Ukraine's northeastern border with Russia. The quantity of Su-34 bombers in this deployment is unclear. This deployment could support Russian military activity against Ukraine.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said on December 22 that Russia and US will hold their first round of talks on security guarantees in Europe in January 2022.³⁰⁵

Over ten Russian Caspian Flotilla ships and air defense personnel conducted air defense exercises in the Caspian Sea on December 22.³⁰⁶ The participating ships included the missile ships *Tartarstan* and *Dagestan* and the small rocket and artillery ships *Grad Sviyazhsk*, *Uglich*, *Volgodonsk*, *Makhachkala*, and *Astrakhan*. The participating ships practiced neutralizing enemy aircraft and cruise missiles. The Russian Navy could potentially transfer ships from the Caspian to the Black Sea to support any operations against Ukraine. However, these exercises are likely routine.

Approximately 200 personnel of the Black Sea Fleet and the 22nd Army Corps conducted exercises to repel enemy reconnaissance and sabotage attacks in Crimea on December 22.³⁰⁷

Battalion-sized artillery and tank elements of the 49th Combined Arms Army conducted fire and maneuver exercises in Stavropol on December 22. Approximately 400 personnel used T-72 tanks and 152-mm self-propelled artillery to destroy enemy armor at distances up to 12 kilometers.³⁰⁸

Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu accused the United States of planning of a chemical weapon attack in Donbas at a Ministry of Defense collegium with Russian President Vladimir Putin on December 21.³⁰⁹ Shoigu said Russia has evidence that the US deployed 120 American private military contractors with chemical weapons to Avdeevka and Priazovskoe in Donetsk. Shoigu claimed that cooperation between NATO and Ukraine constitutes a Russian security threat because Kyiv attempts to solve the conflict in Donbas by force. Putin accused NATO of building up NATO forces near Russian borders and conducting unplanned large-scale exercises. Shoigu accused Poland of creating infrastructure to accommodate a US armored brigade and nearing completion of an Aegis Ashore anti-missile system in Poland. Shoigu said the United States and NATO are increasing the scale and intensity of military exercises near Russia and practicing using strategic aviation to conduct simulated nuclear strikes against Russia. Putin said that NATO has adapted Mark 41 vertical launchers located in Romania to use Tomahawk missiles. Putin said that NATO plans to deploy Mark 41 launchers to Poland and that the deployment of such weapons to Ukraine would be a serious Russian security challenge. Putin said that he gave NATO and American leadership proposals on how to start negotiations on security agreements. Putin reiterated that Russia seeks "long-term, legally binding guarantees" because the US withdraws from all international treaties. Putin said Russia will take "adequate retaliatory military-technical measures" if the West continues along its "clearly aggressive line."

Russian gas company Gazprom suspended gas transit through the Yamal-Europe gas pipeline on December 21 and 22.³¹⁰ The Kremlin likely reduced gas transit to Europe to increase energy pressure against Europe as the Kremlin seeks to complete the certification of the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline and political concessions on security assurances from NATO.

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Vladimir Titov held a meeting to coordinate policy with Russia’s ambassadors to Central and Eastern European states in Budapest on December 21.³¹¹ Russian ambassadors to Austria, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, Germany, Czech Republic, Switzerland, and Liechtenstein participated in the meeting.

Unspecified artillery elements of the Russian 150th Motorized Rifle Division conducted indirect fire exercises with 122-mm howitzers in Rostov on December 21.³¹²

Unconfirmed social media video from December 19 allegedly depicted several hundred Russian reservists moving across an unspecified field on an unknown date.³¹³ If accurate, this video is the first open-source evidence of reservist mobilization since the crisis began in October 2021.

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Andrey Rudenko said that Russia would consider Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko offer to host Russian nuclear missiles in Belarus if NATO places nuclear weapons in Poland on December 21.³¹⁴ Lukashenko said he would not exclude offering to host Russian nuclear weapons in Belarus if NATO deploys nuclear weapons to Eastern Europe on November 30.³¹⁵ Lukashenko implied that Belarus is ready to resume hosting Russian nuclear infrastructure – as it did during the Soviet era – if NATO deploys nuclear missile structures to Eastern Europe.³¹⁶ The Kremlin had not previously engaged with Lukashenko’s statement.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov gave an interview on December 21 in which he reiterated that continued NATO expansion eastward crosses Russia’s “red line.”³¹⁷

The Russian Foreign Ministry published a draft of its “security guarantees” demands to the US and NATO on December 17.³¹⁸ The draft document calls on the United States and Russia to not conduct activities which “affect the security” of either party; to not use the territory of other states to prepare an attack against either party or conduct activity that affects the “fundamental security interests” of either party; to rule out any NATO eastward expansion; to refuse to admit former Soviet states into NATO or establish NATO military bases on the territory of former Soviet States; to rule out NATO developing bilateral military cooperation with former Soviet states; to refrain from any military deployments that either party could perceive as a national security threat; to refrain from flying heavy bombers equipped for nuclear or non-nuclear weapons outside of national airspace or locating surface warships outside of national territorial waters; to not deploy ground-based intermediate and shorter-range missiles outside Russian or US national territory, as well as in areas of their national territory from which such weapons are capable of hitting targets on the national territory of the other party; to exclude the deployment of nuclear weapons outside of national territory and return nuclear weapons already deployed outside national territory back to national territory; to eliminate all existing infrastructure for the deployment of nuclear weapons outside national territory; to not train military personnel and civilians from non-nuclear-weapon countries to use nuclear weapons; to not conduct exercises and general

purpose trainings with non-nuclear-weapon states that include the development of scenarios with the use of nuclear weapons. This is clearest and most expansive list of Russian demands of the US and NATO that the Kremlin has articulated as of December 22.

Nord Stream AG – the consortium for the Nord Stream 2 pipeline – began filling the Nord Stream 2 pipeline with natural gas despite German and European Union objections on December 17.³¹⁹ Germany and the EU have not given regulatory approval to Nord Stream 2 yet likely in part due to Russia’s military buildup near Ukraine.

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Grushko on December 21 said that Russia is willing to hold a Russia-NATO Council meeting if NATO will consider the Kremlin’s security guarantees that it articulated on December 17.³²⁰

Brigade-sized elements of the Southern Military District and likely of the 49th Combined Arms Army conducted combined-arms combat exercises at the Nikolo-Alexandrovksy Training Ground in Stavropol, Russia, on December 16.³²¹ Over 3,000 servicemen and 500 armored vehicles participated in the exercise which emphasized tactical coordination between motorized rifle squads. Motorized rifle elements participated in simulated firefights against enemy armored vehicles.

Russian presidential aide Yuri Ushakov explained a draft document on the Kremlin’s security demands on “security guarantees” to American National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan on December 16.³²² Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov stated this action confirms Russia’s readiness to begin negotiations with the United States on security guarantees. Peskov also stated that Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov is ready to begin negotiations. This statement follows a phone call between Sullivan and Ushakov on December 15. The Kremlin later publicly released a draft agreement on December 17.

S-400 anti-aircraft missile system crews conducted air defense exercises in Crimea on December 15.³²³ Military personnel practiced measures to launch missiles at simulated enemy targets. Su-24M bombers acted as the simulated enemy.

Elements of Russia’s 106th VDV Division conducted training at the Tesnitskoye training ground in the vicinity of Tula on December 15.³²⁴ The servicemen practiced conducting fire missions amidst a hostile air attack using the Strelets intelligence command and control complex. The officers of the 106th tested their servicemen’s ability to independently prioritize targets according to their importance to the mission. The 106th Division is based south of Moscow and could support a Russian VDV deployment into Belarus, which ISW has previously forecasted is highly likely.

Elements of the Russian 106th VDV Division conducted training at the Tesnitskoye Training Ground in Tula on December 14.³²⁵ The servicemen practiced conducting fire missions amidst a hostile air attack. The servicemen used the Strelets intelligence command and control complex to quickly strike a reconed position. The officers of the 106th tested their servicemen’s ability to independently prioritize targets according to their importance to the mission. Elements of the 106th Division have continued holding command and control exercises through December 21.³²⁶

Independent Russian polling agency Levada released the results of a poll of Russian public opinion on the Ukraine crisis on December 14.³²⁷ The poll asked

several questions about “the recent exacerbation of the situation in eastern Ukraine” and the likelihood of war. Only 4% of respondents believed Russia is responsible, while 50% blamed NATO, 16% Ukraine, and 3% the DNR/LNR. 75% do not exclude the possibility of a Russia/Ukraine war. Of those 75%, 3% think war is inevitable, 36% highly likely, 38% the least likely but possible outcome, and 15% think it is impossible.

Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova claimed the G7’s joint statement on Russia/Ukraine demonstrated the G7’s inability to take responsibility for its own mistakes on December 12.³²⁸ Zakharova blamed the G7 for meddling in Ukraine’s internal affairs and causing a split in Ukrainian society. She claimed further negotiations must occur between “Ukraine and Ukraine,” not Ukraine and Russia. The Kremlin did not issue any other official response to the joint G7 statement.

Russian military hardware is likely moving in Bryansk and Kursk Oblasts, Russia as of December 12.³²⁹ OSINT Twitter accounts The Lookout, ELINT News, and Kyle Glen reported the movements of Russian military hardware roughly 100km from the Russo-Ukrainian border. These OSINT accounts assessed that these movements occurred between December 7 and December 14 based on the weather. The Lookout assessed that some of the moving hardware in Kursk are likely components of the Russian 138th Motorized Rifle Brigade or the 6th Combined Arms Army arriving to the Russo-Ukrainian border. The Russian hardware includes tanks and logistics convoys with fuel tankers.

The 1st Tank Army is likely establishing an assembly area in Voronezh, Russia. Russian authorities on December 11 issued a Notice to Airman (NOTAM) covering the Pogonovo Training Ground in Voronezh from December 16-22.³³⁰ The Russian Ministry of Defense stated on December 9 that unspecified tank units (approximately 200 personnel) of the Western Military District conducted live fire training with battalion-sized artillery elements at the Pogonovo and Krintsa training grounds in Voronezh.³³¹ Russian social media users observed approximately two battalions of T-80 and T-72 tanks in Maslovka, Voronezh on December 8-11.³³² Social media users observed Buk air defense systems, likely from the 49th Air Defense Brigade of the 1st Tank Army, at railheads in Voronezh on December 8.³³³ Social media users observed T-80s, likely of the 4th Tank Division and equipment of the 2nd Tank Division, in Maslovka, Voronezh, in mid-November.³³⁴ The likely deployment of elements of two divisions and air defense units of the 1st Tank Army indicates significant elements of the army deploying to Voronezh. The deployment of the 1st Tank Army to Voronezh, as opposed to Belarus, indicates that the MDCOA of a mechanized drive to Kyiv from Belarus is less likely.

The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) stated on December 11 that over 1,500 Southern Military District (SMD) personnel participated in tank fire and maneuver exercises in unspecified training grounds in Crimea, Volgograd, Rostov, Adygea, Dagestan, Ingushetia, North Ossetia, Karachay-Cherkessia, Armenia, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia.³³⁵ The MoD claims these exercises occurred over a five-day period. The MoD stated that the SMD will continue combat coordination activity through February 2022.

The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) reiterated its red line demand for legal guarantees that NATO will not expand eastward on December 10.³³⁶ The MFA stated it seeks “serious long-term legal guarantees” that would “exclude NATO’s further advancement to the east and deployment of weapons on Russia’s western borders which are a threat to Russia.” The MFA demanded NATO “officially disavow” the 2008 NATO Bucharest summit decision on Ukraine and Georgia’s potential membership in NATO. The Russian

Foreign Ministry said this explicit restatement and clarification was necessary because “numerous loose interpretations of our position have emerged in recent days.” The MFA accused NATO of pushing Ukraine towards aggression as opposed to “reining in” Kyiv. The MFA urged Washington to return to the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty. The MFA announced that the Kremlin is drafting formal guarantees proposals in preparation for the next round of strategic US-Russia talks.

The Ukrainian Navy reported that Russian forces blocked 70 percent of the Sea of Azov on December 10. The Ukrainian Navy claims that the Kremlin issued navigation warnings to restrict movement in large areas of the Sea of Azov in order to prepare for Russian artillery fire against Ukrainian positions near Mariupol, Berdyansk, and Henichesk.³³⁷ Russia has not conducted such artillery attacks as of December 11.

Russia staged a provocation against an old Ukrainian naval transport in the Kerch Strait on December 9. Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) coast guard ships staged a provocation in the Kerch Strait against a 1969 Ukrainian navy transport that was training in the Sea of Azov on December 9.³³⁸ The Ukrainian transport departed Ukraine’s naval base in Mariupol and went south for training. Russian FSB ships demanded the Ukrainian transport not cross the Kerch Strait. The Ukrainian vessel stated it never had intention to do so and eventually returned to Mariupol without an interception. The Russian Foreign Ministry cited this incident and accused Ukraine of creating “a new provocation.”³³⁹ **The Russian Black Sea Fleet conducted artillery firing exercises from the new patrol ship *Sergey Kotov* in the Black Sea and from Novorossiysk naval base on December 8.**³⁴⁰ The crew fired AK-176 artillery mount large-caliber naval machine guns and DP-65 anti-sabotage grenade launcher systems.

Company-sized sapper elements (over 200 servicemen) of the Russian Black Sea Fleet conducted engineering support exercises in Crimea on December 8.³⁴¹ Servicemen camouflaged berths, supplied vessels with power, and provided bases with drinking water under simulated enemy reconnaissance.

Russia’s Western Military District (WMD) may be building a new base near Ukraine or Belarus. The Russian Ministry of Defense stated that unspecified platoon commanders of the WMD began conducting training exercises at the WMD’s 31st Training Ground on December 7.³⁴² It is unclear where the 31st Training Ground is located or how long it has existed. The Russian Ministry of Defense publicly mentioned the 31st Training Ground for the first time on November 24, 2021, and announced its intent to build 72 buildings and structures on the grounds.³⁴³ The 31st Training Ground could be a new Russian base near Ukraine or Belarus to support Russian military activities in either country, though ISW has no evidence for that hypothesis.

Two large landing ships of the Russian Black Sea Fleet loaded naval infantry for amphibious assault exercises at the Opuk Training Ground in Crimea on December 7.³⁴⁴ The *Caesar Kunikov* and *Novocherkassk* large landing ships of the Black Sea fleet onboarded an unspecified number of naval infantry at an unspecified location for future exercises at Opuk on an unspecified future date.

Over 300 naval infantry of the Caspian Flotilla conducted exercises with Southern Military District (SMD) air support at the Adanak Training Ground in Dagestan on December 7.³⁴⁵ Caspian Flotilla naval infantry defended a beach from simulated amphibious assault with Mi-28 helicopter air support from the SMD’s 4th Air and Air Defense

Army. This was the first roughly battalion-sized Caspian Flotilla naval infantry exercise since the Russian military buildup near Ukraine resumed in October 2021.

Peskov stated that NATO military deployments to Ukraine would “force” Russia to protect its interests on December 6.³⁴⁶ Peskov condemned the US and NATO for not recognizing Russia’s “red lines” and suggested Russia will act unless the West respects Kremlin red lines.

Over 300 senior officers of the Southern Military District (SMD), including regimental commanders, began training for multi-domain operations with missile and air strikes on December 6.³⁴⁷ SMD Commander Alexander Dvornikov is presiding over videoconference training with SMD commanders down to the regimental level. The training includes conducting complex multi-domain operations to conduct air and missile strikes in multiple operational directions.

