



Russia Policy Monitor No. 2606

October 16, 2023 **Ilan I. Berman, Chloe E. Smith**

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MORE DRIFT ON ARMS CONTROL

Vladimir Putin has hinted at the possibility of withdrawing Russia from the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, the multilateral agreement banning nuclear testing. The Russian president emphasized the need to ensure the reliability of new weapons, suggesting that nuclear tests might be necessary for Moscow to carry out in the future. In doing so, Putin drew a parallel with the United States, which has signed the CTBT but has not ratified the agreement, suggesting that the Kremlin might follow a similar path. (*Meduza*, October 5, 2023)

WHAT MAKES PUTIN TICK?

The start of Russia's war against Ukraine last year has revived the global conversation about the Kremlin's objectives and – at a broader level – the core ideology of the current government in Moscow. A new study from a prominent Washington think tank has now outlined what it identifies as the five ideological tenets animating the government of Russian President Vladimir Putin.

"First is the imperative of a *strong, stable state* that allows Russians to be Russians (based on exceptionalism and traditional values), to preserve their unique or exceptional way of life (whatever that might mean) and to live out their patriotism, whether it extends back into the past or is a matter of celebrating contemporary Russia," the report, entitled "The Ideology of Putinism" and written by scholars at the Center for Strategic & International Studies, notes. Through this lens, President Putin is seen as a restorer of stability who "has brought peace, prosperity and harmony to Russia."

Secondly, it lays out, "Putin tends to present *Russia as under threat*" – both in terms of a threat of physical dissolution and a cultural loss of cohesion as a result of an encroaching West. Third, and related, is a deep seated (and extensively cultivated) "*anti-Westernism*" that sees the countries of Europe and the United States as simultaneously "both menacing and declining."

"*Cultural conservatism*, the will to avoid a hedonism that is Western in origin, is the fourth tenet of official ideology," the paper outlines. The final tenet of contemporary "Putinism," the study asserts, "is the cult of the *Great Patriotic War*," which Kremlin officials have used as an emotional tool to harness the loyalty and patriotism of ordinary Russians. (CSIS, September 2023)

A NEW BLACK SEA NAVAL BASE

Russia has announced plans to establish a naval base in Georgia's separatist enclave of Abkhazia. Abkhazia, backed by Moscow, will host a "permanent point of deployment" for Russia on the Black Sea coast, according to the breakaway region's leader, Aslan Bzhania. This decision coincides with increased attacks by Ukraine on Russia's Black Sea Fleet, including an assault on the Fleet's Crimea headquarters. The Kremlin's silence on the alleged deal contrasts with that of Georgia's foreign ministry, which vehemently opposes it, citing concerns about sovereignty and territorial integrity. Abkhazia, which already hosts a Russian military base, is located in northwestern Georgia and shares a border with Russia. (*BBC*, October 6, 2023)

REPURPOSING RUSSIA'S FUNDS

The Biden administration is throwing its weight behind European plans to repurpose the revenue generated by Russian funds frozen in foreign jurisdictions in order to assist Ukraine. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellin has backed the idea of "harnessing windfall proceeds from Russian sovereign assets immobilised in particular clearinghouses and using the funds to support Ukraine." In a press conference on the sidelines of the IMF and World Bank meetings in Marrakesh, Morocco, Yellin formally backed the idea of using the profits from some \$300 billion in Russian reserves currently escrowed in foreign jurisdictions to bolster Ukraine's fight against the Kremlin. The U.S. and its allies "must continue to impose severe and increasing costs on Russia and continue efforts to ensure Russia pays for the damage it has caused," Yellin said. (*Financial Times*, October 11, 2023)