



Indicators and Thresholds for Russian Military Operations in Ukraine and/or Belarus

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Updates to this document since the previous publication on February 15, 5:00 pm are highlighted

New updates to this publication:

Russian Activity

The Russian Foreign Ministry (MFA) threatened that Russia will take “military-technical measures” in a published response to the US and NATO response to Russian security demands in Europe on February 17.¹ The 11-page document states that the US did not give a “constructive response” to the basic elements of the Russian draft treaty: a moratorium on NATO expansion, a revocation of the 2008 NATO Bucharest Summit Declaration that Ukraine and Georgia are eligible to become NATO members, a moratorium on establishing military bases on the territory of former Soviet and current non-NATO states, not deploying strike weapons near Russia, and rolling back NATO to its 1997 posture when the Russia-NATO Founding Act was signed. The document states that the US and NATO continue to ignore Russia’s “red lines and core security interests” and Russia’s “sovereign right to protect them.” The document states that Western demands to withdraw troops from “Russian territory” and threats of sanctions are “unacceptable and undermine the prospects for reaching real agreements.” The document states that US unwillingness to provide legally binding guarantees will “force Russia” to respond, “including through the implementation of [unspecified] military-technical measures.” The document states that the US did not confirm commitment to observing the “immutable principle of the indivisibility of security.” The document states that Washington is unwilling to “abandon its counterproductive and destabilizing course of creating advantages for itself and its allies at the expense of Russia's security interests.” The document states that NATO’s “Open Door” policy runs contrary to NATO states’ “basic commitments” in the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe to not “strengthen one's security at the expense of the security of others.” The document called on the US and NATO to “return to fulfilling their international obligations in the field of maintaining peace and security.” The document reiterates that the Kremlin “expects concrete proposals” from NATO members on the “forms of legal consolidation” to renounce further NATO expansion. The document states that Washington’s proposals on arms control and risk reduction measures, while desirable, will not be sustainable in the long run “even if they can be agreed upon” because NATO refuses to stop actions that undermines Russia’s security. The document states that Russia continues to advocate an “integrated approach to strategic issues” and that the Kremlin proposes to engage in the joint development of a new “safety equation.” The document reiterates that de-escalating the situation in Ukraine necessitates “forcing Kyiv to comply” with the Minsk II Accords, withdrawing all Western military instructors and advisors from Ukraine, ceasing all NATO exercises with Ukraine, and withdrawing all foreign weapons from Ukrainian territory.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov met with Italian Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio on February 17.² Lavrov said that the West is trying to place all the blame for the war in

Ukraine on Russia and reiterated that Ukraine must implement the Minsk II Accords “in strict accordance with the way they were approved by the United Nations Security Council.” Lavrov expressed hope that Italy would not support new European Union sanctions against Russia but instead continue “the traditions of Italian diplomacy... not to threaten constantly, not to announce any punishments, but to look for agreements.” Lavrov also reiterated that Russia and the West will not “resolve anything” until they agree on “key positions on which security in Europe depends: non-expansion of NATO to the east, non-deployment of strike weapons, respect for the military-political configuration in Europe that existed at the time of the signing of the Russia-NATO Founding Act [in 1997].”

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov accused the West of intentionally fueling tensions and stated that “Russia will decide how and by what means it will ensure its security” on February 17.³ Lavrov called NATO’s “Open Door” policy towards Ukraine “arrogant” and criticized NATO and European Union interventions in “neutral” European countries. Lavrov also stated that deescalating tensions around Ukraine depends on the West, not Russia. Lavrov accused the West of intentionally manipulating the Minsk II Accords to vilify Russia.

Kremlin Spokesman Dmitry Peskov held a press conference to discuss Russian national security interests on February 17.⁴ Peskov decried reports of shelling between the Ukrainian Armed Forces and Kremlin proxy militias, adding that any form of escalation risks igniting a wider conflict. Peskov stated that Moscow remains open to the possibility of diplomacy and encouraged NATO leaders to revisit their position on Russian security guarantees. Peskov criticized French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian for leaking details of the phone conversation between Russian President Vladimir Putin and French President Emmanuel Macron on the proposed recognition of the Donetsk People’s Republic and Luhansk People’s Republic, arguing that such distortions are dangerous.