Lavrov said Russia “must force” Ukraine to work within the Minsk Agreements framework on December 5.³⁴⁸ Lavrov stated that Ukraine will not implement any agreements on its own. Lavrov added that Berlin and Paris are slacking on their commitments to hold Ukraine accountable under the Normandy Format.³⁴⁹

The Kremlin granted United Russia Party membership to LNR leader Leonid Pasechnik and DNR leader Denis Pushilin on November 30 and December 4, respectively.³⁵⁰ The Kremlin will likely use Pushilin and Pasechnik’s now-official position in the Kremlin’s ruling party to advance Russian information operations about protecting “Russian citizens” in Donbas.

More than 500 marines of the Russian Black Sea Fleet began conducting military exercises in unspecified Crimean training grounds on December 3.³⁵¹ Black Sea Fleet naval infantry practiced defending equipment transports and neutralizing enemy reconnaissance groups while deploying to Crimean training grounds. This mobilization does not constitute mobilization at scale but is significant as the Black Sea Fleet naval infantry’s first public battalion-sized mobilization since the crisis began in October 2021.

Over 700 Russian servicemen, likely of the 20th Combined Arms Army, began conducting tactical sniper and reconnaissance exercises in Voronezh, Belgorod, Bryansk, and Smolensk on December 2.³⁵² The exercises emphasize reconnaissance, sniper, and counter-sniper tasks. Embedded regular Russian snipers and Russian-trained proxy militia snipers are a leading cause of Ukrainian casualties in Donbas.

The Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) announced on December 2 that it arrested an alleged Ukrainian Military Intelligence (GUR) operative that Ukrainian officials instructed to conduct a “terrorist attack” with improvised explosive devices on Russian soil.³⁵³ Intensified Russian information operations about alleged Ukrainian attacks against Russian soil would indicate an effort to set information conditions to support Russian military operations against Ukraine. The Kremlin has not pushed this narrative as of December 3.

Ukraine’s GUR reported on December 3 that Russia’s 8th Combined Arms Army began new operational and combat training exercises and preparations for forward artillery in occupied Donbas on December 1.³⁵⁴ The GUR claims these exercises seek to raise the combat readiness of units of the DNR and LNR. The GUR claims

that Russian-controlled forces in the DNR and LNR are rotating units to forward positions and preparing indirect fire assets to attack Ukrainian positions. The DNR and LNR have not yet mobilized at scale as of December 3.

Lavrov called on the OSCE Ministerial Council to formulate “long-term, legally binding security guarantees” against NATO expansion on December 2.³⁵⁵ Lavrov repeated Putin’s “red lines” from December 1 speech.³⁵⁶ Lavrov said that Russia will make concrete proposals soon, counting on Western “serious consideration, in essence and without excuses.” Lavrov demanded that OSCE participate in regulating conflicts, specifically by sending a harsh signal to Kyiv to implement the Minsk Agreements. Lavrov said the Ukrainian crisis cannot be resolved without direct dialogue between Ukraine and the DNR and LNR, and by granting the proxies special status in Ukraine’s constitution. The Kremlin likely seeks to permanently integrate DNR and LNR into Ukraine as Russian-controlled proxies.³⁵⁷

Putin clearly articulated his red lines on halting NATO’s eastern expansion for the first time on December 1. Putin stated he insists on “legal guarantees” that NATO will not expand further eastward towards Russia at a ceremony to present foreign ambassadors their credentials on December 1.³⁵⁸ Putin also referenced his previous November 18 session with Lavrov in which Putin claimed the West is not respecting Russian red lines.³⁵⁹ Putin’s statement was exceptionally clear and unusual; Putin does not normally articulate Russian policy objectives so clearly in open settings. Putin seeks to impose a revisionist world order in which states in Russia’s claimed sphere of influence have truncated sovereignty. The Kremlin may decide to conduct military operations against Ukraine if Western leaders and Zelensky reject these demands.

The Permanent Council of the CSTO expressed “great concern” over NATO’s military activity near Russian borders on December 1.³⁶⁰ The Kremlin-dominated CSTO accused NATO of violating the 1936 Montreux Convention which forbids the transit of non-Black Sea states’ warships with large military equipment. The CSTO is likely establishing information conditions in former Soviet states about NATO’s disregard of Russian borders to support Putin’s stated red lines.

Lavrov said that Russia will “harshly react” to any maneuvers on Russia’s western borders on December 1.³⁶¹ Lavrov encouraged the West to consider Lukashenko’s November 30 statement of his openness to host Russian nuclear missiles as a warning.³⁶² Lavrov’s statement indicates an increased likelihood of a permanent Russian military deployment to Belarus. Lavrov said NATO’s effort to add Ukraine to its “anti-Russia” orbit “severely complicates” the situation in Donbas. Lavrov accused NATO of supplying Ukraine with weapons illegal under the Minsk Agreements and of collaborating with the US to incite land, air, and sea-based provocations near Russian borders. Lavrov emphasized Russia’s readiness to suppress diplomatic initiatives in the United Nations that are beneficial to the West.

The Russian Ministry of Defense on December 1 acknowledged large military movements in the Southern Military District (SMD) for the first time since the crisis began. The Russian Ministry of Defense stated that over 10,000 SMD personnel organized in battalion tactical groups (BTG) began deploying to unspecified training grounds in the SMD for exercises.³⁶³ Multiple BTGs of the Russian 58th CAA and 8th CAA are likely mobilized in Crimea and Rostov, respectively.³⁶⁴ This is the first time the Kremlin acknowledged large SMD mobilization since the Russian buildup against Ukraine began in October 2021. This acknowledgement is likely intended as a signal to Ukraine and NATO given

Putin's simultaneous articulation of a red lines for the West on NATO expansion on December 1.³⁶⁵

The Critical Intelligence Team (CIT) OSINT group claims it spotted more elements of the Russian 41st CAA deploying from Siberia to western Russia on December 1.³⁶⁶ CIT claims it found video depicting trucks of the Tuva-based 55th Motorized Rifle Brigade deploying westward via rail. CIT argues these deployments are likely to Yelnya where other elements of the 41st CAA are deployed near the border with Belarus.³⁶⁷

Putin defined NATO deployments of “shock weapon systems” to Ukraine as one Kremlin “red line” on November 30.³⁶⁸ Putin said if Ukraine receives cruise and hypersonic missiles, Russia will respond in minutes. Putin stated that “there are repeated threats of new [Ukrainian] military formations” near the LNR and DNR and reiterated Russia's concern over NATO strategic aviation in the Black Sea. Putin had not previously publicly defined any Kremlin red line in Ukraine. Putin may articulate more red lines as Russia increases military pressure against Ukraine over winter 2021-2022.

The Kremlin officially initiated a first batch of 100 Donbas residents into Putin's ruling United Russia party on November 30.³⁶⁹ Putin's ruling United Russia Party announced on November 2 that Russian passport-holders in the LNR and DNR will be able to join the party.³⁷⁰ The Kremlin will likely increasingly leverage information operations claiming to defend Russians in Donbas.

Zakharova said Russia will continue its humanitarian assistance for “Russian citizens” in Donbas on November 29.³⁷¹ Zakharova accused the European Union (EU) of considering sending military equipment to Ukraine instead of humanitarian aid to Donbas. The Kremlin will likely intensify military shipments to Donbas falsely presented as “humanitarian aid convoys” in winter 2021-2022.

Peskov stated on November 28 that the Kremlin hopes Putin and Biden will have a video conference before the end of 2021. Peskov stated that there is no exact date for such a call.³⁷²

Military equipment parked in Crimea since April 2021 is on the move to an unknown location as of November 27. Previously visible Russian military equipment at the Opuk Training Ground in Crimea disappeared from satellite monitoring visibility on November 26-27, indicating redeployment elsewhere.³⁷³ Motorized rifle and artillery elements, many from the 58th CAA, deployed to Opuk in April 2021.³⁷⁴ It is unclear where the equipment is going as of November 29.

The Kremlin's political objectives for Donbas likely have not changed as of November 26. Zakharova reiterated the Kremlin's historically consistent political objectives for a settlement in Donbas on November 26.³⁷⁵ Zakharova stated, “there is no alternative to an exclusively peaceful settlement, a direct dialogue between Kyiv, Donetsk, and Luhansk as parties to the conflict, and a strict sequence of steps, according to which the restoration of control of the Ukrainian authorities over the border with Russia takes the last place after the granting of a special status to Donbas, the implementation of an amnesty, and the lifting of the economic blockade. And holding local elections.” Zakharova said the “main negotiating format” is the Trilateral Contact Group (Kyiv, OSCE, and LNR/DNR), and that the Normandy Format's purpose is to monitor the implementation of the Minsk Agreements. She also condemned the

foreign ministries of Germany and France for “groundlessly” accusing Russia of refusing to participate in the Normandy Format on November 25.

Russia sent a “humanitarian aid” convoy to the DNR on November 25. The convoy arrived in the DNR on November 25 and is Russia’s 104th so-called humanitarian convoy to Donbas to date.³⁷⁶ Russia’s Emergency Situations Ministry claimed the convoy carried more than 92 tons of medicine and medical equipment³⁷⁷; the convoy likely carried weapons and ammunition given documented past Russian weapon shipments to Donbas under the guise of “humanitarian aid convoys.”

Russian authorities increased border security in Voronezh Oblast on November 22. The FSB announced on November 22 that Russian border guards deployed 24-hour border patrols and stricter checkpoints on a 56-kilometer stretch between Boguchar and Kantemirovka in Voronezh Oblast, Russia, on the Russian border with Ukraine.³⁷⁸ Russia’s 3rd Motorized Rifle Division is based in Boguchar. This increased border security supports Russian efforts to conceal Russian deployments closer to Ukraine in Voronezh.

Russian Proxy Activity

The Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) claimed that Ukrainian forces deployed six heavy weapon systems near three villages in Ukrainian government-controlled Donetsk on January 13.³⁷⁹ The DNR claimed that Ukrainian forces deployed a 9K33 “Osa” air defense system to Andriyvka, Donetsk, a BM-21 “Grad” multiple launch rocket system and three 152mm self-propelled howitzers to Mangush, Donetsk, and a S-300 air defense system to Volodarske, Donetsk.

The Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) accused Ukrainian forces of shooting an Organization for Security and Cooperation Special Monitoring Mission (OSCE SMM) observation drone with small arms near Ukrainian government-controlled Chermalyk Village, Donetsk Oblast, on January 13.³⁸⁰

The Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) accused Ukrainian forces of firing 82mm mortars at Horlivka, Donetsk, on January 10.³⁸¹

The Luhansk People’s Republic (LNR) accused Ukrainian forces of deploying armored vehicles near the villages of Popasnaya, Zolote and Vrubovka on January 7.³⁸² The LNR accused Ukrainian forces of deploying four MT-LB armored personnel carriers and four armored combat vehicles near Popasna, Luhansk, three MT-LB armored personnel carriers near Vrubovka, and two BMP-2 infantry fighting vehicles near Zolote.³⁸³ Ukraine’s 24th Mechanized Brigade operates in this vicinity.

The Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) accused Ukraine’s 36th Naval Infantry Brigade of conducting aerial reconnaissance near Shirokino and Pavlopol, Donetsk, on January 3.³⁸⁴ The DNR said Ukraine’s reconnaissance of these areas could be a Ukrainian armed provocation to accuse the DNR of violating the ceasefire.

Luhansk Peoples Republic (LNR) police accused the Ukrainian Armed Forces of firing over 4,300 rounds of ammunition against Luhansk and violating the ceasefire 534 times in 2021 during a briefing on December 31.³⁸⁵ LNR police claimed that the Ukrainian military fired 155 artillery shells and planted 635 mines in Luhansk. LNR

police reported that ceasefire violations intensified after the Ukrainian Security Service (SBU) detained LNR Joint Center for Control and Coordination of the Ceasefire Regime representative Andrei Kosyak on October 13. The LNR previously claimed that the SBU detained Kosyak to destabilize the situation in Donbas in October 2021 after the SBU reported that Kosyak, a Russian citizen, conducted a reconnaissance operation on Ukrainian Armed Forces positions.³⁸⁶ LNR and Kremlin-sponsored media may resurface old news about Kosyak's detention to establish an alleged starting point for Ukrainian offensive activity against Donbas.

Luhansk Peoples Republic (LNR) police on January 2 accused “Ukrainian nationalist militants” of setting up a headquarters in a seized school in Valuyvsk village, Luhansk, on December 27.³⁸⁷ LNR police claimed that Ukrainian militants use the school to host a “tactical combat unit of nationalists” and establish firing positions. LNR police said they observed Ukrainian vehicles with armed personnel, artillery reconnaissance, target designators, and radio stations near the school. The report reiterated that Ukrainian attacks intensified after Ukrainian Security Service detained Russian reconnaissance officer Andrei Kosyak in October 2021.³⁸⁸

The Luhansk People’s Republic Militia accused the Ukrainian Armed Forces of kidnapping an LNR security officer near the contact line in Donbas on December 29.³⁸⁹ LNR representative Ivan Filiponenko claimed traces of struggle and blood were found at the site of the officer’s disappearance and accused the Ukrainian military of torturing the captured officer to “justify the criminal actions of Ukrainian militants.”

The Donetsk People Republic militia claimed on December 22 that the US shipped botulinum toxin to Mariupol and then Kharkiv in November 2021.³⁹⁰ The Donetsk People Republic militia also accused the US private military contractors of preparing firing points near the front line in Donbas. These claims support Russian Defense Minister Shoigu’s claim on December 21 that the US private military contractors brought chemical warfare agents to Ukraine.

Ukraine’s Main Intelligence Directorate (GUR) stated on December 21 that the Russian proxy forces in Donbas intensified engineering work to improve the fortification of equipment in advanced positions by mining frontline positions and masking false forward positions.³⁹¹

Ukraine’s Main Intelligence Directorate (GUR) stated on December 20 that approximately 600-800 Russian military officers are permanently embedded in the Donetsk and Luhansk Peoples Republic militias.³⁹² The GUR stated that the Kremlin conducted an officer rotation in October and November 2021 resulting with a new Russian proxy army corps commander and new brigade-level commanders.

The People’s Militia of the Luhansk Republic (LNR) reported that Ukrainian Armed Forces deployed additional armor and artillery to the front line in Donbas on December 16.³⁹³ The LNR said that Ukrainian Armed Forces deployed a Strela-10 anti-aircraft missile system, four T-72 tanks to the Novookhtyrka, Luhansk, and three T-72 tanks to the Severodonetsk, Luhansk. Ukraine’s 57th Motorized Rifle Brigade operates in the vicinity of these locations.

The Ukrainian Ministry of Defense Main Intelligence Directorate reported on December 14 that Russia’s 1st and 2nd Corps in Donetsk and Luhansk began new

training exercises on December 13.³⁹⁴ The GUR stated Russian Armed Forces commanders oversaw a combat readiness check of motorized, artillery, and tank units from December 6-10. The report stated the 1st and 2nd Corps began high intensity readiness exercises, particularly practicing meetings with unit commanders and specialized training for snipers.

Representatives from the DNR, LNR, South Ossetia, and the Russian government met in Donetsk to discuss prospects for deepened economic integration on December 14.³⁹⁵ Representatives from the Russian regions of occupied Crimea, Karelia, Volgograd, Penza, and North Ossetia attended the meeting. The DNR, LNR, and Russian Federation signed several cooperation agreements to promote agricultural, industrial, and infrastructure cooperation. The Kremlin seeks to increase economic ties between its proxies and neighboring Russian regions.

