



RUSSIA REFORM MONITOR

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

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July 10, 2023 Ilan I. Berman, Sydney Duckor

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A TRIAL BALLOON FOR RUSSIAN NUCLEAR USE

For most of the past year, Washington and other Western capitals have worried about the possibility that Russia – facing serious difficulties in its campaign against Kyiv – might resort to the use of tactical nuclear weapons to consolidate its gains and improve its strategic position. Those fears have been fanned by a recent article in *Russia in Global Affairs*, the country's analogue to *Foreign Affairs*, by prominent political scientist Sergei Karaganov. In it, Karaganov argues that, rather than seeking partial victory on the battlefield in Ukraine, Moscow must fundamentally tilt the geopolitical balance vis-à-vis the West in its favor – and that, in order to do so, "[t]he fear of nuclear escalation must be restored."

"We can fight for another year or two or three, sacrificing thousands and thousands of our best men and grinding tens and hundreds of thousands of residents of the territory that is now called Ukraine in a tragic historical trap," Karaganov writes. "But this military operation cannot be ended with a decisive victory without imposing a strategic retreat or even surrender on the West." Instead, he argues, Russia "must force the West to abandon attempts to reverse history, abandon the attempts at global domination and force it to take care of itself..." – something that can only be accomplished by restoring "a lost sense of self-preservation" among Western elites. That is, by threatening nuclear escalation in the conflict with Ukraine, and even a preemptive nuclear strike. "The enemy should know that we are ready to strike a pre-emptive blow of retaliation for all his current and past aggressions to prevent a slide into a global thermonuclear war," Karaganov argues. (*Rossiia v Globalnoye Politike*, June 13, 2023)

[EDITORS' NOTE: Karaganov is known for his close ties to the Kremlin, and has served as an advisor to Russian President Vladimir Putin and the Russian Ministry of Defense. As such, his article is likely a trial balloon by the Russian government designed to signal that it is willing to escalate the Ukraine conflict, in hopes of getting Western nations to scale back their support for Kyiv.]

CONGRESS TARGETS RUSSIAN FUNDS IN THE WEST

Continued support for Ukraine has become a pitched – and increasingly partisan – political debate in some corners of the U.S. electorate. On Capitol Hill, however, a bipartisan group of legislators is on a mission to make Moscow pay for the damage it has inflicted on Ukraine, and to do so by using confiscated Russian assets. House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Michael McCaul (R-TX-10) and Senate Foreign Relations Committee Ranking Member Jim Risch (R-ID), together with several other Democrats and Republicans, recently introduced the *Rebuilding Economic Prosperity and Opportunity (REPO) for Ukrainians Act*. The Act is aimed at seizing the \$300 billion in Russian sovereign wealth that is now frozen in Western financial institutions, and repurposing it to assist with the reconstruction of Ukraine. According to Rep. Marcy Kaptur (D-OH-9), a co-sponsor of the legislation, "Responsibility for the senseless and brutal war being waged against Ukraine lies with Russia alone. It must be Russia that shoulders responsibility for rebuilding Ukraine in the aftermath." The Act also empowers the President and the Department of State to work with allies to establish a mechanism for transferring those confiscated assets. (House Foreign Affairs Committee, June 15, 2023)

RUSSIA SEEKS TO UPGRADE ISRAEL TIES

Since the start of the Ukraine war last year, relations between Moscow and Jerusalem have changed considerably. While Israel was initially hesitant to take a firm stand in support of Ukraine on account of strategic understandings hammered out with the Kremlin over security in Syria, among other issues, the country has gradually drifted into alignment with the West regarding the conflict, including the provision of military materiel to Kyiv. In the process, diplomatic ties with the government of Vladimir Putin have suffered – a situation that the Kremlin is now attempting to correct.

Russia recently signaled that it plans to open a branch of its embassy from Tel Aviv. The development, hammered out with the Jerusalem city government, will see Moscow erect a "branch office of the Consular Section of the Russian Embassy in Israel" in downtown Jerusalem. The Russian government says that the move is "in line with [our] Middle East policy." "We believe that this step fully serves the interests of further strengthening friendly multifaceted relations between Russia and Israel, as well it goes in line with our country's unchanging course towards a fair Middle East settlement," the Russian embassy in Israel said in an official statement. Israeli officials, for their part, are seeing the move as a positive step. "We are constantly in talks with many different countries about the recognition of Jerusalem as our capital," Jerusalem deputy mayor Fleur Hassan-Nahoum has said. "We are pleased that this deal brings us a step closer towards that goal with the Russian Federation." (*Jerusalem Post*, June 16, 2023)