



# Russia Reform Monitor No. 2589

June 22, 2023 Ilan I. Berman, Sydney Duckor

**Related Categories:** Arms Control and Proliferation; Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues; Missile Defense; Science and Technology; Warfare; Russia; Ukraine

## WASHINGTON MOVES AWAY FROM NEW START... FINALLY

Back in February, Russian President Vladimir Putin announced that his government was suspending its participation in New Start, the 2010 treaty that serves as the last major arms control agreement remaining in force between Moscow and Washington. Russia's decision was based on a slew of grievances – not least U.S. support for Kyiv in the current war in Ukraine. Back then, however, the Biden administration stopped short of reciprocating in kind, declaring that it would unilaterally continue to abide by the terms of New Start, including providing Moscow with information on nuclear forces covered by the treaty.

That, however, is now changing. On June 1st, the State Department announced a quartet of "countermeasures" that the United States is taking in response to Russia's suspension of the agreement, including ending the provision of data to the Kremlin on America's nuclear-capable missiles and launchers. "Russia ceased fulfilling its notification obligation upon its purported suspension of the treaty on February 28, 2023," Foggy Bottom said in an official statement explaining its decision. "The fundamental purpose of the majority of notifications is to improve each side's ability to verify the other's compliance with the treaty, especially in combination with on-site inspections." (*The Washington Times*, June 1, 2023)

## RUSSIAN WARTIME INFIGHTING ESCALATES

The tensions between Russia's military and the Wagner mercenary group have reached a boiling point. What began as escalating verbal jabs between Wagner founder Yevgeny Prigozhin and Russian officials like Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu has now escalated to violent altercations. Wagner forces, which have in the past accused the Russian Armed Forces of depriving them of equipment and taking credit for their victories, are now accused of kidnapping and torturing Russian soldiers. The accusation does not come from the West, but rather from a member of the Russian Army itself: Colonel Roman Vinivitin. According to Vinivitin's account, Wagner is responsible for stealing military equipment and vehicles from Russian troops, as well as raping and kidnapping Russian soldiers themselves. (*Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, June 8, 2023)

## EXPERT: RUSSIA COMMITTING "CULTURAL GENOCIDE" IN UKRAINE

Many foreign publics have been hesitant to label Russia's war in Ukraine as a genocide, but Russia's intentional targeting of Ukrainian culture suggests that the conflict very much is. Richard Kurin, a Smithsonian Distinguished Scholar and Ambassador-at-Large, pointed out recently at a public conference that Moscow's destruction of Ukrainian museums, archives, and libraries – of which there have been over 1,700 accounts – is purposeful, and constitutes a "war crime." "Particularly in Ukraine, culture and identity and history is being targeted," Kurin said. "This is not collateral damage." As such, Kurin likened Russia's actions to that of the Islamic State terrorist group in the Middle East, when the group intentionally targeted the Mosul Museum in Iraq. (*The Hill*, June 2, 2023)

## THE COST OF BAKHMUT

Over the past year-and-a-half, the information environment surrounding the war in Ukraine has been murky, and there has been much back and forth regarding casualty numbers and losses between Moscow and Kyiv. The same holds true when it comes to the long-running "Battle of Bakhmut," in which Russia recently claimed victory. Kyiv has grudgingly admitted Russia's gains, but emphasizes that they came at an extremely high cost. According to Ukrainian National Security and Defense Council chief Oleksiy Danilov, Russian casualties in its campaign to take Bakhmut surpass those of Ukraine by a factor of 7.5. Moreover, the victory is mostly a symbolic one. Although Bakhmut previously served as an important industrial center, the city has now been decimated and holds little strategic value. (*Kyiv Independent*, June 4, 2023)

[EDITORS' NOTE: Ukraine's long-awaited counteroffensive is now underway, and as part of that military action a number of territories occupied by Russia – including Bakhmut – could soon once again change hands. Future issues of the *Russia Reform Monitor* will cover these developments.]

## **RUSSIA TAKES BACK ASIAN ARMS**

As its campaign in Ukraine has dragged on, Russia has experienced deepening deficits of military hardware and materiel. So severe have these shortages become that Moscow has begun buying back arms it previously sold to clients in Asia. Russia's biggest customer, India, along with Myanmar, is reportedly selling the Kremlin back its own weapons amid Russian wartime losses and widening Western sanctions. For its part, Russia has attempted to obscure the purchases by listing them under the "reclamation act," a statute governing defective items. However, the quantity of items now being shipped and the fact that the items are being "reclaimed" years after their procurement suggests that the true purpose of the Russian effort is to restock its depleted arsenal. (*Nikkei Asia*, June 5, 2023)