DNR leader Pushilin said during a December 5 interview that the DNR may unify with the LNR in the future.³⁹⁶ Pushilin said the DNR and LNR cannot unify at this time because the unification would allow Ukraine to undermine the Minsk Agreements. Pushilin stated that Ukrainian government-controlled Donetsk and Luhansk are awaiting the “arrival of the Russian world” and implied that DNR seeks to occupy the entire Donetsk Oblast.³⁹⁷ Pushilin also reiterated Kremlin statements about Ukrainian militarization and deployments to Donbas.³⁹⁸ Pushilin announced that over 350,000 DNR residents received Russian passports.³⁹⁹

DNR leader Pushilin said on November 30 that he wants to hold a referendum in the DNR, but did not specify on what issues.⁴⁰⁰ Pushilin said the DNR proposed a referendum to the members of the United Nations Security Council—likely Russia—in a November 30 interview. Pushilin likely seeks to hold a referendum to unify the DNR with Russia. The DNR has long sought full integration with Russia—an objective the Kremlin historically has not supported. The Kremlin likely seeks to reintegrate the DNR and LNR into Ukraine as Russian-controlled proxies.⁴⁰¹ The Kremlin could leverage Pushilin’s statements about a referendum to advance Russia’s own information operations to support a Russian military operation in Donbas, however.

United Kingdom

British Foreign Secretary Liz Truss said that any further Russian military incursion into Ukraine would bring “massive consequences” and coordinated sanctions to impose a “severe cost on Russia’s interests and economy” on January 6.⁴⁰²

British Foreign Secretary Liz Truss spoke with Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba on January 4.⁴⁰³ The ministers coordinated their respective states’ positions ahead of planned NATO, European Union (EU), and Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) talks with Russia on January 9-13. Truss reiterated the UK’s support for Ukraine and briefed Kuleba on UK consultations with the EU on new sanctions to deter Russia from further aggression.

Chief of the Russian General Staff Valery Gerasimov and UK Chief of the Defense Staff Tony Radakin had a phone call on December 23. The Russian Ministry of Defense stated they discussed issues of global and regional security, likely focused on Ukraine.⁴⁰⁴

Russian President Vladimir Putin and UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson held a phone call on December 13.⁴⁰⁵ The Kremlin readout stated Putin “outlined in detail” his assessments of the current situation around Ukraine in response to Johnson’s concern about the “alleged large-scale movement of Russian troops.” Putin presented “specific examples” of Kyiv’s violation of the Minsk agreements, exacerbation of the situation on the line of contact, and discrimination against the Russian-speaking population of Ukraine. Putin announced “the need to immediately begin negotiations in order to develop clear international legal agreements that would exclude any further NATO advance to the east and the deployment of weapons threatening Russia in neighboring states, primarily in Ukraine” and stated the Russian side will present draft relevant documents. London’s readout expressed Johnson’s “deep concern” over the Russian buildup, reiterated the importance of working through diplomatic channels, and emphasized the UK’s commitment to Ukraine’s territorial integrity and sovereignty. However Johnson also “recognized the importance of dialogue on international and regional security” – a possible concession to the Kremlin’s desire for a new European security agreement – and agreed it is imperative “all sides respect the terms of the Minsk protocol.”

The Group of Seven (G7) foreign ministers met in Liverpool to discuss measures against Russian aggression in Ukraine on December 11.⁴⁰⁶ The Ministers discussed Russian aggression against Ukraine and global efforts to “present a united front against malign behavior” by Russia and other actors. The Ministers discussed several non-Ukraine related items including global development, JCPOA negotiations, and ongoing crises in Myanmar in Ethiopia.

The G7 ministers released a joint statement on Russian aggression towards Ukraine on December 12, the day after the meeting.⁴⁰⁷ The statement stated:

1. The G7 states are “united in our condemnation of Russia’s military build-up and aggressive rhetoric towards Ukraine.”
2. Called on Russia to de-escalate, pursue diplomatic channels, and maintain transparency of military activities – framing this request as a repeat of those articulated by President Biden during his December 7 call with Putin. The G7 additionally reconfirmed its support for France and Germany in the Normandy Four and called for full implementation of the Minsk agreements.
3. Stated “Russia should be in no doubt that further military aggression against Ukraine would have massive consequences and severe cost in response.”
4. Reaffirmed the G7’s commitment to Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity while additionally stating “we commend Ukraine’s posture of restraint.”
5. Stated the G7 will “intensify our cooperation on our common and comprehensive response.”

British Foreign Secretary Liz Truss met with Lavrov on the sidelines of the OSCE ministerial in Stockholm, Sweden, on December 2.⁴⁰⁸ Truss restated the UK’s support for Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity and urged the Kremlin to deescalate.⁴⁰⁹ Lavrov emphasized that the UK’s provocative rhetoric undermines efforts to restore constructive dialogue on Ukraine.⁴¹⁰

Truss met with Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba on the sidelines of the OSCE ministerial in Stockholm, Sweden, on December 2.⁴¹¹ The ministers exchanged views on cooperation between Ukraine and the United Kingdom (UK) to strengthen security in

the Black Sea region. They agreed on the need to unite European states to prevent the launch of Nord Stream 2.

The UK announced it established a security force assistance brigade and a NATO holding area in Germany on November 25. The brigade has tanks and drone elements.⁴¹² UK Lieutenant General Ralph Wooddisse stated, “we are putting a substantial number of armored vehicles forward in order to be able to move more quickly should they be required anywhere on the continental [European] landmass.”⁴¹³ This is a reversal of the UK’s permanent force presence withdrawal from Germany in late 2020.⁴¹⁴

The UK and Ukraine signed a 1.7-billion pound loan agreement for the development of the Ukrainian navy on November 12. The deal stipulates that the UK will transfer two decommissioned UK Royal Navy minehunters to Ukraine, jointly produce eight missile ships, deliver and retrofit weapons systems to existing Ukrainian vessels, produce a Ukrainian frigate, and provide technical support for building Ukrainian naval infrastructure.⁴¹⁵

United States

US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken said on January 13 that the US will continue consultations with its allies following US-Russia, NATO-Russia Council, and Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)- Russia summits on January 10-13.⁴¹⁶ Blinken said that the US did not expect any “breakthroughs” during the summits, instead warning Russian President Vladimir Putin of potential consequences if the Kremlin decides to invade Ukraine. Blinken said that Putin is keeping “his options open” and has not “fully decided on what he is going to do.” Blinken said the US is coordinating with European countries within and outside of the Group of Seven (G7), NATO, and the European Union to shape further measures against Russian aggression.

US Permanent Representative to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Michael Carpenter rejected Russia’s security demands but rearticulated calls for dialogue at the Russia-OSCE Meeting on January 13.⁴¹⁷ Carpenter stated that the US would not tolerate “overt or tacit spheres of influence” or restrict states’ right to join NATO if they so choose.⁴¹⁸ Carpenter said the OSCE must “decisively reject blackmail” and never allow “aggression and threats to be rewarded.”⁴¹⁹ Carpenter encouraged a dialogue on concerns over conventional military forces, enhancement of military transparency, confidence building, and deconfliction. Carpenter told reporters following the meeting that the West must prepare for the eventuality that Russia could escalate against Ukraine; Carpenter said that “the drumbeat of war is sounding loud, and the [Russian] rhetoric has gotten rather shrill.”⁴²⁰

US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken said on January 13 that the Group of Seven (G7), European Union, and NATO informed the Kremlin about “massive consequences” if Russia invades Ukraine during US-Russia strategic stability and Russia-NATO Council summits on January 10 and January 12, respectively.⁴²¹ Blinken said that the West is drafting unprecedented and “very significant” sanctions against Russia’s economic and financial sectors. Blinken added that the US and NATO are looking at “shoring up even more the defenses of Ukraine if necessary.” Blinken stated that NATO will not restrict its membership to eligible countries and urged Russia to engage in a dialogue with the US, NATO, and Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman met with French, German, Italian, and UK representatives who participated in the NATO-Russia Council summit to discuss potential sanctions against Russia in Brussels, Belgium, on January 12.⁴²²

The officials met after the summit's conclusion and agreed to impose "massive consequences and severe costs," including "coordinated, restrictive economic measures" on Russia if Russia invades unoccupied Ukraine.

US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman discussed Russia's military buildup on Ukraine's borders during a meeting with the Chief of Staff for the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen in Brussels, Belgium, on January 12.⁴²³ The meeting took place after the NATO-Russia Council summit.

US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken briefed new Czech Foreign Minister Jan Lipavsky on US efforts to resolve the conflict in eastern Ukraine on January 13.⁴²⁴

US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman met with European External Action Service Secretary-General Stefano Sannino in Brussels on January 12.⁴²⁵ The officials discussed a "united approach" to Russia's military buildup near Ukraine's borders.

US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman met with officials from the European Union's Political and Security Committee in Brussels on January 11.⁴²⁶ Sherman briefed the European officials on the results of the January 9-10 US-Russia strategic stability dialogue in Geneva and discussed Russia's military buildup near Ukraine's borders. The US Department of State readout stated that this meeting underscored US commitment to work closely with the European Union.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Dutch Foreign Minister Wopke Hoekstra discussed Russia's military buildup near Ukraine on January 11.⁴²⁷ Blinken reiterated US support for Ukraine's independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity and stressed the US's commitment to impose "significant costs" against Russia if Russia escalates against Ukraine. This was Blinken and Hoekstra's first call after Hoekstra was appointed Dutch Foreign Minister on January 10.

US Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Victoria Nuland gave a briefing on the US-Russia strategic stability talks on January 11.⁴²⁸ Nuland characterized the January 9-10 talks in Geneva as "constructive and worth doing" and reiterated that the US demonstrated commitment to diplomacy by proposing military and exercise transparency and risk-reduction measures. Nuland stated that the US is interested in having "deeper discussions" on arms control with Russia and that treaties about nuclear weaponry "can't be negotiated overnight." Nuland stated the US has not observed Russian military de-escalation. Nuland stated that Russia amassed 100,000 troops near Ukraine's borders and prepared internal sabotage, destabilization, and false flag operations for Ukraine. Nuland stated that Russia now faces two options: "diplomacy and dialogue or instead ... confrontation and the massive consequences that that will bring." Nuland stated that the US and its partners are ready to impose "severe costs," and unprecedented "massive economic measures" if the Kremlin further invades or destabilizes Ukraine.

US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman briefed NATO officials in Brussels on January 11 on the results of the bilateral US-Russia strategic stability talks in Geneva on January 9-10.⁴²⁹ Sherman stated that the US is committed to working closely with NATO allies and partners to urge Russian de-escalation.⁴³⁰

CNN reported on January 11 that the Biden Administration secretly authorized an additional \$200 million in security assistance for Ukraine in late December 2021.⁴³¹ CNN reported that four anonymous US government sources reported that the US authorized small arms and ammunition, secure radios, medical equipment, spare parts, and other equipment consistent with previous US security assistance to Ukraine. CNN reported that the security assistance would likely not arrive in Ukraine quickly given that a previous \$60 million aid delivery authorized in summer 2021 is only nearing delivery completion in winter 2022, though the US may rush the delivery to increase Ukrainian capabilities. Kremlin news outlet *Federal News Agency* criticized CNN's story on January 11, claiming that the US added insult to injury by sending Ukraine weapons ahead US-Russia talks, where the US refused to consider Russia's security demands.⁴³²

US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken and Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba discussed Ukrainian security on January 7.⁴³³ Blinken briefed Dmytro Kuleba on the outcome of the January 7 NATO foreign ministerial and said that NATO members have a position of solidarity with Ukraine ahead of talks with Russia on January 9-13. Both officials coordinated their positions and reaffirmed that states cannot make decisions about Ukraine without Ukrainian participation.

US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken and EU Foreign Policy Chief Josep Borrell discussed Ukrainian security on January 8. Borrell briefed Blinken on his recent assessment of the situation in Ukraine after visiting Ukraine and the Donbas frontline in early January. The officials coordinated their positions ahead of talks with Russia on January 9-13 and agreed that any further Russian military aggression against Ukraine will result in "massive consequences" and a "severe response."⁴³⁴

The Associated Press (AP) reported on January 9 that the Biden Administration issued new warnings to Russia on January 8.⁴³⁵ AP reported that the US will impose strict economic sanctions if Russia intervenes in Ukraine by targeting Russian entities, financial institutions, and restricting US exports to Russia for technology and foreign-made products under US jurisdiction. AP reported that anonymous US officials "flatly rejected" Russian demands to end NATO expansion and remove US troops and weapons from Eastern Europe. AP reported that US officials said that the US would not make any decisions without the consent of Ukraine or NATO. AP reported that US officials said that the United States would consider dialogue on reducing possible future "offensive missiles" (likely referring to cruise missiles which could strike Russia) deployments to Ukraine and defining limits on NATO exercises in Eastern Europe.

US State Department Spokesman Ned Price said that Senator Ted Cruz's bill to sanction Russia's Nord Stream 2 pipeline would "undermine unity" among European allies on January 6.⁴³⁶ Cruz's bill imposes sanctions against Nord Stream within weeks of the bill's adoption and allows Congress to vote to reinstate sanctions if the US president waives them.

US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin spoke with Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu about "risk reduction near Ukraine's borders" on January 6.⁴³⁷ Both US and Russian readouts did not include any further details.

US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken and German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock met to discuss Ukraine in Washington on January 5.⁴³⁸ The officials

emphasized a preference to pursue diplomacy and de-escalation to deal with Russia's force buildup near Ukraine. Blinken stated that the US, Germany, NATO, the EU, and G7 have been very clear that Russia will face "massive consequences" for renewed aggression against Ukraine. Blinken suggested that Nord Stream 2 would not become operational if Russia renews aggression against Ukraine. Baerbock stated Germany is already providing Ukraine with military medical aid (as opposed to weapons), and Blinken stated the US will continue to deliver equipment to Ukraine in coming months through a range of mechanisms.

US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan called his counterparts from Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden to discuss transatlantic security and Ukraine on January 4.⁴³⁹ The officials discussed their readiness to impose "severe consequences" on Russia if it engages in further aggression against Ukraine. They also underscored the importance of diplomacy to de-escalate the situation, including through the US-Russia strategic stability dialogue, NATO-Russia Council, and OSCE meetings planned for January 9-13. Participants reaffirmed the right of each country to choose its alliances.

US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken had a phone call with the foreign ministers of the Bucharest Nine (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Czechia, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria) to reaffirm US commitments to transatlantic security and NATO's Article V on January 3.⁴⁴⁰ The ministers discussed Russia's military buildup near Ukraine, the need for a "united, ready, and resolute NATO stance for the collective defense of Allies," and de-escalation through deterrence, defense, and dialogue. Blinken underscored US "unwavering commitment" to NATO's Article V on collective defense.

US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken had a phone call with Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu on the Russian threat to Ukraine on January 3.⁴⁴¹ Blinken and Cavusoglu discussed the importance of continued coordination regarding the threat of Russian escalation in Ukraine and other topics.

US President Joe Biden and Russian President Vladimir Putin had a phone call on Ukraine on December 30. Both sides confirmed that the US and Russia will hold talks on January 9 to 10 in Geneva, Russia-NATO Council talks in Brussels on January 12, and then Russia-OSCE talks on January 13.⁴⁴² The Kremlin said that "large-scale" US sanctions against Russia in the event of an escalation against Ukraine would be a "grave mistake" that could lead to a "complete fracture" of US-Russia relations. The US readout emphasized that Biden made clear that the US and its allies will respond "decisively" if Russia further invades Ukraine.⁴⁴³ Biden reiterated that substantive progress in these dialogues can occur only in an environment of de-escalation rather than escalation.

US President Joe Biden and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky had a phone call on January 2.⁴⁴⁴ Biden stated that the US and its allies will "respond decisively" if Russia further invades Ukraine and reaffirmed US support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Zelensky thanked Biden for US support and discussed the steps Ukraine is taking within the Minsk and Normandy Formats. Zelensky also thanked the US for supporting a Ukrainian proposal to hold a NATO-Ukraine Commission meeting "in the coming days."

US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken discussed having a "strong, united response to further Russian aggression against Ukraine" with Canadian Foreign Minister Melanie Joly on December 31.⁴⁴⁵ Blinken and Joly also discussed willingness among NATO allies and partners to impose "massive consequences and severe costs on Russia."

