



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; Democracy and Governance; Economic Sanctions; Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues; Intelligence and Counterintelligence; Public Diplomacy and Information Operations; Warfare; Border Security; Iran; Russia; Ukraine; United States

TOWARD A RUSSIAN "PANOPTICON"

As its war against Ukraine has dragged on, the Kremlin has tightened its control over Russian society. Now it is considering a sweeping surveillance network designed to track and monitor citizens in multiple cities across the Russian Federation. Russia's Digital Development Ministry has reportedly put forth a proposal for a "platform for processing and storing data from surveillance cameras." The plan would harness regional video surveillance systems and cameras positioned in the entrances of apartment buildings to collect mass data that would be sifted and analyzed for threats using face and image recognition technology. All told the Ministry's plan envisions a five million-camera nationwide surveillance network by the year 2030, with data being analyzed by artificial intelligence. (*Meduza*, November 24, 2023)

PRIORITIZING GUNS OVER BUTTER

In mid-November, the State Duma, Russia's lower legislative chamber, approved a new three-year national budget. (It was subsequently approved by the country's upper legislative chamber, the Federation Council, as well). The plan, spanning the years 2024-2026, makes clear that Russia's war against Ukraine remains the Putin government's top national priority. Under the plan, 10.7 trillion rubles (\$120.8 billion) is allocated to national defense – amounting to a third of all budgetary spending, and representing more money than is allocated to social spending. According to Finance Minister Anton Siluanov, the budgetary allotments are necessary for Russia to "ensure victory" in its fight against Ukraine. (*Meduza*, November 24, 2023)

RUSSIA, IRAN DEEPEN MILITARY TIES

The strategic cooperation between Tehran and Moscow has expanded significantly since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and those ties continue to grow. Iran's deputy defense minister, Mehdi Farahi, recently disclosed that arrangements have been made for the delivery of Russian-made fighter jets and helicopters to the Islamic Republic. This adds to the Iranian regime's stockpile of indigenously-designed *Kowsar* fighters which began production in 2018. The Iranian Air Force, which currently operates a limited number of strike aircraft, is set to enhance its capabilities by integrating these new assets into its combat units. Russia has not officially confirmed the deal, but rumors of an arms trade *quid pro quo* – in which the Islamic Republic receives Russian weaponry as payment for the drone platforms it has provided Moscow for use on the Ukrainian front – have swirled for some time. (Reuters, November 28, 2023)

HOW REPUBLICANS PLAN TO HELP KYIV WIN

In the United States, aid for Ukraine is becoming a contentious – and increasingly partisan – political issue ahead of the 2024 Presidential election. A significant segment of the Republican party has voiced its skepticism over the continued provision of any aid to Ukraine, a top priority for the White House. However, even Republicans who broadly support Kyiv's fight against Russian aggression are quibbling about how the Biden administration is doing so.

That latter camp has now proposed a plan to optimize American support for Ukraine. The proposal, issued in the form of a study by the Republican leadership of three key committees, the House Foreign Affairs Committee, the House Armed Services Committee, and the House Select Committee on China, posits that President Biden "is mishandling the worst war in Europe since World War II," including by "prolong[ing] the war... [and] inviting further aggression from America's adversaries." The Republican response envisages a three-pronged U.S. policy, entailing "(1) providing critical weapons to Ukraine at the speed of relevance, (2) tightening sanctions on the Putin regime, and (3) transferring frozen Russian sovereign assets to Ukraine."

"This strategy," the position paper argues, "will ensure Ukraine is able to make the needed advances on the battlefield to force Putin to the negotiating table. If Ukraine doesn't negotiate from a position of strength, there can be no lasting peace." (Committee on Foreign Affairs/Armed Services Committee/Select Committee on China, December 2023)