Russian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova stated that White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki does not know the true death toll of civilians in Donbas and urged Psaki not to speculate on February 17.⁵ Zakharova responded to Psaki’s statement that Russian statements on discovering mass graves in eastern Ukraine are misinformation. Zakharova deemed Psaki arrogant and presented photos of tombstones of those that she alleged the Ukrainian Armed Forces killed as evidence supporting Russian claims.

The Kremlin claimed that Ukrainians are committing genocide against Donbas residents in a report to the United Nations (UN) Security Council on February 17.⁶ The Russian report mischaracterized Russian-backed separatist shelling against Ukrainian forces as Ukrainian shelling against Luhansk Oblast schools, and alleged the attacks are a component of a wider genocide against ethnic Russians in Donbas. The Russian report to the UN and the continued mischaracterization of Ukrainian violence in Donbas are components of wider Russian information campaigns that Russia will likely use to justify offensive activity if it decides to launch an offensive.

The Kremlin expelled US Deputy Ambassador Bartle Gorman from Moscow on February 17.⁷ Russian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova said that Russia expelled Gorman in retaliation for the US expulsion of an unnamed diplomat and the September 2021 US demand that 55 Russian diplomats leave the United States in 2022. Zakharova claimed that this “visa war” is not Russia’s fault. US Embassy Spokesperson Jason Rebholz said that Gorman had a valid Russian visa and had been in the country for less than three years, referring to a previous Russian policy of forcing US diplomats to stay in Russia no longer than three years. A US State Department spokesperson stated that the US considers the expulsion an unprovoked and escalatory step.

The Russian Defense Ministry (MoD) said that it is redeploying Southern Military District (SMD) elements from Crimea to the Caucasus in multiple separate readouts on February 17.⁸ MoD Spokesperson Major-General Igor Konashenkov said that unspecified SMD elements are redeploying to their permanent bases in Chechnya and Dagestan, and 1st Tank Army elements are moving to their permanent deployment in Nizhny Novgorod Oblast. The MoD reported that the redeploying SMD elements have exited Crimea through rail and road checkpoints along the Kerch Strait. The Kremlin claims these troop withdrawals reaffirm its assertions of Western hysteria over the Russian military buildup near Ukraine. US and NATO stated say that despite these Russian claims, there are no indications that Russia is decreasing its force presence along the border with Ukraine.

The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) said that it redeployed unspecified elements of a Western Military District (WMD) logistic support brigade to an unspecified location on February 17.⁹ The MoD stated that these WMD support elements travelled over 900 kilometers from an unspecified training ground where they were previously conducting regular winter exercises. The Kremlin claims that these troop withdrawals indicate its lack of aggressive intent against Ukraine.

Twenty ships of the Caspian Flotilla deployed from their base in Makhachkala to exercise areas in the Caspian Sea to conduct command and staff exercises on February 17.¹⁰ The ships will conduct anti-mine exercises during their transit. Unspecified naval tactical groups will conduct air defense and naval combat, and naval rocket and artillery.

Regiment-sized artillery elements of the 49th Combined Arms Army conducted artillery fire exercises at the Molkino Training Ground in Krasnodar on February 17.¹¹

Unspecified Russian Southern Military District special forces elements conducted exercises to covertly deploy special forces personnel behind enemy lines using Mi-8 helicopters at the Kadamovsky Training Ground in Rostov on February 17.¹²

Russian Permanent Representative to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Alexander Lukashevich chastised Western claims about a Russian attack against Ukraine that did not occur on February 16.¹³ Lukashevich said that the West changed its narratives about the Russian invasion of Ukraine and that the West falsely accused Russia of planning to attack Ukraine. Lukashevich additionally said that Ukraine has fallen under the control of Western “external management” who have militarized Ukraine instead of encouraging Ukraine to implement the Minsk II Accords. Lukashevich said that the West and Ukrainian nationalists have undermined Ukraine’s sovereignty; Lukashevich claimed that Ukrainian “nationalist battalions” did not allow Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky to withdraw forces from eastern Ukraine in November 2019. Lukashevich called on the West to stop “fostering ideas of aggressive nationalism in Ukraine” and reiterated that Ukraine implementing the Minsk II Accords is “the only way to peacefully, politically, and diplomatically resolve the conflict.”

Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov claimed that there is a “high probability” that Ukraine will attempt to forcefully resolve the Donbas conflict on February 16.¹⁴ Peskov said that the Kremlin is concerned about a “dangerous concentration of Ukrainian troops” near the line of contact in Donbas, which suggests that a Ukrainian offensive is “quite likely.” Peskov that the whole world is witnessing Ukraine starting a civil war within its borders. Peskov added that there is a “high level of danger” for a Ukrainian attack on Donbas despite weeks of intensive international negotiations on de-escalation – likely implying that Ukrainian offensive plans led to diplomatic

dialogue. Peskov also denied Russia's involvement in the large-scale DDoS cyberattack on Ukrainian government websites, banks, and media monitoring non-profit organizations on February 15.¹⁵ Peskov stated that Russian President Vladimir Putin reviewed the bill on recognizing the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics (DNR and LNR).¹⁶ Peskov stated that Russia's recognition of the DNR and LNR "does not correlate with the Minsk agreements," noting that Putin's main task is to resolve the Donbas crisis through "the implementation of the Minsk [II Accords]." Peskov stated that Putin has a "very contradictory" opinion on Kyiv's readiness to implement the Minsk II Accords because Ukrainian leadership claims commitment to the agreements, while fearing that its implementation "will mean the collapse of Ukraine."¹⁷ Peskov claimed that Kyiv continuously evades implementing its obligations. Peskov emphasized that the distribution of Russian passports in Donbas does not violate the Minsk II Accords because "citizens of the self-proclaimed republics experience extreme social problems to the fact that they are rejected by their homeland."¹⁸ Peskov concluded that the Kremlin issues Russian passports "for humanitarian reasons" to provide the DNR and LNR with social and financial services. Peskov criticized US President Joe Biden's appeal to Russia, claiming that Russians would be more likely to believe the US if the speech did not contain sanction threats.¹⁹ Peskov added that Biden should have called on Ukrainians to "not shoot at each other." Peskov added that Putin will not respond to Biden's speech. Peskov noted that the Kremlin welcomes Biden's readiness to "start serious negotiations" with Russia and stated that such dialogue would "require flexibility from both sides," political will, and demonstration of real commitment.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov stressed the "unacceptability of Western actions leading to accelerated militarization" in Ukraine to Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu on February 16.²⁰ Lavrov warned that Western military-technical cooperation with Ukraine may lead to dangerous developments in Donbas. Lavrov noted the lack of an alternative framework to the Minsk II Accords, the Normandy Four format, and Trilateral Contact Group if Ukraine does not strictly comply with its existing agreements in the Minsk II Accords. Lavrov called on Turkey to contribute to the development of a "constructive and responsible response to Russian proposals" and informed Cavusoglu of Russian initiatives to ensure long-term legal security guarantees in Europe.

Russian Security Council Deputy Secretary Mikhail Popov accused the West of conducting "hybrid war" against Russia on February 16.²¹ Popov claimed that the US conducted a similar information operation ahead of the US 2003 invasion of Iraq by exaggerating Iraq's possession of weapons of mass destruction. Popov added that European Union (EU) states "will be bound by responsibility" for increasing weapons and ammunition transfers to Ukraine under US guidance. Popov claimed that Ukraine's Armed Forces, mercenaries, and nationalist formations will "very likely" use EU military aid in "provocations against the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics (DNR and LNR). Popov accused the US of attempting to "limit the scope of planned operational and combat training of the Russian Armed Forces, as well as to control any movements of [Russian] troops on [Russian] national territory." Popov stated that the US demanded to deploy its troops to Western Europe to "tighten [US] control" over Europe with an expanded military presence. Popov claimed that the US uses hybrid warfare against Russia to divert attention from US domestic problems and revive the US' "rapidly lost world domination." Popov stated that Russia is waiting to see what security conditions will change during the NATO summit in Madrid scheduled for June 2022.

The Young Guard of the United Russia Party (MGER) – a Kremlin-led youth direct-action political group – signed cooperation agreements with Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics' (DNR and LNR) public youth organizations on February 16.²² Over 9,000 activists of the DNR "Young Republic" and LNR "Young Guard" will participate in Kremlin-

approved political activism with MGER members. A “Young Republic” representative claimed that DNR and LNR activists will have the same advocacy rights as MGER members. MGER claimed that DNR and LNR residents’ participation in Russian State Duma elections in September 2021 enabled this cooperation.