US President Biden and Russian President Putin will hold a phone call at 3:30 EDT on December 30.⁴⁴⁶ Putin requested the call on December 29. The Kremlin stated the call would discuss Russian security demands ahead of planned US-Russia talks in early January.

Ukrainian President Zelensky spoke with US Secretary of State Blinken on December 29 ahead of Biden-Putin call on December 30.⁴⁴⁷ Blinken reiterated the United States' support for Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity. Blinken and Zelensky discussed upcoming diplomatic engagements with Russia and efforts to peacefully resolve the conflict in eastern Ukraine.

The US Navy canceled a planned redeployment of the carrier USS *Harry S Truman* and its battle group from the Mediterranean to the Middle East in response to Russia's buildup around Ukraine on December 28.⁴⁴⁸ US defense officials stated the *Harry S Truman* and its five escorting warships (a cruiser, three US guided missile destroyers, and a Norwegian frigate) would remain in the Mediterranean to reassure US allies and partners in the region.

The US deployed unspecified elements of the 335th Fighter Squadron from Seymour Johnson, North Carolina, to Campia Turzii, Romania, on December 15.⁴⁴⁹ At least two American F-15 fighter jets deployed. The jets conducted joint flights with the Italian and Romanian Air Forces to protect NATO airspace in the Black Sea from December 18 to 22. Italian Eurofighters will further operate with Romanian aircraft in the Black Sea area for the next three months (until March 2022). The mission of the 335th Fighter Squadron is to be prepared to deploy anywhere in the world on short notice and deliver an array of air-to-ground weapons with high accuracy.⁴⁵⁰

Chief of the Russian General Staff Valery Gerasimov and US Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Mark Milley had a phone call on December 22. TASS reports that the Russian Ministry of Defense stated they discussed "issues of international security."⁴⁵¹ The Joint Chiefs of Staff readout states they discussed "regional security-related issues of concern."⁴⁵² This was likely on Ukraine.

The New York Times reported on December 20 that the US and UK deployed unspecified cyberwarfare experts to Ukraine to help prepare Ukraine against potential planned Russian cyberattacks. The New York Times reported that Russia could attack Ukraine's power grid in early January 2022, potentially around or after Orthodox Christmas on January 7.⁴⁵³

Ukrainian Armed Forces Commander-in-Chief Valeriy Zaluzhnyi and US Joint Chiefs of Staff General Mark Milley discussed Russian aggression in a phone call on December 15.⁴⁵⁴ This is the third phone call between Zaluzhnyi and Milley in less than a month to discuss Russian aggression against Ukraine. Zaluzhnyi and Milley discussed Ukraine's strategic partnership with the US. Zaluzhnyi thanked Milley for the US' continued support for Ukrainian territorial sovereignty and commended the U.S.-Ukraine Strategic Defense Framework established on November 10, 2021 that expanded Ukrainian-US cooperation in Black Sea security, cyber defense, and intelligence sharing, and countering Russia's aggression. Zaluzhnyi stated that American experts have conducted assessment of Ukrainian Air Defense capabilities following Ukrainian Defense Minister Reznikov's visit to the United States.

US Deputy Secretary of State Karen Donfried met Russian Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister Sergei Ryabkov in Moscow on December 15.⁴⁵⁵ Ryabkov and Donfried discussed Russia's demanded security guarantees from the United States and NATO. The Russian MFA only published a one-sentence readout and the US State Department has not published a readout as of 1600 December 15.

The American guided-missile destroyer USS Arleigh Burke exited the Black Sea on December 15.⁴⁵⁶ The Arleigh Burke conducted exercises with NATO partners in the Black Sea from November 25 – December 14. The Arleigh Burke's deployment placed NATO anti-air, anti-submarine, and surface-to-surface capabilities in the Black Sea and prompted several false Russian claims of NATO aggression.

US Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Karen Donfried met with Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba in Kyiv, Ukraine on December 13.⁴⁵⁷ Donfried stated her agreement with the principle of “no decisions on Ukraine without Ukraine” and reaffirmed the United States' full support for Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty. She stated the United States' readiness to implement comprehensive measures to deter Russia aggression against Ukraine. Kuleba emphasized the need for political and diplomatic approaches to resolving Russian-Ukrainian armed conflict and welcomed American assistance in de-escalatory efforts. The Ukrainian MFA's readout stated Kuleba suggested unspecified security and humanitarian courses of action Russia could take to effectively implement the Minsk Agreements. No new inflections or theoretical changes emerged from the meeting. Donfried will meet with Russian Deputy FM Ryabkov in Moscow on December 15.

The US strategic RC-135W Rivet Joint Electronic Reconnaissance Aircraft plane conducted a reconnaissance mission near Donbas on December 11.⁴⁵⁸ This is reportedly the first time the Rivet Joint Electronic Reconnaissance Aircraft has operated inside Ukrainian airspace.⁴⁵⁹ The Russian Defense Ministry stated it scrambled Su-27 fighters to intercept French and US reconnaissance flights with CL-600 Artemis and RC-135 reconnaissance aircraft over the Black Sea on December 9.⁴⁶⁰

Biden called the heads of state of the Bucharest Nine (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Czechia, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria) to reaffirm US commitments to transatlantic security and NATO's Article V on December 10.⁴⁶¹ The leaders discussed the need for a NATO defensive stance against growing Russian aggression in Ukraine.

Zelensky and Biden discussed the situation in Ukraine during a December 9 telephone call.⁴⁶² Zelensky stressed Ukrainian readiness for extending the peace process in various formats. Biden and Zelensky discussed ways to provide financial, security, and political support to Ukraine in response to Russia's ongoing aggression. Zelensky emphasized the importance the Nord Stream 2 pipeline plays in deterring Russian aggression.

US Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs Victoria Nuland testified to the US Senate on December 7 that Russia deployed approximately 100 battalion tactical groups (BTGs) near the Ukrainian border.⁴⁶³ Nuland added that Russia deployed forces near eastern, northern, and southern Ukrainian borders in an interview following her testimony at the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.⁴⁶⁴ Nuland said Russian forces could deploy to Belarus and “mask” themselves to appear as Belarusian forces.⁴⁶⁵ Nuland pointed out

that Lukashenko's recognition of Russian occupation of Crimea is "particularly concerning" given his previous leverage against Russian influence.

Biden and Putin held a videoconference about Ukraine on December 7. The Kremlin readout accused Ukraine of attempting to completely dismantle the Minsk Agreements and shirk its commitments from the Normandy Format meetings.⁴⁶⁶ Putin stated that NATO seeks to "conquer Ukrainian territory" and deploy military forces near Russian borders. Putin reiterated his demand to obtain "legally fixed guarantees excluding the expansion of NATO in the eastern direction and the deployment of offensive strike weapons systems in the states adjacent to Russia." The Kremlin readout stated that the presidents agreed to undertake "substantive consultations" on these issues. Biden stated that the US and its allies would respond with "strong economic and other measures" in the event of a military escalation against Ukraine.⁴⁶⁷ Biden reiterated his support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity and called for de-escalation and a return to diplomacy. Biden spoke with French, German, Italian, and British leaders to brief them on his call with Putin.⁴⁶⁸

US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken called Zelensky on December 6.⁴⁶⁹ Zelensky and Blinken discussed their respective positions ahead of Biden's call with Putin on December 7. Zelensky and Blinken agreed on the importance of coordinating sanctions pressure against Russia, restoring Ukraine's full sovereignty and territorial integrity, and strengthening security cooperation.

US Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Mark Milley participated in a virtual meeting with the NATO Military Committee to discuss "significant security developments across Europe" on December 6.⁴⁷⁰

Blinken and Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba discussed implementing deterrence measures against Russia on the sidelines of the OSCE ministerial in Stockholm, Sweden, on December 2. Blinken and Kuleba discussed the implementation of deterrence measures against Russia including enhanced security and defense cooperation, the preparation of "tough" economic sanctions in the event of intensified Russian aggression, and political and diplomatic pressure against Russia.⁴⁷¹ Blinken reiterated US commitments to Ukraine's independence and territorial integrity and stressed the full implementation of the Minsk Agreements.⁴⁷²

Blinken and Kuleba discussed implementing deterrence measures against Russia on the sidelines of the OSCE ministerial in Stockholm, Sweden, on December 2. Blinken and Kuleba discussed the implementation of deterrence measures against Russia including enhanced security and defense cooperation, the preparation of "tough" economic sanctions in the event of intensified Russian aggression, and political and diplomatic pressure against Russia.⁴⁷³ Blinken reiterated US commitments to Ukraine's independence and territorial integrity and stressed the full implementation of the Minsk Agreements.⁴⁷⁴

Blinken met with Lavrov on the sidelines of the OSCE ministerial in Stockholm, Sweden, on December 2. Blinken reiterated US calls for Russia to demobilize forces near Ukraine, adhere to the Minsk Agreements, and observe the ceasefire in Donbas. Blinken stated the United States and its allies are prepared to impose "significant costs" against Russia if it escalates militarily.⁴⁷⁵ Lavrov warned that if the United States continues to ignore Russia's "concerns," it will result in "most serious consequences and will force [Russia] to take retaliatory measures to straighten the military-strategic balance."⁴⁷⁶ Lavrov restated desire to

establish a US-Russia dialogue in accordance with the agreements that Putin and Biden reached at the June 2021 Geneva summit.

US Sixth Fleet announced that the USS Arleigh Burke guided missile destroyer began deploying to the Black Sea “to operate with NATO allies and partners in the region” on November 25.⁴⁷⁷ Missile ship Shuya of the Black Sea Fleet conducted an exercise in response to the announcement of Arleigh Burke’s deployment.⁴⁷⁸

Ukraine’s navy received two refurbished former US Coast Guard patrol boats on November 23.⁴⁷⁹

Chief of the Russian General Staff Valery Gerasimov and US Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Mark Milley had a phone call on November 23. TASS reports that the Russian Ministry of Defense stated they “discussed topical issues of international security.”⁴⁸⁰ The Joint Chiefs of Staff readout states they discussed “several security-related issues of concern.” The topic was likely Ukraine, given that Milley had a phone call with Commander in Chief of the Ukrainian Armed Forces Valery Zaluzhny on November 22.⁴⁸¹

The Biden Administration is reportedly considering sending military advisors and weapons to Ukraine. CNN reported on November 22 that the Biden Administration is considering sending Ukraine US military advisers and weapons (Javelins, stingers, Mi-17 helicopters, and mortars).⁴⁸²

The US imposed new sanctions against the Nord Stream 2 pipeline on November 22. Blinken announced that the State Department submitted to Congress a list with two vessels and one Russia-linked entity involved in the pipeline to be sanctioned.⁴⁸³

Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III met with Ukrainian Defense Minister Oleksii Reznikov in Washington on November 18. The ministers agreed to work closely together to advance the shared priorities outlined in the US-Ukraine Strategic Defense Framework signed on August 31.⁴⁸⁴ Austin stated interest in deepening cooperation in Black Sea security, cyber defense, and intelligence sharing.

Canada

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky discussed Ukrainian security in a phone call on January 11.⁴⁸⁵ Zelensky briefed Trudeau on the military situation in eastern Ukraine and near the Ukrainian border. Zelensky stressed that Western states’ position in dialogue with Russia must remain “firm and decisive” and that the West must be ready to immediately impose a “preventative sanctions package” against Russia as a deterrent. Zelensky proposed updating the Joint Declaration on a Special Partnership between Ukraine and Canada. Zelensky reiterated the importance that states make no decisions about Ukraine without Ukrainian participation.

Reznikov met with Canadian Chief of the Defense Staff Wayne Eyre and called Canadian National Defense Minister Anita Anand on December 3.⁴⁸⁶ Eyre met with Reznikov during his official working visit to Kyiv aimed at developing cooperation between Ukraine and Canada’s armed forces. Both parties discussed bilateral defense cooperation in light of Russian security threats

France and Germany

Adviser to the German Chancellor for Foreign Affairs Jens Plotner, Diplomatic Adviser to the President of France Emmanuel Bonn, and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky discussed Normandy Format processes in Kyiv on January 11.⁴⁸⁷ Zelensky stated that Ukraine is ready to hold Normandy Format talks with the Russian, French, and German heads of state. Zelensky also praised the Normandy Four's progress to implement the agreements from the last Normandy Format summit in Paris in December 2019. Zelensky stressed the need to comply with the ceasefire in Donbas, conduct mutual prisoner exchanges with Russian proxy forces, and open checkpoints between Ukrainian and Russian proxy forces. The Kremlin has not discussed holding a Normandy Format meeting since the buildup began in October 2020 besides stating that the Kremlin is unlikely to offer the US to participate in the format on December 7.⁴⁸⁸ Kremlin Spokesman Dmitry Peskov said that a Normandy Format summit "for the sake of a summit" do not make sense in September 2021.⁴⁸⁹

German Economy Minister Robert Habeck stated that Germany may block Russia's Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline due to Russian threats to Ukraine on December 30.⁴⁹⁰ Habeck supported the German federal government's decision to not interfere with Nord Stream 2 certification processes and to consider the pipeline from a strictly legal regulatory standpoint but did not exclude the possibility of Berlin blocking Nord Stream 2 due to Russian threats to Ukraine.

French and Ukrainian ships completed passing exercises in the northwestern Black Sea on December 30.⁴⁹¹ A Ukrainian medium landing ship and French frigate *Auvergne* conducted passing exercises to improve interoperability between French and Ukrainian naval personnel in accordance with NATO standards.

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Ryabkov met with France's ambassador to Russia on December 30.⁴⁹² The Russian MFA reported they discussed Russia's proposals for legal security guarantees from the US and NATO.

The German Green Party's foreign policy representative stated on December 30 that the German government will be unlikely to completely halt the launch of Nord Stream 2 despite the Green Party's disagreement.⁴⁹³ Omid Nuripur, the Green Party's appointed foreign policy expert, stated "unfortunately, fundamental political decisions have already been made in recent years" and if the Nord Stream 2 operating company complies with German law there will be no way to halt the launch of the pipeline "even if I still think that the project is wrong." Germany's federal regulator suspended the certification process of Nord Stream 2 on November 16, noting the process will resume when the Swiss-based Nord Stream 2 company creates a German subsidiary.

Russian President Vladimir Putin had a phone call with French President Emmanuel Macron on December 21.⁴⁹⁴ Putin discussed Russian diplomatic work regarding the Kremlin's effort to extract its demanded security guarantees. Putin also accused Kyiv of evading its obligations under the Minsk Accords, which Putin said hinders the possibility of a new Normandy Format Summit. Macron and Putin also discussed Mali and Nagorno-Karabakh.

Russian President Vladimir Putin had a phone call with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz on December 21.⁴⁹⁵ Putin discussed Russia's demanded security guarantees and provided comments on the draft agreement that Russia gave the US. Putin also accused Kyiv of

evading its obligations under the Minsk Accords, which Putin said hinders the possibility of a new Normandy Format Summit.

European leaders agreed to impose further sanctions on Russia if it invades unoccupied Ukraine at a summit in Brussels, Belgium on December 16.⁴⁹⁶ The new sanctions could include targeting Russian oligarchs, banning European Union (EU) transactions with private Russian banks, and cutting off Russian banks from SWIFT – the system required for international money transfers. The EU leaders stated their desire to continue diplomatic efforts to solve the crisis and voiced their support for using the Normandy Format to achieve full implementation of the Minsk Agreements.

The German Federal Network Agency reported that Nord Stream 2’s certification should not be expected in the first half of 2022 on December 16.⁴⁹⁷ New German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock – a member of the Green Party – said on October 20 that she sees no reason to complete the Nord Stream 2 pipeline.

