



RUSSIA REFORM MONITOR

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

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NORD STREAM EXPLOSIONS REVIVE EUROPEAN ENERGY DEBATE

Against the backdrop of the war in Ukraine, the damage sustained by the Nord Stream 1 pipeline in the wake of several explosions – which some countries are calling intentional sabotage – has once again raised worries over energy security in Europe. Prior to the start of the war, Nord Stream 1 and its now-aborted successor, Nord Stream 2, were topics of contention between the EU, its allies, and Russia – with Russia often using the pipelines as bargaining chips to prevent the West from interfering in its foreign policy priorities. The recent damage inflicted on the pipeline by "parties unknown" has revived concerns that Russia is once again attempting to use the pipelines to cement its territorial gains in Ukraine. Russia stopped the flow of gas through the pipeline in recent months for "maintenance" purposes, and later reopened the route at only 20% capacity. Most recently, gas flow resumed, but was "reduced to 40% of expected levels." Although the managing director of Gasunie Deutschland, a German gas pipeline grid company, is "relatively optimistic" that the damage to Nord Stream could be repaired, Germany and some of its European counterparts may be forced to find alternate sources of fuel – at least in the near term.

As for who bears the blame for the incidents, European countries bordering the pipeline's route in the Baltics have not identified a suspect. A spokesman for the United States military has similarly said that "the jury is still out" as to who is responsible for the sabotage. Various theories have abounded pinning the blame on Ukraine, on Russia itself, or on a third party. (Reuters, September 28, 2022)

OLD RUSSIAN ARMOR ROLLS ONTO THE BATTLEFIELD

As its military materiel is progressively depleted, Russia's government is going back to (Soviet) basics. The Kremlin has begun deploying aging Cold War era T-62 battle tanks to supplement its more advanced armor models, many of which have been lost or incapacitated in combat on the Ukraine front. While the surge in aging armor could have near-term benefits for the Russian side – given that the T-62 is a capable platform for which spare parts abound, and the fact that Russia has spent considerable time and energy modernizing them over the years – it reflects a larger pattern of dwindling Russian military supplies as the Ukraine war grinds on. (*Forbes*, September 26, 2022)

CONSCRIPTS AS CANNON FODDER

Enormous losses in personnel and materiel have forced the Kremlin to initiate a "partial mobilization" to replenish its exhausted military forces. But Russia's new – and often unwilling – conscripts are not getting the training they require before being deployed to the Ukrainian front. On average, Russia's new draftees are getting a mere two weeks of training before they are sent to fight in Ukraine – just a fifth of the standard ten-week training course provided to U.S. soldiers. And some Russian soldiers are being deployed with no training at all. The likely outcome of this policy, experts say, is a "whole range of new problems for the Kremlin — from low morale to troop unreliability and high death rates."

Further complicating matters is the dismal state of Russia's conventional weapons stockpiles. Though the Russian ground forces possess "thousands of tanks" in storage, it is unclear what state of maintenance these vehicles are in. Since the start of the war in February, some 386 Russian tanks have been found abandoned, suggesting that "Moscow has not been regularly servicing its equipment." (*The Moscow Times*, September 29, 2022)

STEALING UKRAINE'S GRAIN

Russia's Ukraine war has been accompanied by campaign of agricultural thievery, according to a new Associated Press report. Satellite imagery and marine transponder data have identified cargo ships smuggling captured Ukrainian grain to buyers in Syria and ports in Turkey, Lebanon, and elsewhere. Those orchestrating and administering the theft include "wealthy businessmen and state-owned companies in Russia and Syria." Further compounding the situation is the potential involvement of Turkey in the scheme. Although Ankara was instrumental in facilitating a deal between Ukraine and Russia allowing for the export of grain from both countries despite the hostilities, there is evidence that entities in Turkey are facilitating the illicit trade. (Associated Press, October 3, 2022)