Kremlin newspaper *Izvestia* reported that its sources in the Russian Ministry of Defense stated that elements of Russia’s 3rd, 42nd and 150th motorized rifle divisions began redeploying to permanent bases after completing exercises on February 16.²³ The 3rd Motorized Rifle Division is default postured against Ukraine from its permanent bases in Boguchar and Valuyki. The 150th Motorized Rifle Division is also postured against Ukraine from its permanent bases in Rostov. The 42nd Motorized Rifle Division’s permanent bases are in Chechnya. This reported redeployment is only a genuine withdrawal from Ukraine for the elements of the 42nd Motorized Rifle Division if the redeployment to its home bases even occurs at all.

Russian Baltic Fleet air defense elements conducted air defense exercises with S-400 air defense systems in an unspecified location on February 16.²⁴ Pilots of unspecified naval aviation helicopters, Su-27, Su-24, and Su-30 aircraft simulated air targets for S-400 crews.

The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) stated that Southern Military District elements began redeploying from Crimea to permanent bases in Stavropol on February 16.²⁵ The Russian MoD also stated that unspecified Southern Military District logistics, tank, motorized rifle, and artillery elements, likely of the 58th Combined Arms Army but possibly other formations, began redeploying to permanent bases in Dagestan, North Ossetia, and other unspecified locations. Imagery observed elements of Russia’s 291st Motorized Rifle Regiment redeploy from Crimea to mainland Russia.²⁶ The Russian MoD stated that it would service and prepare these elements for the “next stage of combat training.”²⁷

The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) stated that unspecified Western Military District tank elements began redeploying to permanent bases after finishing exercises on February 16.²⁸ The Russian MoD stated that it would service and prepare these elements for the “next stage of combat training.” The Russian MoD did not provide any additional details. It is unclear whether this statement applied to 1st Tank Army elements that deployed closer to Ukraine in Belgorod or Voronezh or to different elements.

Russian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova denied Ukraine’s accusations of “unusual” Russian military activities near the border with Ukraine on February 15.²⁹ Ukraine requested that the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) investigate Russian military activity near the Ukrainian border under the framework of the OSCE Vienna Document of 2011. Zakharova accused Ukrainian Armed Forces of engaging in “unusual activity” but stated that Russia complied with the request due to its “commitment to openness in the military field.”

The Russian Foreign Ministry-sponsored World Coordinating Council of Russian Compatriots discussed efforts to protect the rights of Russian citizens and promote Russian unity around the world on February 15.³⁰ The World Council of Russian Compatriots committed to promoting public diplomacy and engaging with Russian diaspora youth to preserve the Russian language and culture. The participants also stated that economic cooperation and patronage will strengthen Russian unity.

Two Russian Black Sea Fleet anti-submarine ships conducted air defense exercises in the Black Sea on February 15.³¹

Russian Proxy Activity

Ukraine's Defense Ministry (MoD) reported that the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics (DNR and LNR) opened artillery fire 34 times at Ukrainian Armed Forces' positions on February 17.³² MoD reported that proxies fired 32 shells at Stanytsia Luhanska, Luhansk Oblast, resulting in three casualties and damage at a local kindergarten.³³ The MoD added that proxy militants shelled a school and a gas pipeline in Vrubivka, Luhansk Oblast. MoD identified that proxy forces also fired at Novotoshkivske, Staryi Aidar, Lobacheve, Troitske, Popasna, Donets'kyi, and Novozvanivka in Luhansk Oblast, and Vodyane, Trudivske, Starohnativka, Mar'inka, Pivdenne, Maiorsk, Novoselivka Druha, Luhans'ke, Svitlodars'k, Zaitseve, Avdiivka, Shumy, Travneve, Nevel's'ke in Donetsk Oblast. The LNR denounced the MoD's report about the shelling of a kindergarten as an "informational fake."³⁴ The LNR claimed that Ukrainian propagandists staged images of a destroyed kindergarten to cover Ukrainian provocative shelling.

The Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republic (DNR and LNR) accused Ukrainian Armed Forces of shelling nine settlements for the second time in Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts on February 17.³⁵ The DNR claimed that Ukrainian forces fired about 160 rounds for two hours at Pikuzy, Verkhnohyrokiivske, Novolaspa, and Pazeno, Donetsk Oblast and Veselenke, Donetskyyi, Zolote, Nizhnie Lozove, and Sokilnyky, Luhansk Oblast. The DNR claimed that Ukrainian forces used 67 mortars, various grenade launchers, small arms, and large-caliber weapons. The DNR claimed that Ukrainian forces fired 17 rounds against Zaitseve and Pikuzy, Donetsk Oblast, the night prior on February 16. The LNR claimed that Ukrainian forces continued to shell Luhansk settlements since morning, committing additional ceasefire violations in Sokilnyky and Lozove. The LNR did not provide any evidence of damage to civilian infrastructure to support its claims. The LNR stated that proxy militants began returning targeted fire against Ukrainian positions. The DNR called on the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Special Monitoring Mission (OSCE SMM) to record damage and casualties following the shelling. The LNR claimed that Ukraine opened fire after waiting for a Russian offensive to begin and then began its own mass provocations along the entire line of contact with Donbas after the Russian offensive did not materialize. The LNR added that over 200 Ukrainian troops deployed to Donbas to participate in artillery fires. The DNR accused Ukraine's 53rd Mechanized Brigade of placing two howitzers and one armored combat vehicle in Shevchenko and Novotroitske, Donetsk Oblast. The DNR added that Ukrainian electronic warfare units interfere OSCE SMM unmanned aerial vehicles.

The Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) accused Ukrainian security forces of using anti-tank missile systems against villages near the Haharin and Izotov mines in Donetsk Oblast on February 17.³⁶ The DNR claimed that Ukrainian forces opened artillery fire with mortars, grenade launchers, and large-caliber machine guns from the Horlivka, Mariupol, and Donetskyyi directions at the Haharin and Izotov mining villages, Olenivka, Syhnalne, Mandrykyne, Pikuzy, Verkhnohyrokiivske, Petrovskyyi, and Novolaspa in Donetsk Oblast. The DNR claimed it opened return fire "in order to protect the civilian population."

Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) intelligence claimed on February 17 that Ukraine is preparing to evacuate the Office of the President, the Ukrainian Parliament, Ukraine's National Security and Defense Council, and Ukraine's Defense Ministry from Kyiv to Lviv ahead of a Ukrainian offensive.³⁷ The DNR claimed that the Ukrainian government would evacuate in case a Ukrainian offensive against Donbas fails and proxy republics launch a

counteroffensive to “liberate Ukraine from the Nazis.” The DNR claimed that Ukrainian leadership is fighting with oligarchs and that Ukraine’s parliament and government ministries no longer can perform their functions due to personnel leaving their posts. The LNR claimed that local government entities in Ukraine stopped conducting routine daily work to prioritize destroying archival documents because Ukraine’s local government bodies are restricted from fleeing abroad or interacting with foreign banks for unspecified reasons.

The Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) claimed that Ukrainian 19th Missile Brigade stationed in Khmelnytsky are preparing Tochka-U tactical ballistic missile systems for combat on February 17.³⁸ The DNR added that Ukrainian Armed Forces are planning to deploy the 19th Missile Brigade to Donbas soon. The DNR added that Ukrainian naval forces will conduct amphibious assault landing to capture the bridgehead on the Azov coast. The DNR added that company-sized reconnaissance and fire elements of the Ukrainian 36th Separate Marine Brigade and platoons of Ukraine’s 107th Territorial Defense Battalion will deploy to Mariupol soon. The DNR claimed that the US would provide Ukraine ships to conduct the naval offensive.

The Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) called on White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki to witness mass graves of civilians in Donbas herself on February 17.³⁹ The DNR added that it “invites everyone who denied genocide in Donbas to join search activities in the republics” and see “mutilated remains of women and children.” The DNR claimed it found 130 mass graves, which it claims are only 40 percent of the total graves in the region. The DNR claimed that the international community is largely ignoring Kyiv’s hostilities in Donbas.

The Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) stated that the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA) will continue to operate in Donetsk on February 17.⁴⁰

The Luhansk People’s Republic (LNR) claimed on February 17 that Ukrainian Armed Forces seek to deploy sabotage groups to Pervomaisk, Luhansk Oblast.⁴¹ The LNR added that a mobile group of Ukrainian special forces operators in Zolote, Luhansk Oblast, is preparing to launch a drone strikes on Luhansk suburbs by releasing explosives disguised as various household items and children’s toys. The LNR accused Ukraine of publishing fake information about the LNR destroying civilian infrastructure in Ukrainian government-controlled Luhansk Oblast.