Ukrainian President Zelensky met both individually and trilaterally with French President Macron and German Chancellor Scholz in Brussels on December 15.⁴⁹⁸ Zelensky concentrated on energy issues in his meeting with Scholz, stating Ukraine counts on Germany support to maintain gas transit through Ukraine after the expiration of Ukraine’s current gas deal with Russia on 2024. Kyiv will likely attempt to secure assurances from the new Germany government that the launch of Nord Stream 2 will not deprive Ukraine of lucrative gas transit fees. Zelensky and Macron discussed Ukraine’s Euro-Atlantic aspirations and the implementation of unspecified joint economic projects. In the trilateral meeting, all parties agreed on the need to continue the Normandy Format, called on Russia to resume constructive work in that format, and seek diplomatic solutions to compel Russia to withdraw its forces from the Ukrainian border.

Russian President Vladimir Putin and French President Emmanuel Macron held a phone call on December 14.⁴⁹⁹ The Kremlin readout stated Putin “outlined in detail” his assessments of the current situation around Ukraine in response to Johnson’s concern about the “alleged large-scale movement of Russian troops.” Putin presented “specific examples” of Kyiv’s violation of the Minsk agreements, exacerbation of the situation on the line of contact, and discrimination against the Russian-speaking population of Ukraine. Putin announced “the need to immediately begin negotiations in order to develop clear international legal agreements that would exclude any further NATO advance to the east and the deployment of weapons threatening Russia in neighboring states, primarily in Ukraine” and called on France to participate in these discussions. The Kremlin readout further stated Macron raised the issue of the Belarusian migrant crisis. Putin spoke favorably of direct discussions between the EU and Minsk, drew attention to claimed violations of “international obligations” to help refugees by Poland and the Baltic States, and expressed hope that the migrant issue “will be completely removed from the agenda” in the near future.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov held a phone call with new German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock on December 14.⁵⁰⁰ Lavrov welcomed Baerbock after her appointment on December 8. Lavrov told Baerbock that Russia needs a security guarantee that NATO will not expand eastward by admitting Ukraine and establish military infrastructure along Russian borders. Lavrov also asked Baerbock to persuade Ukraine to adhere to the Minsk Agreements and participate in the Normandy Format. Baerbock called for “open and honest” dialogue between Russia and Germany and

warned Russia would face “massive consequences” in the event of a Russian invasion of unoccupied Ukraine.

Ukrainian Defense Minister Oleksii Reznikov blamed Germany for blocking NATO supplies to Ukraine in an interview with the Financial Times on December 12.⁵⁰¹ Reznikov stated Berlin vetoed Ukraine’s purchase of anti-drone rifles and anti-sniper systems via the NATO Support and Procurement Agency within the last month, but later relented on the anti-drone rifles after deeming them non-lethal. Reznikov stated “[Germany is] still building the Nord Stream 2 pipeline and at the same time blocking our defensive weapons. It is very unfair.” Reznikov stated Ukraine will seek to purchase equipment bilaterally through the US, UK, Lithuania and France rather than NATO. The Germany economic ministry (responsible for arms sales) and Chancellery declined to comment on the policy, enacted by the government of former Chancellor Angela Merkel. Reznikov stated the strategy of “not provoking Russia” does not and will not work in the future but downplayed the imminent threat. Reznikov stated Kyiv estimates Russia has 100,000 troops near the Ukrainian border, and stated US estimates of 175,000 troops are based on the size of encampments constructed by Russian forces, though many tents remain empty.

German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock stated NordStream 2 will not be allowed to operate in the event of any new “escalation” in Ukraine on December 12.⁵⁰² Baerbock made the statements in an interview with German television station ZDF and said Berlin and Washington agreed on this approach.

French officials issued forceful statements against a Russian offensive in Ukraine in November. Shoigu and Lavrov attended the Russian-French Security Cooperation Council meeting with French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian and Defense Minister Florence Parly in Paris, France, on November 12.⁵⁰³ The Russian and French ministers reiterated the necessity of compliance with the Minsk Agreements. The ministers discussed nuclear non-proliferation and arms control, prevention of an arms race in outer space, Russia-EU and Russia-NATO relations, and other topics. Le Drian and Parly warned the Kremlin of “serious consequences related to any new harm to Ukraine’s territorial integrity” in a joint French ministers’ statement.⁵⁰⁴ Le Drian gave an interview on November 21 in which he reiterated that “Any [Russian] violation of the [Ukrainian] border, any intrusion would lead to extremely grave consequences.”⁵⁰⁵

Germany temporarily suspended Nord Stream 2’s certification on November 16. Germany’s energy regulator suspended the process reportedly because a Swiss-based consortium behind Nord Stream 2 needed to form a German subsidiary company under German law to secure an operating license.⁵⁰⁶ The German energy regulator said it would not continue its approval process until the Nord Stream 2 company, which is registered in Switzerland, transfers its main assets and staffing budget to its German subsidiary.⁵⁰⁷

French, German, and Ukrainian foreign ministers had a working meeting in Brussels on November 15. France and Germany issued a joint statement in support of Ukraine’s independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity.⁵⁰⁸ France and Germany called on Ukraine to implement the Minsk Agreements and expressed regret that Lavrov has refused to meet at the ministerial level for a Normandy Format meeting.

NATO/EU Activity

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg stated that NATO and Ukraine will sign an agreement on enhanced cyber cooperation “in the coming days” on January 14.⁵⁰⁹ Stoltenberg condemned the January 13-14 cyberattacks against Ukraine and framed this agreement as a NATO response. Stoltenberg specified neither the scale or scope of this cooperation agreement nor planned timing of its adoption.

Swedish Chief of Joint Operations Michael Claesson told the *Associated Press* (AP) on January 14 that the Swedish military increased its readiness level in response to increased Russian military activity in the Baltic Sea.⁵¹⁰ Claesson told AP that Sweden “repositioned its troops” and that Swedish forces would “be visible” on Gotland – a strategically significant Swedish island located approximately 300 kilometers from the Russian exclave of Kaliningrad.

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg reiterated that NATO decided in 2008 that Ukraine and Georgia will become NATO members in an interview with Italian newspaper *La Repubblica* on January 13.⁵¹¹

Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas said that the Baltic states and NATO are discussing the possibility of increasing NATO military deployments to the Baltics to deter Russian aggression in Europe on January 12.⁵¹² *Reuters* reported that military deployments to the Baltic states could be discussed at a planned NATO defense ministerial in mid-February.

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said that NATO did not compromise its core values and offered Russia further dialogue on arms control and non-proliferation during the NATO-Russia summit on January 12.⁵¹³ Stoltenberg said NATO will not close membership opportunities for eligible states and will preserve each state’s right to seek its own security arrangements. Stoltenberg said that NATO allies will not withdraw forces from Eastern Europe. Stoltenberg stated that Russian representatives did not accept nor reject NATO’s proposal for further dialogue on reciprocal missile limitations, nuclear policies, military exercise transparency, and arms control. Stoltenberg said that NATO warned Russia that any use of force against Ukraine will be a “serious strategic mistake” resulting in economic and political sanctions, and a potential increased NATO force presence in NATO’s “eastern part.” Stoltenberg reiterated that NATO would provide unspecified practical defense support to Ukraine in case of further Russian military aggression.

The *New York Times* (NYT) reported on January 10 that European Union (EU) Foreign Policy Chief Josep Borrell said that the EU wants to join US-dominated security talks with Russia and called on EU foreign ministers to develop their own security guarantee proposals with Russia.⁵¹⁴ The NYT reported that it obtained a letter in which Borrell urged European foreign ministries to develop their own “separate European proposals on security” and that he “initiated a discrete direct conversation” with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov. The NYT reported that not every EU foreign ministry supports Borrell’s approach, despite Borrell’s promise that European security proposals would be based in “full coherence and coordination with NATO.” The NYT separately quoted Borrell saying, “European Union is the most reliable partner of Ukraine,” and that the EU “cannot be a spectator” while the United States, NATO, and Russia discuss European security. The Kremlin will likely exploit growing fissures among EU and NATO member states, and fissures between the EU and NATO as organizations.

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg warned Russia of "severe costs" if Moscow launches a further attack on Ukraine on January 10.⁵¹⁵ Stoltenberg said NATO is working for a peaceful political solution, but that NATO members must be prepared if Russia decides to conduct an offensive.

NATO's foreign ministers held an extraordinary meeting on January 7 to coordinate positions ahead of the January 12 NATO-Russia Council meeting.⁵¹⁶ NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg reiterated that NATO calls on Russia to de-escalate and withdraw its forces from Ukraine. Stoltenberg said NATO is ready for "meaningful dialogue" with Russia and that the January 12 NATO-Russia Council meeting will be an opportunity for Russia to demonstrate it is "serious about dialogue, diplomacy, and its international commitments." Stoltenberg said that NATO will engage Russia in dialogue in good faith, but that Russia must also be ready to listen to NATO members' concerns about Russian actions. Stoltenberg said NATO must also be prepared for the possibility that diplomacy may fail and reiterated that NATO is prepared to protect its members.

Bloomberg Business assessed on January 4 that European natural gas reserves in underground storage could decrease to 15 percent by March 2022.⁵¹⁷ The current level of natural gas reserves in underground storage is 56 percent, which is more than 15 percent below the current 10-year average. A decrease down to 15 percent would be the lowest level of European gas reserves ever recorded.

European Union (EU) foreign policy chief Josep Borrell visited Ukraine to signal EU support for Kyiv against Russian aggression on January 4.⁵¹⁸ Borrell will meet Ukraine's foreign minister and other officials during his visit, which will last until January 6. Borrell reportedly will also visit the front line in Donbas

Finish President Sauli Niinisto and Finish Prime Minister Sanna Marin said that Finland has the right to seek NATO membership on December 31 despite previous Kremlin threats against Finish NATO membership.⁵¹⁹ Niinisto and Marin gave separate New Year's Eve speeches in which they said that Finland has the right to seek NATO membership if it decides to do so. The Kremlin stated that Finland and Sweden joining NATO "would have serious military and political consequences that would require an adequate response from the Russian side" on December 24.⁵²⁰

Chief EU diplomat Josep Borell stated the EU must be involved in any security discussions between Russia and the US in an interview with German newspaper Die Welt on December 29.⁵²¹ Borell stated discussions between the US and Russia on European security "only make sense... in close coordination with and with the participation of the EU." Borell asserted that NATO cannot negotiate on behalf of Europe, as several European states are not members of NATO. Borell additionally said he will soon submit a proposal to EU member states on creating an EU Military Advisory and Training Mission to Ukraine. The Kremlin is highly unlikely to agree to involve the EU in security discussions. Disagreements between NATO and the EU could impede a unified response to Russian pressure and aggression.

TASS reported on December 26 that NATO confirmed it will convene a NATO-Russia council meeting on security guarantees in Europe in Brussels on January 12.⁵²² Russian media previously reported that Russia would hold high level talks with NATO on security in Europe on January 12-13. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said on December

24 that he hopes that NATO will provide the Kremlin clear answers on its demanded security guarantees in January 2022.⁵²³

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe announced that Ukraine and Russia's proxies in eastern Ukraine reached a new ceasefire on December 22.⁵²⁴ The ceasefire likely will not end the fighting in Donbas. The Russian Foreign Ministry criticized Ukrainian officials' statement that Ukraine seeks to comply with the Minsk Accords on December 23, claiming that the Ukrainian military's refusal to ban Ukrainian field commanders from returning fire without permission from central leadership in Kyiv undermines Ukraine's commitment to peace.⁵²⁵ Kremlin proxy forces violated the ceasefire at least six times on December 26.⁵²⁶

Sweden announced it increased its military readiness on December 23.⁵²⁷ Swedish Commander-in-Chief Micael Byden stated that the increase was due to the situation in Ukraine. Byden met with US Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Mark Millie on December 15.⁵²⁸

Secretary of State Antony Blinken spoke with European Union High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell about responding to Russian aggression against Ukraine on December 22.⁵²⁹ Both the US and European Union readouts emphasized the need for coordinated action to support Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity and reaffirmed that any further Russian military aggression against Ukraine would have "massive consequences" for the Russian Federation.

German news outlet *Welt* reported on December 22 that unspecified element of NATO's very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) – a NATO rapid reaction force of approximately 20,000 soldiers – increased its combat readiness.⁵³⁰ Unspecified VJTF elements reportedly increased its readiness from being ready to deploy to a crisis area within five days instead of seven days. Leading VJTF elements are ready to deploy within two to three days.⁵³¹

The US, United Kingdom, Germany, France, Canada, Poland and several other EU and NATO states issued a joint statement at the United Nations condemning Russian behavior at the United Nations Security Council on December 22.⁵³² The statement condemned Russia's misuse of claims of minority persecution in Donbas in a Security Council Arria-formula meeting that Russia hosted on December 22. The statement reiterated international support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, condemned Russia's disinformation campaign against Ukraine, and called on Russia to de-escalate the situation and withdraw Russian forces and equipment it has stationed in Ukraine. The statement also warned that any further military aggression against Ukraine would have "massive consequences and a severe cost in response."

NATO released a statement calling on Russia to deescalate aggression towards Ukraine on December 16.⁵³³ NATO said that they are seriously assessing implications for NATO security and will take measures through a collective defense strategy. NATO said that they are ready for a dialogue with Russia and called on Russia to meet with the NATO-Russia council. NATO mentioned that the OSCE is a relevant platform for reducing tensions and strengthening confidence-building measures. NATO said that any further Russian aggression towards Ukraine will have immense financial and security consequences. NATO reaffirmed its support for Ukrainian sovereignty.

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg reiterated that Russian aggression against Ukraine or Georgia would “come at a high price” during a meeting with Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili at NATO Headquarters in Brussels, Belgium on December 15.⁵³⁴ Stoltenberg stated NATO’s full support for Georgia’s territorial integrity and called upon Russia to end its claims on Abkhazia and South Ossetia. He also stressed the need for continued vigilance in response to Russian military buildup near Ukraine and in the Black Sea. Stoltenberg stated that Georgia and Ukraine have the right to choose their own alliances without any interference from Russia and discussed NATO efforts to strengthen Georgia’s defense capabilities with maritime support, joint exercises, and information sharing. Stoltenberg stated “any future Russian aggression would come at a high price and have serious political and economic consequences for Russia.”

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky met with European Council President Charles Michel in Brussels, Belgium on December 15 ahead of a European Council meeting scheduled for December 16.⁵³⁵ Zelensky emphasized the importance of pursuing cooperation through the EU’s Eastern Partnership and reiterated that Ukraine seeks full membership in the European Union. Michel and Zelensky expressed the need to continue joint efforts to prevent an escalation along the borders of Ukraine. Zelensky expressed hope that EU leaders will send “clear signals” to Russia following the European Council meeting on December 16.

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said that Russia has “no right to interfere” in Ukraine’s sovereign decision to pursue NATO membership at the Riga NATO meeting on November 30.⁵³⁶ Stoltenberg emphasized Ukraine is a sovereign state and that the Kremlin has no right to dictate Ukraine’s policies. Stoltenberg said “any future Russian aggression against Ukraine would come at high price,” and called on Russia to de-escalate under threat of “serious political and economic consequences.”

Eastern and Central European Allies

Latvian Defense Minister Artis Pabriks said that Latvia intends to send unspecified weapons to Ukraine on January 5.⁵³⁷ Pabriks said that Latvia will provide both humanitarian and military assistance, including “weapons and equipment necessary for defense” after meeting with Ukraine’s ambassador to Latvia.

Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas characterized January talks with Russia as diplomatic dialogue and not negotiations on January 5.⁵³⁸ Kallas said that neither NATO nor the West is “negotiating” with Russia and said the mid-January talks are “a dialogue to maintain diplomatic communication.” Kallas also said that it is “not possible to negotiate” Russia’s “absurd conditions.” Kremlin media criticized Kallas’ statement.⁵³⁹

Latvian Foreign Minister Edgars Rinkevics called on the European Union and NATO to better prepare for Russian hybrid actions against Ukraine on January 5.⁵⁴⁰ Rinkevics said that Latvia intends to draw attention to the need for more active preparation against Russian hybrid threats against Ukraine at the January 7 NATO foreign ministerial and other meetings scheduled in January.

