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Russian Government Actions and U.S. Policy

# Russia Policy Monitor No. 2622

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**Related Categories:** Arms Control and Proliferation; International Economics and Trade; Warfare; SPACE; Border Security; China; Iran; Israel; North Korea; Russia; Ukraine

## **TOP GENERAL: RUSSIA POSES A THREAT TO SPACE SECURITY...**

The head of the U.S. Space Command has warned policymakers not to underestimate Russia's resolve to challenge U.S. dominance in space. Despite waning influence in space and its setbacks in Ukraine, Gen. Stephen Whiting told lawmakers in recent testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee, Russia's space ambitions remain enduring. While not directly addressing Moscow's space-based nuclear weapons development, which has recently generated concern on Capitol Hill, Whiting stressed that Russia is both willing and capable of challenging the U.S. in that domain in coming years. In fact, he noted, Russian military losses on the battlefield in Ukraine might drive Moscow to rely more heavily on space-based and cyber systems to achieve its strategic goals vis-à-vis the West. (*Space News*, March 5, 2024)

## **...AS MOSCOW PIGGYBACKS ON BEIJING'S SPACE AMBITIONS**

Russia and China plan to jointly establish a nuclear power plant on the moon between 2033 and 2035, a top Russian official has divulged. According to Yuri Borisov, the current head of Russian space agency ROSCOSMOS, Moscow sees nuclear energy as needed for potential lunar settlements due to the limitations of technologies like solar panels. Borisov has proposed executing the project in unmanned fashion, citing significant technical impediments to doing so with humans. Borisov likewise outlined goals for a nuclear-powered cargo spaceship, highlighting its potential for transporting large payloads and clearing space debris. And despite some recent high-profile failures on the part of the Russian space program, Moscow is intent on resuming lunar missions and even intends to construct a joint base on the Moon cooperatively with China, Borisov said. (Reuters, March 5, 2024)

## **HOW THE INTEL COMMUNITY SEES RUSSIA**

Despite the ongoing war in Ukraine, Russia remains a chronic threat to the United States and American interests, America's intelligence czar has laid out to Congress. In her annual "global threats" briefing to the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines stressed that Russia remains "a resilient and capable adversary" that represents a threat across multiple domains, including nuclear development and cyberspace. In the context of Ukraine, Vladimir Putin's war of choice against Kyiv may have "upended Russia's geopolitical, economic and military revival," but Russia's President is likely to persist in his aggression because he "probably believes that Russia has blunted Ukrainian efforts to retake significant territory, that his approach to winning the war is paying off, and that Western and U.S. support to Ukraine is finite, particularly in light of the Israel–HAMAS war."

However, Russia's current war has wreaked significant changes to Russian foreign policy, including prompting the Kremlin to expand its relations with rogues like Iran and North Korea. However, it is Russia's relationship with China that has undergone the most drastic change. "China is by far Russia's most important trading partner with bilateral trade reaching more than \$220 billion in 2023, already surpassing their record total 2022 volume by 15 percent," Haines lays out in her testimony.

Moscow's aggression against Ukraine, however, has created serious macro-economic problems for the country, Haines stressed. The country now "probably needs to balance increased military spending with the need for additional revenue without overburdening private and state-backed firms or the Russian public with the cost of the war," she noted. Moreover, "Russia faces long-term problems including a lack of foreign investment, particularly in its energy sector." (Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, February 5, 2024)

## **THE UKRAINE WAR IS ALSO A PARTISAN FIGHT**

As the Russo-Ukrainian war rages on, anti-Kremlin factions are mobilizing in defense of Kyiv. The "Freedom of Russia Legion," a pro-Ukrainian militia made up of Russian irregulars, has taken responsibility for a military incursion into Russia's Kursk and Belgorod regions. Russia's intelligence service, the FSB, has admitted to having repelled a series of attempted cross-border attacks in recent days. For their part, Ukrainian officials are disavowing responsibility, maintaining that the Legion and other anti-Russian fighter factions are acting independently and not under orders from Kyiv. They have, however, been quick to underscore that the local unrest demonstrates that "the Kremlin is once again not in control of the situation in Russia." (*France24*, March 12, 2024)