Luhansk People’s Republic (LNR) Head Leonid Pasechnik accused Ukrainian Armed Forces of launching mass mortar and artillery strikes on civilians in Luhansk on February 17.⁴² Pasechnik’s accusation coincided with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky’s work trip to Donbas.

The Luhansk People’s Republic accused Ukrainian forces of firing 15 artillery shells on Mykolaivka, Luhansk Oblast, and damaging a gas pipeline on February 17.⁴³
The Luhansk People’s Republic claimed it shot down a Ukrainian quadcopter drone used for adjusting artillery fire in Donetsk, Luhansk Oblast, on February 17.⁴⁴

The Luhansk People’s Republic (LNR) accused Ukrainian Armed Forces of deploying troops near Russian and Belarusian borders on February 16.⁴⁵ The LNR claimed that Ukraine deployed additional State Border Service and National Police units from Lviv and Ivano-Frankivsk to Rivne Oblast near the Belarusian-Ukrainian border. The LNR added that additional units of the Ukrainian 1st Operational Brigade of the National Guard arrived in Pripyat near the border with Belarus. The LNR claimed that Ukraine deployed separate radar companies of the 1st

Radio Engineering Brigade to Lysychansk and Lyman, Luhansk Oblast. The LNR claimed that Ukraine opened aviation guidance checkpoints of the 204th and 831st Tactical Aviation Brigades in Lysychansk and Lyman, Luhansk Oblast. The LNR claimed that Ukrainian Commander-in-Chief Valery Zaluzhny ordered the deployment of operational personnel and instructed medical units of Ukraine's 24th Mechanized Brigade to prepare to undertake medical missions focusing on evacuating wounded soldiers using Mi-8 helicopters of Ukraine's 16th Army Aviation Brigade. The LNR claimed that several servicemen of Ukraine's 24th Mechanized Brigade deployed in Donbas received UK LNAW anti-tank guided missiles and US M141 rocket launchers.

The Luhansk People's Republic (LNR) accused Ukrainian Armed Forces of deploying 22 T-72 tanks near the frontline in Pidlisne, Luhansk Oblast, on February 16.⁴⁶ The LNR stated that Ukraine's 20th Electronic Warfare Battalion continues to disrupt Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Special Monitoring Mission's reconnaissance drones in Zolote and Mykhailivka, Luhansk Oblast.

The Luhansk People's Republic (LNR) claimed that it defensively returned fire at the Ukrainian 57th Brigade in Orikhove, Luhansk Oblast, on February 15.⁴⁷ The LNR claimed that the 57th Brigade first started firing at LNR positions in Holubivske. The LNR added that return fire was necessary to defend civilian populations from Ukrainian aggression.

The Luhansk People's Republic (LNR) accused Ukraine of a "significant degradation" of the Minsk II Accords on February 15.⁴⁸ The DNR claimed that Kyiv did not take "a single step towards the implementation of the Minsk agreements" in the past year. The DNR accused representatives of the Ukrainian Presidential Office, Ukrainian Foreign Ministry, and Ukrainian National Security and Defense Council of blocking peace settlement negotiations while systematically conducting armed provocations at the frontline. The LNR claimed that "the fate of [Donbas'] civilian population is of little concern to the Kyiv regime" and that Ukrainian side has not fulfilled its promises to grant amnesty to exchanged prisoners. The LNR concluded that "Ukraine will be forced to implement the Minsk agreements" unless it decides to abandon them entirely.

The Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) accused Ukrainian Armed Forces of firing three grenades from an anti-tank grenade launcher at Zaichenko, Donetsk Oblast, on February 15.⁴⁹

UK Activity

UK Foreign Secretary Liz Truss and Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba announced that they agreed to develop a new UK-Ukraine-Poland "trilateral memorandum of cooperation" in Kyiv on February 17.⁵⁰ A joint trilateral statement states that the three states will work together to "ensure Ukraine's stability and resilience, strengthening democracy on the border in Eastern Europe." The document also states that the three states prioritize further strengthening strategic cooperation and engagement. Truss stated there is a continued need for diplomatic solutions and Russian de-escalation, stated that the United Kingdom will increase defense funding for Ukraine to £100 million, and stressed that Russia is perpetrating a "false-flag operation." She additionally stated that if Russia fails to take the diplomatic route, the UK is prepared to levy severe economic consequences against Russia.

