



## RUSSIA REFORM MONITOR

The American Foreign Policy Council's Review of  
Russian Government Actions and U.S. Policy

# Russia Reform Monitor No. 2285

January 16, 2019 **Ilan I. Berman, Margot van Loon**

**Related Categories:** Arms Control and Proliferation; Democracy and Governance; Energy Security; Europe Military; Missile Defense; Japan; Russia

### GAMING PUTIN'S STRATEGIC PLANS

To kick off the new year, a group of defense analysts has offered forecasts on Vladimir Putin's likely plans for 2019, which across the board are anticipated to be "busy, bloody, and expensive." Hostilities with Kyiv are expected to increase, with likely developments ranging from a spike in violence after the Orthodox New Year to a full-blown tank offensive launched from Russia's new base at Kamesnk-Shakhtinsky to a military operation to secure water access for the parched Crimean Peninsula. Beyond Ukraine, other fault lines loom large as areas for Russia to expand its influence or stage a provocation, including Nagorno-Karabakh, Republika Srpska, Belarus, and the Middle East and North Africa.

Simultaneously, Moscow is poised to make strategic advances in science and technology. Some advances will build on sources of existing Russian strength: developing new long-range missile technology as the INF Treaty implodes or flexing its muscles in cyber warfare. Others present avenues for Russia to catch up with its competitors - including the fields of artificial intelligence and unmanned robotics. (*Defense One*, December 28, 2018)

### THE THREAT FROM THE EAST

Is the geographic nexus of Islamist terror shifting? Russian scholar Vera Mironova argues that it is, and predicts that the major source of terror attacks in the coming year will not be the Middle East but rather the former Soviet states of Central Asia, where thousands of fighters are now returning home from Iraq and Syria. At the same time, privation, government neglect and persecution in Russia and among the Central Asian states serve as drivers for further radicalization of local populations, where militants could augment the ranks of these returnees. The West's Middle East-centric approach to countering violent extremism, Mironova warns, has "grown dangerously outdated," and the United States must rebuild its cadre of Russian and Central Asian specialists while finding a way to pursue effective cooperation and intelligence sharing with Russia and regional states on counterterrorism. (*Foreign Policy*, January 1, 2019)

### RUSSIA'S MILITARY PLANS TO TARGET U.S. EAST COAST

Moscow is increasing the strategic value it places on the *Kalibr* cruise missile system - a long-range, nuclear-capable precision capability that has greatly augmented Russia's offensive naval power. Although the *Kalibr* is a relative newcomer to the Russian arsenal, first appearing in combat in Syria in 2015, the majority of Russia's submarines, surface warships, and coastal vessels are now equipped with the highly lethal system, which is difficult to detect and counter due to its ability to fly close to the ocean surface. Moreover, its land attack range of 930-1,550 miles would enable any Russian vessel within 1,000 miles of the United States to target a swath of the country from the East Coast to Chicago. Indeed, multiple Russian officials have alluded to plans to increase *Kalibr*-equipped Atlantic patrols and submarine deployments close to the United States; others have publicly boasted that Russia has already pulled off undetected submarine incursions in the Gulf of Mexico (a claim that has been denied by the U.S. Department of Defense).

Senior U.S. and NATO officials note that the *Kalibr* expansion is taking place in the context of Russia's modernization of its submarine fleet, its coming deployment of the Avangard hypersonic missile system, and its renewed presence in the Mediterranean, North Atlantic, and the Arctic. Meanwhile, President Vladimir Putin has suggested that if the United States continues its withdrawal from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, Russia may produce a land-based version of the *Kalibr* - which would have previously been prohibited under the terms of the treaty. (*Washington Free Beacon*, January 4, 2019)

### A JAPANESE PUSH FOR THE NORTHERN TERRITORIES

A decades-old territorial dispute between Russia and Japan may be entering a new phase. Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe declared that he intends to use an upcoming summit with Vladimir Putin to push for a peace deal over the disputed Northern Territories (referred to by Russia as the Southern Kuril Islands). Soviet troops seized the Kurils at the end of World War II, and while Moscow agreed in principle back in 1956 to transfer the islands back to Japan, negotiations have been stalled ever since. Putin proposed a peace treaty without preconditions on the islands issue last year, but it is unclear whether Abe's desire to focus on a transfer of the islands' sovereignty will prove politically acceptable to the Kremlin. (*The Moscow Times*, January 4, 2019)