



RUSSIA REFORM MONITOR

The American Foreign Policy Council's Review of
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Related Categories: Public Diplomacy and Information Operations; Warfare; Russia; Ukraine

IN ST. PETERSBURG, PUTIN TAKES A DEFIANT TURN

At the 25th annual St. Petersburg International Economic Forum on June 17th, Russian President Vladimir Putin raised the stakes in his ongoing rhetorical war with the West. In his keynote address at the Forum's plenary session, Putin railed against the U.S.-led liberal world order, dubbing the U.S. and European reaction to his war in Ukraine as "insane" and gloating that the "economic blitzkrieg against Russia" has failed to tank the Russian economy or subjugate the Russian people – objectives that he said the West aspired to. The Russian leader also used the opportunity to brush aside blame for the destabilizing effects of the Ukraine war on global markets and food security. In line with official Russian propaganda and disinformation, Putin asserted that rising global inflation and expanding food shortages were not a product of his "special operation," but rather of attempts by Western nations to "preserve obsolete geopolitical illusions." In his comments, the Russian leader also took aim at Ukraine. Although the country had just received candidate status for admission into the EU, Putin asserted that – without Russian protection – Ukraine was doomed to become a colony of the West. (Kremlin.ru, June 17, 2022)

RUSSIAN MILITARY FAMILIES START TO SPEAK UP

Russia's president faces a new source of opposition to his campaign in Ukraine: military families. Following the sinking of the *Moskva*, the flagship vessel of Russia's Black Sea Fleet, in early April, distraught parents of military personnel took to social media to report that their sons were still missing despite the Kremlin's claim that "[t]he vessel's roughly 500 personnel were successfully evacuated to other ships before being returned to the port of Sevastopol in Crimea." This opposition has continued. On June 21st, parents of 49 conscripts who survived the *Moskva* wreck penned a letter to protest the redeployment of their sons to the *Ladny* missile frigate, claiming they were promised their sons would be allowed to remain on dry land. According to *Novaya Gazeta*, which received a copy of the letter, the sailors' parents pleaded with the Kremlin: "Our children, who are conscripts, have already been unlawfully involved in the special military operation on the *Moskva* cruiser and received psychological traumas as a result of the accident." "We consider it unacceptable to re-enlist those who have experienced a psychologically traumatic situation to participate in combat operations," the letter continues. (MSN, June 21, 2022)

FLASHPOINT: KALININGRAD

Moscow is displaying its willingness to escalate its war in Ukraine into a full-scale confrontation with NATO and the West. The Lithuanian government recently announced that, in compliance with EU sanctions, it will prevent transports of coal, metals, and construction materials through its territory. Doing so will block overland transport routes for these goods from mainland Russia to Kaliningrad, the non-contiguous enclave seized during World War II which currently serves as home of Russia's Baltic Fleet. Calling the action a "blockade" reminiscent of the Leningrad Blockade during World War II, Nikolai Patrushev, the secretary of the Russian Security Council, said the move was "unprecedented and illegal" and would have a "serious" impact on the Lithuanian people. The rhetorical escalation has sparked serious concerns that Russia is gearing up to move against the NATO country, possibly by seizing the Suwalki Gap, the 40-mile-long stretch of Lithuanian-Polish border connecting Kaliningrad to Belarus, and thereby cut the Baltic nation off by land from the rest of NATO. (Washington Post, June 21, 2022)

OTTAWA INVESTS IN ARCTIC DEFENSE AGAINST RUSSIA

Against the backdrop of Russian aggression against Ukraine, new attention is being paid to Western defenses in another theater: the Arctic. Canada's government, which has long dragged its feet on updating its plans for Arctic defense, has announced that it will invest \$30 billion over the next 20 years to modernize North American Aerospace Defense Command radar and satellite imaging capabilities. The upgrades will "help detect and track military threats from Russia and China in the Arctic," Canadian officials said. According to former military commanders, modernizing early warning systems is essential, given Russia's recent refurbishment of its northern military installations and the fact that climatological changes are "leaving the once impassable Arctic Ocean ice-free for longer periods, creating new vulnerabilities for the North American continent."

The impetus for the change, Canadian officials have made clear, is Russian new war in Ukraine. "The threat environment has changed," Canadian Defense Minister Anita Anand has explained. "This has required us to devise and develop this new chapter in continental defense," which will include a renewed focus on "the proximity of Russia to Canada's north." (Wall Street Journal, June 20, 2022)

RUSSIAN HACKERS EYE UKRAINE'S ALLIES

In tandem with its ground invasion of Ukraine, Russia is escalating its cyberspace operations by hacking and infiltrating both U.S. and Ukrainian public and private sector networks. According to a new report from Microsoft, there is evidence that Russia is attempting to hack private companies, government agencies, and humanitarian organizations to undermine Ukrainian defensive operations. All told, the tech company estimates, Russian-origin hacks have targeted more than 100 different networks in the U.S. and 42 other countries (including the foreign ministries of NATO nations, think tanks and energy firms) that have been supportive of Kyiv in its fight against Russia.

Microsoft President Brad Smith has warned that, although only 30% of the attacks have been successful, they reflect an increasingly dangerous pattern. "The destructive cyberattacks have been underreported because in a way, they are invisible to the naked eye, you only know they happen when they succeed," he said. "But what we see from our perspective at the Microsoft Threat Intelligence Center and the literally 24 trillion signals a day is that it has been a formidable, intensive, even ferocious set of attacks." (*Politico*, June 22, 2022)