



## RUSSIA REFORM MONITOR

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

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**Related Categories:** Arms Control and Proliferation; Europe Military; Missile Defense; Public Diplomacy and Information Operations; Warfare; Central Africa; Europe; North Africa; Russia; Turkey; Ukraine; West Africa

### NEW NUCLEAR MOVES FROM MOSCOW

As its military campaign against Ukraine drags on, Russia's nervous neighbors are watching its latest strategic maneuvers with alarm. Late last month, Polish president Andrzej Duda confirmed that Russia's military had begun moving short-range nuclear weapons to neighboring Belarus. Putin and his Belarusian counterpart, Alexander Lukashenko, had announced plans to do so this Spring, but the development had not been confirmed to date. The move, Eastern European officials say, has clear strategic ramifications beyond Ukraine. By shifting its nuclear posture, Russia "is changing the architecture of security in our part of Europe," Duda made clear. (Associated Press, August 22, 2023)

### THE LIMITS OF TURKISH DIPLOMACY

Turkey's larger-than-life president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, has distinguished himself as a geopolitical power broker *par excellence*, playing a commanding role in NATO in recent years – and especially against the backdrop of the Ukraine war and the alliance aspirations of Nordic states Finland and Sweden. Erdogan's diplomatic outreach evidently has its limits, however. The Turkish head of state recently traveled to the Black Sea resort town of Sochi to meet with Russian President Vladimir Putin in order to discuss the Ukraine war and Russia's recent pullout from the Black Sea Grain Initiative. "We believe that the initiative should be continued by correcting the shortcomings," Erdogan said, in an apparent nod to Russian complaints that they are not benefiting from the 2022 deal. "The Black Sea corridor will serve the poorest countries to which this grain will be shipped."

But Erdogan's entreaties fell on deaf ears, with Putin refusing to rejoin the Initiative. Instead, the two leaders agreed on a lesser arrangement, entailing the shipment of some one million tons of Russian grain to six African nations after reprocessing in Turkish plants, as a stopgap measure. (*AI-Monitor*, September 4, 2023)

### NEW ATTENTION TO RUSSIA'S NUKES

With the final U.S.-Russian arms control agreement, known as New START, now on its last legs, and with repeated Russian threats of nuclear escalation in the context of Ukraine, new attention is now being paid to the size and potency of the Kremlin's atomic arsenal. A new policy paper for the National Institute for Public Policy has warned that prevailing Western estimates of Russia's stockpiles are systematically low, and addresses "what may be a systematic undercounting of Russian strategic and non-strategic nuclear forces" by organizations such as the Federation of American Scientists (FAS).

The implications are far-reaching. "In the emerging, unprecedented multipolar nuclear threat environment that the United States and its allies face, sustaining an effective U.S. nuclear deterrence is challenging," writes the author, Mark Schneider. "The existing U.S. nuclear force posture is increasingly obsolescent and badly needs modernization given the expanding nuclear threats. Yet, FAS numbers may undercount Russian nuclear capabilities and thereby misrepresent the severity of the nuclear threat. This may well have the effect of reducing public and congressional support for a defense budget needed to sustain a credible U.S. deterrence posture." (National Institute for Public Policy, September 2023)

### WAGNER'S UNCERTAIN FUTURE

With the fall from grace and subsequent demise of Wagner chief Yevgeny Prigozhin, the paramilitary outfit that he made notorious is undergoing massive changes – and facing new challengers. The *Wall Street Journal* reports that "security groups loyal to the Kremlin are moving to take control of Wagner's military forces in Ukraine and Africa" in the wake of Prigozhin's death. And as Wagner's stature has declined, that of other groups has risen. "A number of private military groups with ties to the Kremlin have sent soldiers to fight in Ukraine in recent months, often as a way of currying favor with Putin. They include groups founded by intelligence officers, financed by oligarchs close to Putin and controlled by state companies," the paper notes. (*Wall Street Journal*, September 5, 2023)