A senior Estonian defense official said Estonia is working on gaining US, Finish, and German permission to transfer Ukraine more Javelin anti-tank missiles and 122mm howitzers on December 30.⁵⁴¹ Peeter Kuimet, the Head of the International Cooperation Department of the Estonian Ministry of Defense, said Estonia is working on

sending more aid to Ukraine, but that it must receive permissions from the United States to export Javelins to Ukraine. Kuimet said that Finland and Germany must give Estonia permission to transfer 122mm howitzers to Ukraine because the howitzers were previously owned by Finland and Germany.

The US State Department approved a sale of Javelin anti-tank missiles to the government of Lithuania for approximately \$125 million on December 21.⁵⁴² The sale includes 341 FGM-148F Javelin missiles and 30 launchers, spares, and technical support.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, Polish President Andrzej Duda, and Lithuanian President Gitanas Nausėda discussed trilateral security concerns at a Lublin Triangle meeting on December 20.⁵⁴³ The heads of state made a joint statement reaffirming the states' commitment to expanding security, defense, and economic cooperation, mutual support regarding the migrant crisis in Belarus, and condemning Russian aggression and the Nord Stream 2 pipeline.⁵⁴⁴

Russian President Vladimir Putin and Finnish President Sauli Niinistö held a phone call on December 14.⁵⁴⁵ The Kremlin readout stated Putin informed Niinistö of the results of his call with US President Biden on December 7, Putin's assessment of the situation around Ukraine, and Kyiv's claimed violation of the Minsk agreements. Putin announced "the need to immediately begin negotiations in order to develop clear international legal agreements that would exclude any further NATO advance to the east and the deployment of weapons threatening Russia in neighboring states, primarily in Ukraine." Putin stressed that "this is fully consistent with the principle of the indivisibility of security, enshrined in the 1975 Helsinki Final Act and the 1999 Istanbul Charter" and "expressed support for Sauli Niinistö's initiative to organize a summit in 2025 to mark the 50th anniversary of the Helsinki Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe." The Finnish readout stated "the Presidents had a thorough discussion on the situation at the borders of Ukraine. President Niinistö expressed the grave concern on the tense situation and stressed the need to find a diplomatic resolution to it."

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Vladimir Titov met jointly with ambassadors from Austria, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Germany, and Switzerland on December 14.⁵⁴⁶ The Russian readout did not specify the topics of conversation.

The Deputy Foreign Ministers of Ukraine, Poland, and Lithuania (the "Lublin Triangle") signed a joint action plan for countering Russian disinformation in Lutsk, Ukraine on December 11.⁵⁴⁷ Ukrainian Deputy Foreign Minister Mykola Tochytsky, Polish Deputy Foreign Minister Marcin Przydacz, and Lithuanian Deputy Foreign Minister Mantas Adomenas participated in the meeting. The three states created the "Lublin Triangle" format on July 28, 2020 to support trilateral dialogue and "support Ukraine's Eur-Atlantic aspirations."⁵⁴⁸ The Lublin Triangle is a non-binding discussion format similar to the Visegrad Four or Bucharest Nine. The ministers discussed the Belarusian migrant crisis and Russian military escalation near the Ukrainian border. They emphasized the need for coordination with NATO and the European Union to counter hybrid threats and prevent Russian aggression towards Ukraine. The ministers additionally signed a (non-public) Joint Action Plan for Countering Disinformation in 2022-2023. The plan "provides for the preparation of regular joint reports on information challenges and threats, the development of a joint response mechanism to Russia's destabilization campaigns, the exchange of experience and the strengthening of institutional capacity to counter hybrid threats."

Ukraine, Lithuania, and Georgia signed a memorandum of understanding to create a cybersecurity cooperation group on December 8.⁵⁴⁹ The joint group's mission is to develop multistate capabilities for cyber threat analysis by developing standard procedures for tactical and operational-level information exchanges on cyber threats, security vulnerabilities, and incident response.

Ukrainian Defense Minister Oleksiy Reznikov and Lithuanian Defense Minister Arvidas Anusauskas discussed mutual Russian and Belarusian threats on December 8.⁵⁵⁰ The ministers discussed the intensification of Russian-Belarusian military cooperation and the concentration of Russian troops near the border with Ukraine. They also discussed Belarusian migrant trafficking on the Lithuanian-Belarusian border and the possible risks of Belarus moving a wave of migrants to the border with Ukraine.

Polish Air Force F-16 aircraft from Siauliai Air Base, Lithuania, conducted the first Alpha Scramble training over the Baltic Sea to intercept a Russian IL-20 reconnaissance aircraft on December 8.⁵⁵¹ The Polish detachment Orlik-10 practiced intercepting an unknown aircraft visually resembling Russian IL-20 COOT A, which had failed to submit a flight plan and communicate with air traffic control. The exercise is a component of NATO's Air Policing mission.

Kuleba met Lithuanian Foreign Minister Gabrielius Landsbergis on the sidelines of the OSCE ministerial in Stockholm, Sweden on December 3.⁵⁵² Kuleba and Landsbergis discussed Russian military deployments near Ukraine and Belarus' migrant trafficking against Lithuania and Poland.

Zelensky, Lithuanian President Gitanas Nausėda, and Polish President Andrzej Duda issued a joint statement reaffirming support for Ukraine's EU and NATO accession on December 2.⁵⁵³ Nausėda and Duda reiterated Lithuania's and Poland's support for Ukraine joining the EU and NATO. The statement also asserted that Belarus presents hybrid threats that impact all of European security and restated Polish and Lithuanian readiness to jointly oppose Russia's Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline.

Kuleba met with Estonian Foreign Minister Eva-Maria Liimets on the sidelines of the NATO ministerial meeting in Riga, Latvia on December 1. Kuleba informed Liimets of the Russian military deployments near Ukraine and Liimets agreed to jointly oppose Russian aggression in the Baltic-Black Sea region.⁵⁵⁴ Liimets reiterated Estonia's support for admitting Ukraine into the EU and NATO. Kuleba and Liimets also discussed further joint defense cooperation and responses to hybrid threats.

The defense ministers of the Bucharest Nine (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Czechia, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria) issued a statement calling for the strengthening of NATO's eastern flank "from the Baltic to Black Sea" on November 25.⁵⁵⁵ They also said it was necessary to work on a new defense strategy within NATO. US Deputy Secretary of Defense Kathleen Hicks addressed the allies virtually and "affirmed the U.S. commitment to NATO's eastern flank and commented on recent Russian activity around Ukraine, the migrant crisis on the Belarusian-EU border, and strategic competition with the People's Republic of China."⁵⁵⁶ Hicks also underscored that EU defense initiatives should remain coherent, mutually reinforcing, and interoperable with and available to NATO.

Ukrainian Political Activity

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky told UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson that the West must be ready to immediately issue a preventative sanctions package to counter Russian aggression on January 13.⁵⁵⁷ Zelensky reiterated that the West should not make any decisions about Ukraine without Ukrainian participation and that the West must remain “firm and decisive.” Zelensky reiterated Ukraine’s interests to intensify the negotiation process within the Normandy Format. Ukraine’s readout states that Johnson and Zelensky agreed that the Kremlin uses its Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline as a weapon.

Ukrainian Armed Forces Commander-in-Chief Valeriy Zaluzhny participated in a NATO Military Committee meeting on January 13.⁵⁵⁸ Zaluzhny briefed NATO commanders about Russia’s military buildup near Ukraine and the Kremlin’s hybrid war methods using energy pressure, migration crises, and information operations. Zaluzhny said that Russia’s recent military threat to Ukraine and ultimatums to the West require a “consolidated response” from NATO and Ukraine. Zaluzhny said he discussed issues on the “practical implementation of Ukraine’s NATO status with enhanced capabilities and the continuation of mutually beneficial military cooperation” during the meeting.⁵⁵⁹

Ukrainian Defense Minister Oleksiy Reznikov and Ukrainian defense officials attended an unprecedented meeting with over 30 US defense industry companies on January 12.⁵⁶⁰ Ukrainian officials and unspecified US defense companies discussed increasing cooperation in providing Ukraine advanced defense systems, including automated command and control systems, air defense systems, and specialized ammunition for naval forces, intelligence, and electronic warfare units. This meeting was the first of its kind and indicates intensified US efforts to augment Ukraine’s defense capabilities.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said Ukraine’s Western partners “fully supported” Kyiv against Russian aggression at the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Permanent Council meeting on January 13.⁵⁶¹ Kuleba said Ukraine and its partners will continue to “implement a comprehensive strategy to deter Russia from a new wave of war.” Kuleba added that “despite the unsatisfactory week of great diplomacy for Russia,” the Kremlin must continue dialogue within OSCE framework.

Ukraine’s Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) claimed on January 11 that the militias of the Donetsk and Lugansk People’s Republics began a week of combat and mobilization readiness exercises in proxy-controlled Donetsk and Luhansk on January 10.⁵⁶² The readiness exercises include meetings with proxy reservists, replenishing proxy units’ resources, and checking on deployed military equipment. The GUR said that proxy forces’ administrative elements intensified internal searches for proxy reservists who are evading reserve mobilization orders.

Ukraine’s State Security Service (SBU) announced on January 5 that it disrupted 59 attempted cyberattacks against Ukrainian government services in December 2021.⁵⁶³ The SBU said that attacks against command-and-control servers and unauthorized access intrusion attacks were among the main cyber attack types for December 2021. The SBU did not specify the actors who conducted these attacks.

Ukrainian Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) Head Kirill Budanov and Turkish Military Intelligence Chief Rafet Dalkiran agreed to deepen intelligence cooperation between Ukraine and Turkey on January 5.⁵⁶⁴ Ukrainian readouts and Turkish reports state the intelligence chiefs exchanged views and agreed to deepen cooperation between intelligence agencies. Reports did not mention a formal signed agreement.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba and Czech Foreign Minister Jan Lipavský agreed on joint steps to deter Russian aggression against Ukraine in a January 4 phone call.⁵⁶⁵ This call was Kuleba's first call with Lipavsky, who was appointed Czech foreign minister on December 17.

Ukraine enacted a law prohibiting Russian commercial and passenger naval vessels from entering Ukrainian inland waterways on January 1.⁵⁶⁶ The law prohibits vessels with Russian flags, vessels registered to Russian citizens or businesses based in Russia, and vessels registered to sanctioned Russian entities from entering Ukrainian inland waterways.

Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) reported on December 28 that the Russian Armed Forces sent fuel, weapons, military equipment, electronic warfare assets, and drones via railways and roads to Russian proxy forces in Donetsk and Luhansk throughout December 2021.⁵⁶⁷ The GUR claimed that Russia sent military supplies via humanitarian convoys and deployed additional armored combat vehicles to Donbas. The GUR claimed that Russian military personnel and mercenaries operate as scouts, snipers, artillerymen, liaison officers, and electronic reconnaissance and electronic warfare specialists in the militias of the Donetsk and Luhansk proxies.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky had a phone call with members of the US Congress on December 24.⁵⁶⁸ Zelensky emphasized that Russian forces have not withdrawn from Ukraine, the importance of increasing US-Ukraine security cooperation, and the importance of including Ukraine in any talks regarding Ukraine.

Ukrainian Presidential Chief of Staff Andriy Yermak said that Ukraine began manufacturing Turkish-designed Bayraktar TB2 UAVs in Ukraine on December 24.⁵⁶⁹ Yermak said that TB2 production in Ukraine "has already started" but did not specify when production began. Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba met with Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu on October 7 and stated that Ukraine determined the location of a plot of land where a TB2 production facility would be located.

Ukraine's Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) reported on December 24 that Russian forces in command of the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics militias are increasing exercises to improve coordination between combat and support units.⁵⁷⁰ GUR claims that the DNR and LNR are increasing small arms, artillery, tank, and combat vehicle exercises to improve coordination of motorized infantry units, tank crews, and artillery and mortar units. GUR claimed that Russian personnel are meeting with DNR and LNR artillery units to conduct exercises to fire 152-mm howitzers and 122-mm Grad multiple rocket launchers.

The Ukrainian Ministry of Defense announced on December 23 that it updated military draft regulations on December 17, requiring Ukrainian women to register for military draft in 2022.⁵⁷¹ Women between 18 and 60 years old are required to register for the draft and can be mobilized in Ukraine's national guard in the event of a major

war. This announcement significantly changed the Ukrainian information space dynamics regarding the public perception of the real possibility of a major war with Russia. Ukrainian women are protesting this change en masse. Over 30,000 Ukrainians have petitioned Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky to change the policy as of December 27.⁵⁷²

Head of the Ukrainian National Security and Defense Council Oleksiy Danilov said that Russia concentrated approximately 122,000 military personnel within 200 kilometers distance of Ukraine's borders and approximately 143,500 military personnel within 400 kilometers borders on December 22.⁵⁷³

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said Kyiv wants to break the deadlock in the Donbas peace process and gain clarity on Ukraine's NATO membership timeline in 2022 on December 21.⁵⁷⁴ Zelensky stated Ukraine is ready to hold peace talks with Russia in any format.⁵⁷⁵ Zelensky also stated he and NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg discussed the possibility of Ukraine participating in the NATO summit in Madrid in 2022.

Commander of the Ukrainian Navy Oleksiy Neizhpapa said on December 20 that Ukraine will acquire 12 US Mark VI high-speed combat boats at an unspecified future date in 2022.⁵⁷⁶ Neizhpapa said that Ukraine will likely use the Mark VI boats for special operations in the Sea of Azov or to preserve Ukrainian maritime passage rights in the Kerch Strait. The Ukrainian navy will likely utilize these boats to counter increased Russian military activity and exercises in and along the Black Sea.

The Ministry of Infrastructure of Ukraine and the Danish Ministry of Defense signed a Memorandum of Cooperation on joint ship construction on December 18.⁵⁷⁷ Ukrainian officials stated that joint Ukrainian-Danish ship production will occur at a Ukrainian plant with more than 50 percent of orders fulfilled by Ukrainian firms. The memorandum reportedly also stipulates that Ukraine's Sea Guard will acquire an undisclosed number of Danish-designed MPV80 offshore patrol vessels, with the completion of the first ship planned by 2024.⁵⁷⁸

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky met with NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg in Brussels, Belgium on December 16.⁵⁷⁹ Stoltenberg said that NATO will agree to a new concept of NATO-Ukraine cooperation at the 2022 NATO summit in Madrid on June 29-30, 2022. Zelensky discussed the importance of increasing NATO-Ukraine exercises in the Black and Azov Seas. Stoltenberg said that NATO and Ukraine are stronger together, and that Ukraine's right to further security cooperation with NATO does not threaten Russia. Stoltenberg said that Ukraine's dialogue with NATO is a fundamental principle of European security. Stoltenberg said that NATO has not seen a decrease of Russian military build-up near Ukraine, and that any further aggression will have serious consequences for Russia. Stoltenberg said that NATO will continue assisting Ukraine with training and advising of the Ukrainian military, the development of cybersecurity, conducting joint maneuvers, and supporting military reform.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev discussed bilateral relations and Turkish/Azerbaijani support for Ukraine at a meeting in Brussels, Belgium during the sixth Eastern Partnership Summit on December 15.⁵⁸⁰ Zelensky thanked Aliyev for Azerbaijan's ongoing support for Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity against Russian aggression. Zelensky discussed the intensification of bilateral cooperation between the countries following his working visit to

Azerbaijan in December 2019. Zelensky and Aliyev discussed the need to implement a transit route along the Europe-Caucasus-Asia route using rail and sea transport. Zelensky and Aliyev discussed transit construction plans implemented under the Great Construction National Program implemented in July 2020. Zelensky proposed a summit between Ukraine, Turkey, and Azerbaijan in Kyiv in February 2022.

