



RUSSIA REFORM MONITOR

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

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CHINESE MICROCHIPS ARE FAILING MOSCOW

Russia's attempt to procure microchips for its battlefield necessities just got a good deal more complicated. As a result of hard-hitting sanctions and new, stricter export control measures imposed by the West in response to its war in Ukraine, Moscow has been forced to employ alternative methods to obtain the microchips necessary to field advanced armaments. Since the imposition of sanctions, for instance, Russia has relied on looting regions of Ukraine it now occupies for home appliances (which contain microchips as components) and exploiting third parties to circumvent sanctions. Another tactic, however, has been to purchase Chinese-manufactured microchips on the gray market. But this remedy isn't panning out well; according to the *Kommersant* newspaper, "up to 40% of Chinese chips are turning out to be defective." This massive failure rate represents a logistical nightmare for Moscow, the paper notes, necessitating Russia test the viability of all microchips that have been delivered to date. The issue is compounded by a lack of experience among Russian companies in vetting suppliers, which has made sourcing the requisite microchips an even more difficult task. (*Tom's Hardware*, October 18, 2022)

NEW TACTICS BELIE A DIFFERENT HAND AT THE WHEEL OF WAR

In recent weeks, Russia has utilized wave after wave of Iranian drones to pummel Ukrainian cities and civilian infrastructure targets in what represents a marked shift in Moscow's approach. While the Russian military is no stranger to striking Ukrainian population centers, the severity and savagery of the most recent attacks reflect a change in both tactics and strategy that European officials are attributing to personnel changes. Estonian Defense Minister Hanno Pevkur believes that the new shape of the Russian offensive is due to "a new general in the Kremlin": namely, General Sergey Surovkin, a military commander previously responsible for Russia's scorched earth campaign in Syria in support of the Assad regime, who was recently put in charge of Russia's troubled war effort in Ukraine. According to Pevkur, the leadership change reflects that the Russian side is seeking every avenue to gain an advantage, including encouraging the buildup of Russian forces in Belarus as a way of "dividing Ukrainian forces" by raising the specter of a northern front. (*Breaking Defense*, October 18, 2022)

YET ANOTHER GERMAN OFFICIAL COMPROMISED BY THE KREMLIN

In many policy circles, Germany is understood to be the weakest link in a unified European response to Russian aggression, a fact attributable in part to the entanglements among some current and former German officials with the Russian state. Another of those came to light in recent days with the firing of Germany's top cybersecurity official for his ties to Russia. Arne Schönbohm headed the German Federal Office for Information Security (BSI), the country's top "cybersecurity authority," before he was fired in mid-October for his ties to Russian intelligence. At issue were previous business dealings by Schönbohm's advisory firm, the Cyber Security Council of Germany, which had taken on a German client that is a subsidiary of a Russian cybersecurity firm founded by a former member of the KGB. The news, when it came to light, "permanently damaged the necessary public trust in... Schönbohm's conduct of office as president of Germany's most important cybersecurity authority," a German Interior Ministry spokesperson has affirmed. (*CNN*, October 18, 2022)

IN RUSSIA, AN UNDERGROUND ETHNIC PROTEST MOVEMENT EMERGES

The Russian government's recent plan for the "partial mobilization" of the country's population in service of its Ukraine war is having a polarizing – and radicalizing – effect on segments of the populace. In the Republic of Bashkortostan, where local activists have long advocated for federalism in Russia, the call-up – and the disproportionate numbers of ethnic Bashkirs and Tatars who have been drafted as part of the supposedly neutral order – has led to the emergence of an armed underground group advocating for separation from Russia. The so-called "Committee of Bashkir Resistance" announced its formation on Telegram following the mobilization order, and stated that its ultimate objective was that "Bashkortostan will be free." Since then, observers have linked the group to instances of violence – including the firebombing of the regional office of Russia's ruling "United Russia" party in the city of Salavat – directed at countering what many view as a thinly-veiled attempt by Putin's government to conduct "ethnocide" against its own population.

The Bashkir ferment, moreover, may be a sign of things to come. Bashkortostan "is becoming the first swallow among the republics which are talking about independence," says Russian political analyst Dmitry Oreshkin. "Putin's strategy is leading to the disintegration of the country. He began a war and opened the gates for such processes. The mistakes of the Kremlin authorities are now giving all this a powerful stimulus." (*Euromaidan Press*, October 19, 2022)

ISRAEL RECALIBRATES ITS UKRAINE WAR POLICY

For months, the Israeli government's relatively restrained stance on the Ukraine war – and its hesitance to provide lethal aid to assist Kyiv's effort to repel Russian aggression – has been informed by a number of domestic considerations. Among them has been the fact that Russia plays an important, and stabilizing, role on the territory of Israel's northern neighbor, Syria, where the Kremlin is a key factor in propping up the fragile regime of dictator Bashar al-Assad. Israel's calculations, however, now appear to be changing as a result of several factors.

The most prominent of these is Iran's growing significance as a source of military materiel (most prominently, drones) to the Russian armed forces. Germaine as well, however, has been Russia's progressive disengagement from Syria, as battlefield losses force Moscow to shift its forces – and its air defense systems – to the Ukrainian front. These changes have cumulatively prompted a strategic rethink of sorts in Jerusalem, with Israeli officials and experts becoming increasingly vocal about the need to step up assistance to Kyiv. (*New York Times*, October 19, 2022)