



RUSSIA REFORM MONITOR

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

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RUSSIA'S AFRICAN FOOTPRINT DEEPENS

Following a recent diplomatic offensive in Africa, Russia appears to be reaping significant dividends. Sudan's ruling junta has announced the conclusion of a 25-year agreement that will allow Russia to set up a naval base in the east African state. In exchange for the naval base, Russia has agreed to provide Sudan with weapons and military equipment. However, the deal is still notional, and needs to be approved by Sudan's yet-to-be-formed legislature to go into effect.

For Moscow, the agreement – though tentative – represents a significant strategic achievement. It marks tangible progress on Russia's efforts to establish a global naval presence, a Kremlin priority in recent years. When it is built, the facility will also help to secure Russia's access to the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean. (Associated Press, February 11, 2023)

AMERICANS WARNED AGAIN TO LEAVE RUSSIA

As ties between Moscow and Washington continue to deteriorate, the U.S. government has issued a new warning to Americans present in the country. In the run-up to the one-year anniversary of the Ukraine war, the U.S. embassy in Moscow has advised all Americans currently in Russia to leave immediately. The warning referenced the Russian government's practice of singling out Americans for harassment and arrest. However, the State Department did not provide a specific reason as to why it released the warning when it did. This is not the first call by the State Department for Americans to leave Russia, however; the last one came in September 2022, in the wake of Russian President Vladimir Putin's "partial mobilization" order. (Fox News, February 13, 2022)

MOLDOVA IN THE CROSSHAIRS

The growing tensions between Moldova and Russia have reached a fever pitch. Earlier this month, the Moldovan government accused the Kremlin of trying to destabilize Moldova and topple the government through orchestrated protests – an accusation which echoes claims made previously by Ukraine. Moldovan concerns over Russian intentions even led the national air carrier, Air Moldova, to close the country's airspace for two hours on February 14th. Previously, a Russian missile fired from the Black Sea violated Moldovan airspace on its way to Ukraine. Moldova has taken an increasingly pro-Western turn in recent years, but is still highly dependent on Russia for its energy supplies, which has led to significant friction between the two countries. (New York Times, February 14, 2023)

WESTERN SANCTIONS HIT RUSSIAN GAS EXPORTS

Western sanctions had a pronounced effect on Russian gas exports last year. According to Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak, Russian exports of natural gas fell by 25% in 2022. Novak attributed the fall entirely to "the refusal of European countries to buy Russian gas." Europe had been the largest buyer of Russian gas up until Russia's invasion of Ukraine, when the EU began to dramatically decrease its dependency on Russian energy. However, in other areas, Russia saw increasingly positive energy trends. For instance, gas supplies to China through the Power of Siberia pipeline rose almost 50% as Russia reoriented its energy trade, and oil exports increased by 7.6% in 2022. (The Moscow Times, February 14, 2023)

IN STATE OF THE NATION, PUTIN STRIKES A DEFIANT NOTE

On February 21st, after weeks of delay, Russian President Vladimir Putin delivered his annual "State of the Nation" address to the Federal Assembly, Russia's upper chamber of parliament. In it, Putin attempted once again to cast his war of aggression against Ukraine as a necessary humanitarian and defensive measure, claiming military action had to be taken in order "to ensure the security of our country and to eliminate the threat coming from the neo-Nazi regime that had taken hold in Ukraine after the 2014 coup." He also appeared to re-double his government's commitment to the "special military operation" against Kyiv, saying that "Step by step, carefully and consistently we will deal with the tasks we have at hand."

Perhaps the most tangible development in Putin's address, however, was the announcement that his government was suspending its participation in New START, the last arms control agreement remaining in force between the United States and Russia. "Before we come back to discussing this issue, we must have a clear idea of what NATO countries such as France or Great Britain have at stake, and how we will account for their strategic arsenals, that is, the Alliance's combined offensive capabilities," Russia's president said. (kremlin.ru, February 21, 2023)