Ukrainian President Zelensky gave an interview to Italian newspaper La Repubblica on December 13.⁵⁸¹ Zelensky stated Russia is increasing its troops numbers on the Ukrainian border to blackmail the West, and stated that “in some European capitals fear prevails,” referencing Germany’s decision to block the sale of weaponry to Ukraine. Zelensky stated Ukraine constantly pursues a diplomatic solution to the conflict because it is aware of the human cost, and stated “it is questionable whether or not Russian society is ready or not to pay for the attempt to occupy another part of Ukraine with the lives of its children.” In response to a question on Ukraine’s willingness to give up its NATO aspirations as part of a deal with Russia, Zelensky stated Russia does not honor any agreements, referencing the 1994 Budapest Memorandum. Finally, Zelensky stated he will not be able to say Western efforts have had any affect on Russia until Russia withdraws troops from the Ukrainian border.

Ukrainian President Zelensky stated Ukraine must rely on its own military and has done everything possible to prevent a Russian invasion in an interview with 1 + 1 news on December 10.⁵⁸² Ukrainian oligarch and Zelensky backer Ihor Kolomoisky owns 1 + 1. Zelensky said that despite Kyiv’s desire to join NATO, admittance is in the hands of NATO’s member-states and that some unspecified states are putting “barriers” in Ukraine’s path. Zelensky said that Ukraine must be able to confront Russian aggression on its own if it must, and stated the willingness of every Ukrainian to fight if needed is “stronger than any military bloc.”

Zelensky stated Ukrainian society does not support coup attempts and claimed groups responsible for coups “saw that society does not support them.”⁵⁸³ Zelensky did not provide further details to support his claim of a Akhmetov-backed coup against Ukraine he claimed was planned for December 1-2, but stated “some forces” received signals from abroad that “forced them to halt their intentions” – alluding to preventing a Russian-backed coup without saying so directly.

Zelensky additionally discussed several results of his December 9 call with Joe Biden⁵⁸⁴:

- Ukraine must retain the Normandy Format as-is with France and Germany, stating Macron and new German Chancellor Olaf Scholz both support the format.
- Zelensky stated Biden is open to a role in the Normandy format, however, “not just moderating the process or watching from the sidelines.” Zelensky stated American participation could also take the form of a separate platform that cooperates with the Normandy Four.
- Zelensky does not rule out direct talks with Putin and “sees support for this direction” from Europe and the US. Zelensky directly stated Ukraine will not hold direct talks with the DNR/LNR without Russian participation, however, and praised Macron for his support of this Ukrainian stance.
- Zelensky claimed that *during* his call with Biden, he received a “message of assurances from Russia that it is not going to continue the escalation of the territories of our state” and praised this “small and not final but very important result” of Ukraine’s efforts to prevent an invasion.
- Zelensky noted Putin only wants to talk to the United States, not any other states, but that Ukraine and its allies seek to present a united front.

- Finally, Zelensky stated he would not rule out a referendum on the status of “Donbas, Crimea, or ending the war in general,” while claiming Ukraine will not give up its territories. This is not an inflection from Zelensky’s previous rhetoric that any possible decision could be put to a national referendum as a populist measure.

Zelensky said that he does not “exclude the possibility” of holding a “referendum” to grant Donbas increased legal autonomy on December 10.⁵⁸⁵ This is a significant rhetorical inflection for Zelensky, who has so far refused to capitulate to Kremlin demands and irreversibly undermine Ukraine’s sovereignty.

Zelensky and French President Emmanuel Macron discussed Russia’s military buildup near Ukraine on December 10.⁵⁸⁶ Zelensky and Macron discussed resuming negotiations in the Normandy Format Tripartite Contact Group (TCG). Zelensky and Macron agreed to continue discussions on security issues at the Eastern Partnership Summit in Brussels on December 15.

Military Times reported that Ukraine’s Defense Ministry assessed that there are approximately 120,000 Russian troops near Ukraine’s border as of December 8.⁵⁸⁷ The updated Ukrainian assessment reportedly includes 98,000 ground troops and approximately 22,000 airborne and naval personnel.

Ukraine’s Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) reported on December 7 that Russia is reinforcing the front line in Donbas with an unspecified number of 122mm self-propelled artillery, tanks, and infantry fighting vehicles.⁵⁸⁸ The GUR also stated that Russian forces increased proxy sniper readiness through increased training.

Reznikov called on Canada, the United States, and the UK to provide Ukraine with additional military support in an interview published on December 5.⁵⁸⁹ Reznikov stated Ukraine needs Canadian, US, and UK assistance in securing anti-aircraft missiles, modern warplanes, navy vessels, and electronic jamming equipment. Reznikov also suggested that Canada should increase its training mission in Yavoriv, Ukraine, from 50 to 500 instructors.⁵⁹⁰ Reznikov said Canada should deploy more Canadian trainers to Kharkiv, Mariupol, Kramatorsk, Odesa, and Zminiy Island to deter a Russian military action. Canadian Chief of Defense Staff Wayne Eyre said on December 2 that Canada will not increase its military presence in Ukraine.⁵⁹¹

Reznikov stated Russia may conduct a large-scale escalation at the end of January during an address to the Ukrainian parliament on December 3.⁵⁹² Reznikov said Russia has accumulated approximately 94,300 troops near Ukraine and in Donbas and Crimea. Reznikov stated that Russia deployed over 50 battalion tactical groups (BTGs) to the Ukrainian border between April and September.⁵⁹³ Reznikov said that Russia has 41 BTGs at a constant state of readiness around Ukraine, 33 on a permanent basis and eight “additionally transferred to Crimea,” and implied that Russia left military equipment at Ukraine’s borders after some BTGs returned to their permanent positions earlier in the year.⁵⁹⁴ Reznikov noted that Russia began its winter training season near Ukraine in the Bryansk and Smolensk regions, activated reconnaissance assets, established signals, and camouflaged the troops throughout the week of November 21-28.⁵⁹⁵ Reznikov said if two Russian Baltic Fleet landing ships redeploy from the Mediterranean to the Black Sea, Russia will have nine vessels with a capacity to transport 3,000 servicemen and up to 250 armored combat vehicles to the region. Reznikov said Ukraine and its partners are looking for political ways to frame a potential invasion as detrimental and unacceptable to Russia.⁵⁹⁶ Ukraine likely seeks to leverage Russia’s

dependence on the European gas market and the threat of further sanctions to prevent an invasion. Reznikov announced that Ukraine and the UK are building two naval bases in Ochakovo, Mykolaiv, and Berdyansk, Zaporizhia.⁵⁹⁷ Reznikov said that Ukraine's main priority is establishing a Western-supported anti-missile program by 2032—a goal that will likely prompt further Russian military campaigns.⁵⁹⁸

Zelensky and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau had a phone call on Russian threats to Ukraine on December 2.⁵⁹⁹ Zelensky and Trudeau discussed Russian security threats to Ukraine and agreed on the need to increase economic, political, and sanctions pressure against Russia in the event of an escalation against Ukraine.

Zelensky restated Kyiv's desire to implement Ukraine's Association Agreement with the European Union and stated his readiness to talk to Russia at an address to the Ukrainian parliament on December 1.⁶⁰⁰ Zelensky reiterated that Kyiv aims to implement the European Union Association Agreement and claimed that Ukraine has fulfilled 60 percent of the agreement's requirements.⁶⁰¹ Zelensky stated that negotiating with Russia is necessary to end the war in Donbas. The Kremlin will likely intensify military pressure against Ukraine and NATO over the next several weeks to curtail Kyiv's efforts to join Western structures.

Ukraine's GUR claimed on November 30 that Russia sent the DNR and LNR more ammunition, lubricants, military equipment, UAVs, and electronic warfare assets in November.⁶⁰² This report, if accurate, indicates a growing Russian command and control development activity in occupied Donbas that could support Russian combat operations in Ukraine.

The Ukrainian Ministry of Defense on November 29 claimed that Russia deployed an unspecified "group of Russian military personnel" to the DNR and LNR to strengthen DNR and LNR reconnaissance, sabotage, and sapper units sometime during the week of November 21-28.⁶⁰³ Ukraine's defense ministry did not provide details on the size or organization of this Russian military "group."

Kuleba gave a speech articulating Ukraine's strategy to deter a Russian invasion on November 29. Kuleba said Ukraine seeks to deter and demotivate Russia from conducting further military activities against Ukraine.⁶⁰⁴ He said Ukraine proposed to its international partners a package of measures consisting of three main points: political containment of Russia, economic deterrence from new sanctions tied to a new Russian offensive, and the enhancement of Ukraine's defensive capabilities through international defense cooperation.

Zelensky claimed that Ukrainian oligarch Rinat Akhmetov (a former Party of Regions funder, Viktor Yanukovich partner, and alleged Donetsk mafia boss) was planning a coup that did not occur in tandem with Russian actors on December 1 or 2 in a carefully orchestrated press conference on November 26. Zelensky stated that Ukrainian intelligence received information about a planned coup against Zelensky's government on December 1 or 2. Zelensky stated that "representatives of Russia" along with Ukrainian oligarch Rinat Akhmetov were planning the coup. Zelensky suggested that the Russian coup attempt may be enlisting Akhmetov's participation without Akhmetov's knowledge.⁶⁰⁵ Zelensky did not present any evidence of these claims. Zelensky also stated that Ukraine has received assurances from allies—the United States, Canada, UK, the EU, and Turkey—that they will support Ukraine in the event of an escalation.⁶⁰⁶

Ukrainian defense officials continue to issue contradictory statements about a Russian offensive as of November 25. Secretary of Ukraine's National Security and Defense Council Oleksiy Danilov contradicted Ukrainian GUR Chief Kirill Budanov's claims of a Russian offensive around mid-January on November 25.⁶⁰⁷ Danilov stated "we do not see the threats that Mr. Budanov is talking about for January 15." Danilov characterized Russian threats against Ukraine as not new, and said that Ukraine is ready to respond.

Zelensky had a phone call with German Chancellor Angela Merkel about the Russian buildup on November 25. They agreed to coordinate international efforts to oppose Russian threats and preserve sanctions policy.⁶⁰⁸ They also discussed the migration crisis on the border with Belarus and Poland.

Zelensky had a telephone conversation with the President of the European Council Charles Michel on November 25. They agreed to coordinate efforts and discussed the Russian buildup. Michel discussed the results of his November 24 call with Putin. Michel said that de-escalation of the situation could be helped by contacts between the Ukrainian and Russian sides with the participation of the EU.

Ukrainian Force Deployments

The Ukrainian military deployed the 201st Anti-Aircraft Missile Brigade to southern Ukraine to guard southern Ukrainian territory against Russian air threats from Crimea on January 6.⁶⁰⁹ The 201st Brigade is equipped with S-300 air defense systems.

The Ukrainian military announced on January 4 that Ukrainian reconnaissance elements are conducting exercises to rapidly repel enemy forces at close range and conduct raids near Crimea.⁶¹⁰

Ukraine's State Border Guard Service stated it constructed ditches to defend against enemy mechanized movement in Sumy Oblast on December 21.⁶¹¹

Several unspecified Ukrainian anti-tank and engineering units conducted joint exercises on the border of occupied Crimea on December 15.⁶¹² Ukrainian Lieutenant General Sergei Naev said that participating troops simulated defending against an armored assault by redeploying anti-tank artillery and installing minefields.

The Ukrainian Defense Ministry announced on December 14 that the Ukrainian Armed Forces are strengthening air defenses around critical infrastructure.⁶¹³ The announcement specified that the Armed Forces will strengthen defenses (without specifying how) on the Dnieper River bridges, hydroelectric power plants, nuclear power plants, and other unspecified critical infrastructure. The Ukrainian MoD additionally stated Ukrainian forces are ready and able to protect critical infrastructure and the national transportation network. It is unclear from this announcement if the Ukrainian military is redeploying air defense assets or increasing the readiness of units already in place.

Ukraine launched a new operation to reinforce the Ukrainian-Belarusian border on November 24. Ukraine's State Border Guard Service announced a new special operation on the border with Belarus called "Poissya" with border guards, national police, national guard, Ukrainian army, and "other reserves" to counteract illegal migrants on November 24.⁶¹⁴

Ukrainian Interior Minister Denis Monastyrskiy announced on November 11 that Ukraine would reinforce the border with Belarus with 3,000 border guards, 3,500 national guardsmen, and 2,000 national police.⁶¹⁵ Ukraine has not openly deployed military units to the Belarusian border or elsewhere as of November 24.

Ukraine used Javelins for the first time in training exercises in Zaporizhia in mid-to-late November. Ukraine's General Staff stated on November 23 that Ukraine used Javelins and Bayraktar TB2 drones in training exercises at the Shiroky Lan Training Ground, Zaporizhia Oblast, Ukraine.⁶¹⁶ Ukraine has not used the Javelin in combat operations yet.

The OSCE observed a likely Ukrainian electronic warfare system near Donbas for the first time on November 23. The OSCE reports that they spotted a "probable" Ukrainian Khortytsia-M electronic warfare system about five kilometers from the front line, east of Mariupol.⁶¹⁷ This is the first sighting of the Ukrainian electronic warfare system near the front.

Belarus

Russian and Belarusian pilots conducted their second joint air patrol of Belarusian airspace in 2022 on January 12.⁶¹⁸ Russian and Belarusian pilots flew Su-30SM fighters for the patrol.

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko gave a speech on January 7 in which he said he took more measures in an unspecified past time frame to preserve Belarusian sovereignty and independence to protect Belarus "as a state."⁶¹⁹ Lukashenko said the world is "seriously" changing in 2022 and that the world will change by "uniting nations and states in unions." Lukashenko said he took more serious measures in an unspecified past time frame to protect Belarus' sovereignty because it would be impossible for states like Belarus to "survive alone" given these global changes. Lukashenko said that current events in Kazakhstan should be a lesson for Belarus for what could have happened during the Belarusian protests in fall 2020. Lukashenko characterized the protests in Kazakhstan as an "attempt to attack post-Soviet states along Russia's perimeter" and praised Belarus' joint peacekeeping efforts with Russia in Kazakhstan. Lukashenko also criticized Ukraine's autocephalous church and said, "we need to do everything to return Ukraine to the bosom of our true faith." Lukashenko has not spoken prominently about defending Belarusian sovereignty and independence in several months. Lukashenko may realize he needs to intensify efforts to prevent a Russian intervention into Belarus after observing the rapid Collective Security Treaty Organization operation in Kazakhstan.

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko accused NATO of deploying 30,000 troops on the Polish-Belarusian border on January 6.⁶²⁰ Lukashenko also stated his support for the Collective Security Treaty Organization's decision to send forces to Kazakhstan and stated that "Kazakhstan cannot be given away." Lukashenko implied that Kazakh protesters are Western-backed. Lukashenko called for revitalization of Soviet Belarusian history to form "friendly relations" with Russia and combat Western information operations. Lukashenko claimed that certain neighboring states politicized their histories to advance political goals – likely implying Ukraine's shift away from Soviet history.

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko held phone calls about the situation in Kazakhstan with Russian President Vladimir Putin and Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev on January 5.⁶²¹ Lukashenko confirmed that the leaders

discussed Collective Security Treaty Organization peacekeeping deployments to Kazakhstan on January 6.⁶²²

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko signed a law condemning Nazis and Nazi-collaborators for genocide against Belarusians and Soviet citizens residing in Belarus during World War II and denounced genocide-denial on January 5.⁶²³

The law aligns with the Kremlin's campaign to consolidate its preferred historiography on World War II. This development will more closely align Belarus and Russia's cultural spheres and can support Russian efforts to involve Belarus in vilifying Ukraine.

Russian and Belarusian pilots conducted their first joint air patrol of in Belarusian airspace in 2022 on January 5.⁶²⁴ Russian and Belarusian pilots of Su-30SM fighters flew for 120 minutes and covered 1,150 kilometers.

