



AMERICAN FOREIGN  
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RUSSIA REFORM MONITOR

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

# Russia Reform Monitor No. 2507

January 21, 2022 **Ilan I. Berman**

**Related Categories:** Energy Security; Europe Military; Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues; Military Innovation; Warfare; Global Health; Arctic; Russia; Ukraine

## **RUSSIA HAS EUROPE OVER A BARREL**

Fatih Birol, the head of the Paris-based International Energy Agency (IEA), has blasted Russia's role in exacerbating Europe's mounting energy crisis. "We believe there are strong elements of tightness in the European gas market due to Russia's behaviour," Birol said. "I would note that today's low Russian gas flows to Europe coincide with heightened geopolitical tensions over Ukraine." Moscow, Birol made clear, is in a position to alleviate Europe's energy woes - but is choosing not to do so. "Russia could increase deliveries to Europe by at least one-third – this is the key message," the IEA chief has told reporters. (*Financial Times*, January 12, 2022)

[EDITOR'S NOTE: Russia's failure to ramp up its energy supplies to Europe has everything to do with the recently completed Nord Stream 2 pipeline. That energy route was finished back in September, after the Biden administration lifted Congressionally-imposed sanctions on companies involved with its construction. However, the pipeline still requires approval from German regulators to become fully operational - a decision that German authorities have indicated could still be months away. Experts believe that, after a period of initial cooperation, Russia's dwindling assistance to Europe is a pressure tactic by the Kremlin to speed approval for its new energy project.]

## **A DOMESTIC FIGHT OVER QR CODES**

Popular outrage has forced the Kremlin to pare back its latest pandemic-related social measure. Deputy Prime Minister Tatyana Golikova has told reporters that, after consultations with the ruling "United Russia" party, the Kremlin has postponed consideration of new legislation mandating the use of QR codes throughout the country. Under the draft legislation, QR codes providing proof of vaccination against COVID-19 would have been required in order for Russians to work, enter mass event venues, cultural institutions, and an array of businesses. The QR code requirement for rail and air transport is also being considered. However, in response to pushback from the general public, the government and the country's ruling party came to the decision that "the bill will be withdrawn from consideration" by the State Duma, Golikova said. (*Novaya Gazeta*, January 14, 2022)

## **WHAT WASHINGTON MIGHT DO IF RUSSIA INVADES UKRAINE**

If Russia goes ahead and launches a military incursion into Ukraine in coming weeks, the United States could end up backing the Ukrainian insurgency that results. This is one of the options reportedly being considered by the Biden White House amid ongoing tensions in Europe and the breakdown of diplomatic dialogue with the Kremlin. While the *New York Times* makes clear that the Biden administration "has not determined how the United States might arm insurgents in Ukraine who would conduct what would amount to a guerrilla war against Russian military occupation," it is among the options now being considered by policymakers as frictions with the Kremlin deepen.

Should the U.S. pursue this route, former officials say, it will be able to draw on past experiences from Afghanistan, Iraq and elsewhere. "If Putin invades Ukraine with a major military force, U.S. and NATO military assistance — intelligence, cyber, anti-armor and anti-air weapons, offensive naval missiles — would ratchet up significantly," explains former NATO SACEUR Adm. James Stavridis. "And if it turned into a Ukrainian insurgency, Putin should realize that after fighting insurgencies ourselves for two decades, we know how to arm, train and energize them." (*New York Times*, January 14, 2022)

## **THE THREAT OF A RUSSIAN "FALSE FLAG"**

Russia may foment a military altercation in Ukraine to provide it with the "pretext" to invade, U.S. intelligence officials have warned. In recent days, intelligence sources have recorded signs that Russia has prepositioned operatives "trained in urban warfare and in using explosives to carry out acts of sabotage against Russia's own proxy-forces." These forces, they say, could carry out a provocation "several weeks before a military invasion, which could begin between mid-January and mid-February."

Who, exactly, these operatives are is as yet unclear - a testament to Russia's proficiency with hybrid warfare. "When we talk about Russian operatives, it could represent a blend of individuals inside the Russian government, whether from their intelligence communities, their security services, or even their military," Pentagon Press Secretary John Kirby has said. "They often hybridize their personnel to such a degree that the lines are not necessarily really clear on who, specifically, they report to in the conduct of some of these more covert and clandestine operations." (*CBS News*, January 14, 2022)

## **CONNECTING THE ARCTIC**

The Kremlin is moving ahead with its plans for Arctic development. Russian President Vladimir Putin has reportedly tasked his government with coming up with plans to build a northward rail link connecting "European Russia" to the Barents Sea. The deadline for the proposals to be submitted for review is May 10th. It is believed that the terminus of the proposed rail route will be Indiga, an Arctic settlement in the Nenets region where the Russian government has indicated an interest in building a year-round port in coming years. (*Agence France Presse*, January 16, 2022)

