



RUSSIA REFORM MONITOR

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

Russia Reform Monitor No. 2539

October 7, 2022 **Ilan I. Berman, Sydney Duckor**

Related Categories: Europe Military; Missile Defense; Warfare; NATO; Europe; Russia; Ukraine

PUTIN PLANS "PARTIAL MOBILIZATION"...

On September 21st, the Ukraine war came home to ordinary Russians. That's when when President Vladimir Putin gave a public address in which he announced he had signed an Executive Order authorizing a "partial mobilization" of the Russian population to shore up the Kremlin's flagging war effort. In his speech, Putin laid out the parameters of the effort, emphasizing that "only military reservists, primarily those who served in the armed forces and have specific military occupational specialties and corresponding experience, will be called up." Additional details were subsequently provided by Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu, who laid out publicly that 300,000 reservists will be drafted under the plan. However, *Novaya Gazeta* subsequently reported that, pursuant to a passage in Putin's Executive Order that was kept from the public, the actual number of draftees that the Kremlin is planning on is as much as one million souls. (Kremlin.ru, September 21, 2022; Reuters, September 21, 2022; *Novaya Gazeta*, September 22, 2022)

...FAKE REFERENDUMS...

Putin's speech likewise signaled plans to take his political claims on Ukrainian territory a step further. "The parliaments of the Donbass people's republics and the military-civilian administrations of the Kherson and Zaporozhye regions have adopted decisions to hold referendums on the future of their territories and have appealed to Russia to support this," he revealed. In turn, the Russian president committed that "we will do everything necessary to create safe conditions for these referendums so that people can express their will."

The referendums, held a week later, yielded an unsurprising result. As the *Washington Post* reports, "Russian officials and Kremlin proxy leaders claimed that staged referendums showed that more than 95 percent of voters want to join Russia — an absurd level of support." Western leaders, including President Biden, have rejected these results and termed the votes a "sham." (Kremlin.ru, September 21, 2022; *Washington Post*, September 27, 2022)

...AND THREATENS NUCLEAR WAR...

Finally, Putin used his speech to level a nuclear threat at the West. In his address, Putin misleadingly alluded to "statements made by some high-ranking representatives of the leading NATO countries on the possibility and admissibility of using weapons of mass destruction — nuclear weapons — against Russia." "I would like to remind those who make such statements," he said, "that our country has different types of weapons as well, and some of them are more modern than the weapons NATO countries have. In the event of a threat to the territorial integrity of our country and to defend Russia and our people, we will certainly make use of all weapon systems available to us. This is not a bluff." (Kremlin.ru, September 21, 2022)

[EDITORS' NOTE: The linkage in Putin's address is not coincidental, and is deeply significant. By holding sham referendums in Kherson, Zaporizhzhia, Donetsk and Luhansk, Russia will be able to thereafter claim them as Russian territory — and extend its nuclear umbrella over them. In this way, Putin hopes to be able to lop off additional parts of Ukrainian territory while simultaneously deterring Western nations from responding.]

...AS OTHER OFFICIALS FOLLOW SUIT

If NATO countries attempt to carry out military operations in Crimea, they will face retaliation from Russian hypersonic weapons, and perhaps its nukes as well, Dmitry Medvedev, the head of Russia's Security Council, has said. "Various retired idiots wearing a general's insignia should know better than to try to scare us with speculations about a NATO strike at Crimea," Medvedev wrote on his channel on social media app *Telegram*. "Hypersonic retaliation is be [sic] able to reach targets in Europe and the United States much faster, it's guaranteed."

The reference was an apparent allusion to Gen. Ben Hodges, the former commander of U.S. army forces in Europe, who had opined in recent days that the Alliance could potentially destroy Russia's Black Sea Fleet, which is based in Crimea, should Vladimir Putin resort to the use of nuclear weapons in Ukraine. Russia's retaliatory capabilities, Medvedev emphasized, include "not only mobilization capabilities, but also any Russian weapons, including strategic nuclear weapons and weapons based on new principles, can be used for such protection." (Itar-TASS, September 22, 2022)

A WARNING FROM WASHINGTON

If the Kremlin uses nuclear weapons in Ukraine to shore up its failing military campaign, the consequences could be "catastrophic" for Russia. That message has been privately communicated to senior Russian government leaders in recent days by Biden administration officials. According to Secretary of State Antony Blinken, White House principals have signaled to their Russian counterparts that the United States is prepared to "respond decisively" to any use of nuclear weapons. The private warning to Moscow comes following Russian President Vladimir Putin's public statements in mid-September that seemed to indicate that he was mulling such a step as a potential contingency. "If Russia crosses this line there will be catastrophic consequences for Russia. The United States will respond decisively," National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan has told NBC's *Meet the Press*. (*Daily Mail*, September 26, 2022)