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Andrey Rudenko stated that Russia opposes Western interference in Belarus and said that Belarusians will enjoy visiting Crimea on January 3. Rudenko said Western curators control Belarusian opposition leadership. Rudenko said Belarus and Russia are "brotherly peoples" – the language the Kremlin also uses to describe Russia and Ukraine as one Eastern Slavic nation. Rudenko expressed support for Belarusian constitutional amendments and stated that Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko is welcome to visit Crimea.

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko claimed he signed a decree to give Belarusian citizenship to 380 Ukrainians on December 31.⁶²⁵ Lukashenko additionally claimed that Belarus has given Belarusian citizenship to more than 2,300 Ukrainians since August 9, 2021. Lukashenko stated that these Ukrainians came from Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, implying they are refugees from eastern Ukraine. The Kremlin and Minsk may frame Ukrainians as refugees to support a larger information operation about a humanitarian catastrophe in Ukraine that necessitates Russian intervention.

Belarus' 56th Communications Regiment received an unspecified quantity of new Russian-made "Kestrel" automated intelligence and command and control systems on December 30.⁶²⁶ The Belarusian Ministry of Defense stated that these systems will improve the "unified automated control" of Belarus' Air Force and Air Defense Forces. This is likely a component of the Kremlin's campaign to expand Russian integration with and control over the Belarusian Armed Forces.

Putin met with Belarusian President Lukashenko in St Petersburg and discussed economic cooperation and upcoming military exercises on December 29.⁶²⁷ Lukashenko remained in Russia for the bilateral meeting following a meeting of CIS heads of state on December 28. Putin and Lukashenko discussed the implementation of the Union state roadmaps signed in early December. Lukashenko thanked Putin for Russia's economic support to counteract Western sanctions on Belarus. Putin stated Russia and Belarus are coordinating plans for Russian military exercises in Belarus and will likely finalize these plans by February or March.

The Russian Federal Service for Military-Technical Cooperation (FSMTC) announced on December 28 that Belarus plans to purchase Tor-M2 anti-aircraft missile systems from Russia.⁶²⁸ FSMTC did not specify when Belarus will complete the purchase.

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko threatened to suspend ground cargo transit between Ukraine and Lithuania through Belarusian territory if Lithuania blocks Belarusian exports via Lithuania's Klaipeda seaport on December 22.⁶²⁹

The Belarusian Ministry of Defense and Armed Forces conducted joint staff training from December 14 to 17.⁶³⁰ The exercises focused on improving the structural coordination of Belarus' Ministry of Defense, General Staff, and military command and control bodies. These exercises can support Russian efforts to deploy Russian forces to Belarus.

The Belarusian military will conduct a joint staff training from December 14-17.⁶³¹ The Chief of the Belarusian General staff will oversee the exercise, which will include the "structural divisions of the Ministry of Defense," the General Staff, and unspecified command and control bodies. The exercise is intended to improve the coherence of military command and control bodies.

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko reiterated his threat to cut off gas transit to Europe through the Yamal-Europe pipeline in response to EU sanctions on December 13.⁶³² The European Union imposed a fifth round of sanctions on Belarus in December 2021 in response to the Belarusian state-manufactured migrant crisis along the Belarus-Poland border in November 2021. Russian Press Secretary Dmitry Peskov stated that Russian state-owned gas company Gazprom will still fulfill its obligations to supply gas to Europe and that Lukashenko's threat came without Kremlin approval.⁶³³ Lukashenko made the same threat on November 11, prompting Putin to state Lukashenko did not consult with him beforehand and state and decision by Belarus to halt gas transit would harm relations with Russia.⁶³⁴

Russia continues to modernize Belarusian brigades through early December. Russia delivered an unspecified quantity of modernized BTR-82A armored personnel carriers to the Belarusian 6th Mechanized Brigade in Grodno, Belarus, on December 9.⁶³⁵ Russia similarly gave an unspecified quantity BTR-82s to the Belarusian 120th Brigade in Minsk on December 2.⁶³⁶ The Kremlin seeks to modernize Belarus' maneuver elements to improve interoperability and integration with Russian ground forces.

Lukashenko had a phone call with Putin about Belarusian-Russian relations and "outside threats" concerning both countries on December 10.⁶³⁷ The call followed Lukashenko and Putin's participation in the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council on December 10. Minsk did not specify the contents of the discussed topics and the Kremlin did not confirm the call with its own readout.

Lukashenko announced he granted 448 Ukrainians Belarusian citizenship on December 7.⁶³⁸ Lukashenko stated that Belarus has granted Belarusian citizenship to approximately 1,200 Ukrainians since August 9, 2021.⁶³⁹ The Kremlin and Minsk may frame Ukrainians as refugees to support a larger information operation about a humanitarian catastrophe in Ukraine that necessitates Russian intervention.

Active-duty Belarusian forces began countrywide combat readiness classes to improve their ability to support a mass mobilization on December 7.⁶⁴⁰ Belarusian forces have not mobilized as of December 11. The training emphasizes maintaining mobilization readiness for large Belarusian formations and command and control elements. This training supports assessed Russian efforts to permanently deploy Russian forces to Belarus.

Belarusian Prime Minister Roman Golovchenko announced Minsk’s intent to develop industrial cooperation with Russia and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) on December 7. Golovchenko stated that Western sanctions against Belarus will not achieve their goals and that Russia and Belarus can “withstand any pressure.”

Lukashenko announced that he will deliver an address to Belarus’ parliament in January and repeated false claims about a NATO buildup near Belarus on December 6.⁶⁴¹ Lukashenko stated that Russia will not attack Ukraine and reiterated Belarus’ support for Russia. Lukashenko stated that NATO seeks to encircle Russia with a “a chain [of states hostile to Russia] from the Black to Baltic Sea.” Lukashenko repeated his claim that the West is conducting a hybrid war color revolution against Belarus. Lukashenko stated that if opposition leaders ousted Lukashenko’s regime in 2020, then there would have been a “NATO bloc near Smolensk.” Lukashenko reiterated Kremlin narratives that the Belarusian opposition seeks to break the Union State with Russia, bring Belarus into NATO, create an autocephalous (independent from Moscow) Belarusian Orthodox church, and ban the Russian language.

The Belarusian Defense Ministry claimed that a Ukrainian Mi-8 helicopter violated Belarusian airspace in Novaya Rudnya, Belarus, on December 4.⁶⁴² Belarusian officials claimed that a Ukrainian Mi-8 flew one kilometer into Belarusian airspace while conducting Ukraine’s “Poissya” border security operation.⁶⁴³ Ukraine’s State Border Service denied any violations on December 4.⁶⁴⁴ A Belarusian border guard official said Belarusian border guards “will act extremely harshly” if Ukraine further violates the border.⁶⁴⁵ These claims reinforce Belarusian and Kremlin information operations about a supposed Ukrainian threat to Belarus and support Russian efforts to set informational conditions for deploying Russian forces into Belarus.

Kremlin news outlet Rossiya Segodnya published on December 2 that Lukashenko stated he would not exclude increasing Belarus’ armed forces from 65,000 to 70,000 men to “cover [Belarus’] south” during a November 30 interview.⁶⁴⁶ Lukashenko also stated that recently announced joint Russian-Belarusian exercises on Belarus’ southern border with Ukraine will occur within the next two months.⁶⁴⁷

Lukashenko said Ukraine is “under external control” during the November 30 Rossiya Segodnya interview.⁶⁴⁸ This statement supports a Russian propaganda narrative that NATO and Western states, primarily the United States, have turned Ukraine into a proxy. Lukashenko’s rhetoric is increasingly aligned with Kremlin narratives in an unprecedented manner. Analysts should consider Lukashenko’s actions as increasingly directed by the Kremlin. Belarusian forces will likely support Kremlin objectives in any intensified military and information operations against Ukraine and/or NATO.

Lukashenko said that recent Western actions encouraged deeper Russian-Belarusian integration at a meeting with the governor of Russia’s Astrakhan Oblast on December 2.⁶⁴⁹ Lukashenko’s statement about “Western actions” references both a falsely claimed NATO hybrid war that Lukashenko alleges the West has waged against Belarus since fall 2020, and a falsely claimed NATO buildup near Russian and Belarusian borders since fall 2021.

Russian military units’ freedom of movement in Belarus will likely increase in 2022. Belarusian Armed Forces officially began the new military training year for 2021-2022

on December 1 with an explicit emphasis on intensive combat training.⁶⁵⁰ The Belarusian MoD stated that Belarusian exercises in 2022 will occur not only at training grounds but also in “individual terrain sections of [Belarus’] territory.”⁶⁵¹ A permanent Russian deployment to Belarus is increasingly likely. Belarusian exercises typically occur at established military training grounds; the extended range of new exercises in Belarus likely presage expanded Russian force posture shifts within Belarus. Belarusian officials stated on November 29 that Russia and Belarus will conduct a joint exercise on Belarus’ southern border with Ukraine at an unspecified future date.⁶⁵² Belarusian units have not yet begun conducting exercises as of December 1, however they will likely begin within the next several days or weeks.⁶⁵³

Lukashenko said he would not exclude offering to host Russian nuclear weapons in Belarus if NATO deploys nuclear weapons to Eastern Europe on November 30.⁶⁵⁴ Lukashenko implied that Belarus is ready to resume hosting Russian nuclear infrastructure—as it did during the Soviet era—if NATO deploys nuclear missile structures to Eastern Europe.⁶⁵⁵ This is a significant inflection in Lukashenko’s rhetoric about his openness to hosting Russian weapon systems in Belarus. Prior to August 2020 Lukashenko was stalwartly opposed to Russia increasing its military infrastructure in Belarus beyond two Soviet legacy radar stations. This statement indicates an increased likelihood of a permanent Russian force deployment to Belarus. Lukashenko and Putin also had phone call on November 29 about the situation in Belarus and Russia prior to the interview on November 30, which the Kremlin did not report.⁶⁵⁶ Putin warned against NATO deploying hypersonic missiles to Ukraine on November 30.

Lukashenko signaled that Belarus will support Russia during any military escalation in Donbas on November 29. Lukashenko stated that if the West conducts a military operation in Donbas or against Russian borders, then “Belarus will not be left on the sidelines. It is very clear on whose side Belarus will be.”⁶⁵⁷ Lukashenko also reiterated false Kremlin claims about reports of a Russian offensive being propaganda and false claims of increased NATO force buildups against Belarus. This is a significant inflection in Lukashenko’s rhetoric towards Ukraine. Lukashenko’s rhetoric on Donbas typically has not so closely aligned with Kremlin talking points.

Belarus’ Ministry of Defense announced that Russia and Belarus will conduct a joint exercise on the Belarusian-Ukrainian border, possibly on December 1. Belarusian Defense Minister Khrenin announced that all Belarusian troops will begin combat exercises on December 1 at a Belarusian General Staff meeting on November 29.⁶⁵⁸ Khrenin also announced a joint military exercise with Russia on the Belarusian-Ukrainian border on an unspecified future date which could correspond with the Belarusian exercises that will begin on December 1.⁶⁵⁹ Khrenin stated that enemy force groups near Belarus’ western and southern borders necessitate these measures to protect the Union State.⁶⁶⁰ Russia will very likely deploy ground forces to Belarus within the next several days or weeks.

A Belarusian Mechanized Brigade from Grodno reportedly will deploy to Belarus’s southern border with Ukraine. Belarusian online news outlet Motolko reported on November 29 that the Belarusian 6th Mechanized Brigade based in Folush, Grodno, will deploy to Belarus’ southern border with Ukraine.⁶⁶¹ There is no open-source evidence of a deployment of the Belarusian 6th Brigade towards Ukraine as of November 29.

The Belarusian MoD continued to accuse Poland and Lithuania of deploying forces closer to Belarus on November 26. The Belarusian Head of the Main Directorate of Ideological Work of the Ministry of Defense on November 26 stated, “Unfortunately, we

cannot note any positive steps taken by our neighbors [regarding alleged Polish and Baltic military deployments near Belarus]. Along with the previously announced unfriendly steps to deploy troops and infrastructure, which make it possible to significantly increase the combat strength and create groupings in a short time, we note the further actions of our neighbors aimed at escalating the situation.”⁶⁶² The official claimed that Lithuania concentrated approximately 4,000 troops near the Belarusian border and criticized Ukraine’s new “Poissya” border security operation. The Belarusian MoD stated it is prepared to quickly create its own force groupings if necessary.

Russia and Belarus decided on November 25 to increase the quantity of combined Russian-Belarusian air patrols in Belarusian airspace. The Belarusian MoD stated that it made the decision to increase joint patrols due to an increase in foreign aviation around Belarus’ border—a reference to claimed NATO flights near Belarus. A combined Russian-Belarusian tactical group of Su-30SM conducted a flight patrol along the Belarusian border on November 25.⁶⁶³

Russian elements’ presence in Belarusian exercises will likely further expand in 2022. Chief of the Belarusian General Staff Viktor Gulevich stated on November 23 that the Belarusian MoD “significantly adjusted” the training process of the Belarusian Armed Forces in 2021-2022 after “taking into account the difficult military-political situation created by Western countries” in regard to the migrant crisis. “We are forced to respond to the intensification of military activity along the outer contour of the State Border of the Republic of Belarus.” Gulevich accused a “belt of unfriendly states” of surrounding Belarus like an “anaconda.”⁶⁶⁴ Gulevich stated Belarus will thus intensify Belarusian exercises.

Strategic Calendar

November – December: Waterways near the Pinsk Marshes in Belarus freeze.⁶⁶⁵ Some bogs never freeze.⁶⁶⁶ Generally, Russian bogs usually begin to freeze about two weeks after the stable transition of air temperature through 0 degrees Celsius to negative values.⁶⁶⁷ Pinsk historically gets to around this condition in late December through February.⁶⁶⁸ Russian geographic information indicates that traversing the Pinsk Marshes, even in winter, is dangerous; the ice is thin in many spots and even experienced adventurers who traverse it on foot can fall through and drown.⁶⁶⁹ It is unclear how traversable the marshes actually are for mechanized forces, even in ideal winter conditions.

December 1: Zelensky delivered an address to the Verkhovna Rada in which he reiterated Ukraine’s desire to implement the European Union Association Agreement and articulated readiness to talk to the Kremlin.

December 2: US, Russian, and Ukrainian foreign ministers met in Stockholm, Sweden.⁶⁷⁰

December 6-10: New German Cabinet.⁶⁷¹

December 7: Putin-Biden videoconference.⁶⁷²

December 15: Eastern Partnership summit focusing on “stability and cooperation,” in Brussels, Belgium.⁶⁷³

December 23: Putin press conference.⁶⁷⁴

December 28: Meeting between Putin and Lukashenko.⁶⁷⁵

December 30: Putin-Biden phone call.⁶⁷⁶

December–January: Anticipated joint Russo-Belarusian exercise on Belarus' southern border with Ukraine.⁶⁷⁷

January: Lukashenko gives speech to the Belarusian parliament and nation.⁶⁷⁸

January 7: Videoconference among NATO foreign ministers.⁶⁷⁹

January 9-10: US-Russia talks on security guarantees in Geneva.⁶⁸⁰

January 12: NATO-Russia Council meeting on security guarantees in Europe in Brussels.⁶⁸¹

January 13: OSCE-Russia meeting.⁶⁸²

January 15–February 15: Seasonal freeze in Ukraine that the Ukrainian GUR is forecasting the Russians will plan maneuvers around. Ukraine's National Security and Defense Council contradicts GUR's claims and does not see these dates as particularly significant as of November 25.⁶⁸³

Late March- Mid April: Rasputitsa, the annual period of snow melt that makes travel difficult, occurs—though it varies by region and local climate factors.⁶⁸⁴

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