



## RUSSIA REFORM MONITOR

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

# Russia Reform Monitor No. 2512

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**Related Categories:** Europe Military; Public Diplomacy and Information Operations

### FROM BAD TO WORSE IN CHECHNYA

Russia's region of Chechnya has long been restive, and a source of instability for the North Caucasus. The situation, however, appears to be getting worse. Writing for the analytical website *Riddle*, analyst Harold Chambers notes that recent moves by regional strongman Ramzan Kadyrov - including revived tensions with neighboring Ingushetia, as well as stepped up persecution of dissidents and local opposition figures - suggest that the local government's "reactionary policy of distraction and repression" is intensifying. The reason, Chambers argues, is that Kadyrov's previously-dominant political position appears to be eroding, at least somewhat.

"Domestically, socioeconomic conditions have become a sufficient grievance to create a physical protest in the center of Grozny. Abroad, the diasporic opposition appears to be strengthening ties and achieving victories from afar," he notes. "Accordingly, the repressive centripetal forces of the state rise to meet the strengthening centrifugal power of the opposition." The end result, Chambers argues, is the creation of a negative "feedback loop," in which "increased repression causes more resistance, which then leads to more repression, and so forth." (*Riddle*, February 7, 2022)

### PUTIN'S SUPERYACHT HEADS HOME

Russian president Vladimir Putin appears to be attempting to secure his valuables ahead of possible conflict in Ukraine, and resulting pressure from the West. Putin's lavish "superyacht," *The Graceful*, recently left the Hamburg, Germany shipyard where it had been docked and was logged sailing toward the Russian Baltic enclave of Kaliningrad. The move comes amid threats from Western officials of increasingly severe measures - including personal sanctions on Putin himself - if the Kremlin moves forward and engages in hostilities against Ukraine. *The Graceful* is said to be valued at some \$100 million. (*Business Insider*, February 9, 2022)

### RUSSIAN ELITES IN THE CROSSHAIRS, WHITE HOUSE WARNS

If the Kremlin moves ahead with hostilities against Ukraine, the United States could retaliate by targeting Russian elites, a top Biden administration official has warned. According to Deputy Treasury Secretary Wally Adeyemo, Russia's oligarchs are not immune to accountability, and could be targeted as part of "severe economic consequences" leveled against Moscow. In particular, Adeyemo said on CBS's *Face The Nation* program, there are Russian elites that are "putting their money in Europe and in the United States. And those elites, those who are helping President Putin make these decisions, we would cut them and their families off from the global financial system in ways that would limit their ability to do business in the ways they've done it in the past." Such measures would come in addition to penalties on Russia's recently-completed Nord Stream II pipeline, Adeyemo said. The U.S. has pledged to render the pipeline inoperable if war in Ukraine breaks out. (*The Hill*, February 6, 2022)

### CSTO SEES NATO AS A THREAT

Amid tensions over Ukraine, the Russia-led Collective Security Treaty Organization is echoing the Kremlin's rhetoric regarding the threat posed by NATO. "NATO is substantially building up its forces on the western borders of the zone of the CSTO's [sic] responsibility and developing military infrastructure on adjacent territories," Stanislav Zas, Secretary General of the six-member bloc (which encompasses Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan) has told the prestigious Valdai Club discussion group. "Military activity is increasing and militarization of the whole region is actually underway. This creates threats not only to Belarus and Russia but adversely affects the provision of security of our entire organization, the CSTO." This view of NATO as a fundamental challenge, Zas made clear, is embedded in his bloc's "development strategy through 2025" - providing the basis for an enduring anti-Western alliance. (Itar-TASS, February 9, 2022)

### POLL: EUROPEANS BACK UKRAINE AGAINST RUSSIA

A majority of Europeans believe that a Russian invasion of Ukraine will indeed take place, and in the event that it does NATO and Europe should throw their political and military support behind Kyiv. Those are the findings of a new study carried out by the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR) of thousands of citizens in seven separate countries: Poland, Romania, Sweden, Italy, Germany, France and Finland. The online study found that majorities in every country but Finland believed that a Russian invasion of Ukraine was either "very likely" or "fairly likely." As well, more than 60% of the over 5,000 respondents expressed the conviction that NATO should come to the defense of Ukraine if it is attacked.

"The data suggests something of a geopolitical awakening in Europe," notes ECFR's Mark Leonard. "EU states have been portrayed as divided, weak and absent on Ukraine, but European citizens are united: they agree Vladimir Putin may pursue military action, and that Europe, together with its Nato partners, should ride to Ukraine's aid." (*The Guardian*, February 9, 2022)