



RUSSIA REFORM MONITOR

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

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Related Categories: Arms Control and Proliferation; Democracy and Governance; Economic Sanctions; Europe Military; Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues; International Economics and Trade; Warfare; NATO; Russia; Ukraine

RUSSIA'S AVIATION INDUSTRY STARTS TO EAT ITSELF

While some world leaders, including Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, have advocated imposing a full travel ban against Russian citizens as a further consequence for the Kremlin's brutal war against Ukraine, sanctions already in place are hitting Russia's aviation industry hard enough that air travel in and from the country could soon become extremely dangerous – if not impossible. The Reuters news agency reports that Russian state-owned airline Aeroflot, which is already banned from flying over most of Europe and North America, has been stripping working aircraft for spares in order to service its many Western-built planes amid a parts shortage caused by Western sanctions.

The development follows a law passed by Russian President Vladimir Putin back in March allowing Russian operators total control over hundreds of leased aircraft. *Business Insider* reports that, beginning in June, "the Kremlin advised airlines to use parts from their own aircraft to maintain foreign-built jets," hoping to keep the planes in the air until 2025 at least, and *FlightRadar* data suggests that around 50 Aeroflot planes have been grounded since late July. The Kremlin continues to deny that sanctions are having any negative effect on the country's economy, however, and *Kommersant* reports that the Russian government's aviation development plan will ensure that its commercial fleet is replaced "with as many as 1,000 Russian-made aircraft by 2030." However, industry analysts have warned that cannibalizing new aircraft for spare parts could eventually prevent the industry from operating at all. (*Business Insider*, August 9, 2022)

ARMS CONTROL A CASUALTY OF THE UKRAINE WAR?

Russia is continuing its nuclear posturing. On August 8th, the country's Foreign Ministry lashed out at the New START treaty, the last remaining arms control treaty in force between the U.S. and Russia, announcing the continued suspension of mutual nuclear weapons sites inspections. The ministry statement argued that U.S. sanctions imposed because of the war on Ukraine placed an undue burden on Russian inspectors travelling to the U.S., while "There are no similar obstacles to the arrival of American inspectors in Russia."

The inspection and verification clauses of New START are widely seen as vital in building mutual confidence and preventing nuclear miscalculation. However, inspections have yet to be reinstated in any form after they were suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic, making the August 8th announcement more of a rhetorical challenge than an actual threat. Furthermore, notifications from Russia to the U.S. on any movements or changes in status of its nuclear arsenal have increased since its war on Ukraine began, with officials at the National and Nuclear Risk Reduction Centre receiving up to an astounding eighteen notifications per day, according to former Under Secretary of State for Arms Control and International Security Rose Gottemoeller. While inspections help to build trust by confirming the accuracy of notifications, the volume of notifications makes other means of detecting discrepancies even more reliable. "So, I wouldn't say that all is lost for arms control, even though, of course, it's a rather unfortunate decision on Russia's part," says Pavel Podvig, a Geneva-based independent analyst on Russian nuclear forces and a senior researcher at the UN Institute for Disarmament Research. (*The Guardian*, August 9, 2022)

MORE RUSSIAN NUCLEAR BLACKMAIL

As its Ukraine campaign drags on, the Kremlin is resorting to more and more extreme measures – including reviving the threat of targeting Europe's largest nuclear power plant. *Ukrainskaya Pravda* reports the head of the radiological, chemical and biological weapons division of the Russian military, Major General Valery Vasiliev, as threatening that Russia will control the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant or turn it into a "scorched desert." Ukrainian intelligence sources confirm that the Russian military has mined the nuclear plant, and is prepared to detonate the explosives if it is forced to step back from strategic site. "As you know, we mined all important objects of the Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant," Vasiliev is reported as telling his troops. "And we do not hide this from the enemy. We warned them. The enemy knows that the plant will be either Russian or nobody's." (*Ukrainskaya Pravda*, August 8, 2022)

WOONG ALLIES THROUGH ARMS SALES

With his government increasingly ostracized by the world community as a result of its aggression against Ukraine, Russian President Vladimir Putin is now ramping up his outreach to remaining allies in a number of ways. A notable one is arms trade. Russia currently ranks as the world's second-largest exporter of arms, with annual sales of some \$15 billion – mostly to India, China, Egypt and Algeria. But, against the backdrop of Western sanctions, Putin is trying to improve on this total. To that end, the Russian president announced at the opening of the Army-2022 International Military and Technical Forum outside of Moscow that his government "sincerely cherishes the historical strong, friendly, truly trusting ties with the states of Latin America, Asia, and Africa and is ready to offer its partners and allies the most modern types of weapons... From small arms to armored vehicles and artillery, combat aircrafts and unmanned aerial vehicles." According to the Russian president, the military materiel provided by his government to potential clients has been battle tested and "[m]any of them are years, or maybe decades ahead of their foreign counterparts, and in terms of tactical and technical characteristics they are significantly superior to them." (*Fox News*, August 17, 2022)

RUSSIA'S MILITARY HAS A MANPOWER PROBLEM

Nearly six months into its war in Ukraine, even Russia's most elite military units are experiencing serious personnel issues, including manpower shortages and low morale. According to Ukrainian intelligence sources, officers in the Russian Airborne Forces (VDV) are now refusing to take part in the fighting in Ukraine, putting a significant crimp on the battlefield readiness of a key military command. In past conflicts, Russia's military has made up for troop shortages through the use of private military corporation contractors such as the Wagner Group. Now, however, even mercenaries are reportedly refusing to fill the empty roles. This has led Russia's military leadership to try a range of tactics to motivate soldiers to fight, from positive reinforcement (such as promises of social benefits and government awards) to negative consequences, such as termination and legal prosecution. However, the problem still persists. (*Jerusalem Post*, August 21, 2022)