The UK Foreign Office announced it is opening a new consular services office in Lviv, Ukraine, on February 15.⁵¹ The UK Foreign Office stated that Russian aggression against Ukraine will severely inhibit UK consular services in Lviv and its embassy in Kyiv. The UK advised all UK

citizens to leave Ukraine due to Russian military threats on February 11. The United States and Canada moved their embassies to Lviv on February 12 and 13, respectively.

US activity

US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin reiterated that NATO allies remain united in opposing Russia's military buildup near Ukraine during a NATO defense ministers' meeting in Brussels on February 17.⁵² Austin announced that a US Army Stryker company based in Germany will deploy to Bulgaria "in the coming days" to conduct joint trainings with NATO troops. Austin reiterated that the United States will defend NATO territory and said that Russia is adding, not removing, troops to its border with Ukraine. Austin also reiterated that the United States and NATO would welcome meaningful diplomatic dialogue with Russia to de-escalate the situation around Ukraine.

United States Secretary of State Antony Blinken spoke about a Russian military escalation at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) on February 17.⁵³ Blinken stressed that the United States still believes that Russia may manufacture a pretext for an attack against Ukraine and proceed with an invasion that will directly target Kyiv and the Ukrainian government. Blinken called on the UNSC to directly address Russia's aggressive actions and for Russia to commit to de-escalation with an explicit statement of intent to withdraw, followed by withdrawing troops from the border with Ukraine as Russia previously promised.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Canadian Foreign Minister Melanie Joy discussed joint efforts to prevent further Russian aggression in Ukraine on February 16.⁵⁴ Blinken and Joy emphasized the importance of transatlantic alliances to deescalate the situation and to coordinate harsh consequences should Russia invade Ukraine.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken stated that Russia has shown no evidence of de-escalation and troop withdrawals despite its recent claims of redeploying on February 16.⁵⁵ Blinken also discussed NATO unity against Russian aggression and emphasized NATO's extensive support to Ukraine in diverse forms. Blinken noted NATO will never permanently block Ukraine's ambition to join the Alliance no matter Russia's actions.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Estonian Foreign Minister Eva-Maria Liimets discussed US-Estonian cooperation against Russian aggression in Ukraine on February 16.⁵⁶ Blinken discussed recent changes in US force posture to support NATO's eastern flank and committed to continue support for Estonia's defense forces. Blinken and Liimets urged Russia to continue diplomatic talks and called on Belarus to follow international obligations in the Vienna Document of 2011 to report on exercise details given the large Russian deployments to Belarus for the Union Resolve 2022 exercises.

White House Press Secretary Jenn Psaki held a press conference to discuss developments in Ukraine and the potential repercussions of Russia's proposed recognition of the self-declared republics of Donetsk and Luhansk on February 16.⁵⁷ Psaki reaffirmed US Secretary of State Antony Blinken's message of "a swift and severe response, in coordination with allies" if the Russian Federation goes forward with formally recognizing the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics. Psaki later stated that Russian proxy claims of discovering mass graves in the occupied territories are false and were a part of a larger Kremlin-led disinformation effort to justify an invasion.

US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan spoke with Secretary-General of Japan's National Security Secretariat Akiba Takeo on February 16.⁵⁸ Sullivan and Takeo discussed recent security developments in Ukraine and the progress of diplomatic efforts. Sullivan praised Japan's decision to divert natural gas to Europe and stressed the importance of a robust response to any Russian escalation. The two leaders concluded their meeting by reaffirming their commitment to working with G7 partners and close coordination.

US President Joe Biden and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz discussed their respective conversations with Russian President Vladimir Putin and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky on February 16.⁵⁹ Biden and Scholz noted Russia's continued military build-up on Ukraine's borders and reaffirmed commitment to Ukrainian sovereignty if Russian further invades Ukraine.

US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken stated that the Kremlin's recognition of the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics (DNR and LNR) will result in Russia's "wholesale rejection of its commitments under the Minsk agreements," on February 16.⁶⁰ Blinken added that the Kremlin's recognition of the DNR and LNR will further undermine Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, violate international law, and will prompt and "a swift and firm response from the US" and its allies.

US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman stated that if Russian President Vladimir Putin recognizes the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics (DNR and LNR), then the Kremlin will officially reject the Minsk II Accords on February 16.⁶¹ Sherman said the recognition of the DNR and LNR is "another attempt to undermine Ukraine's sovereignty and integrity." Sherman said that it is unknown whether Putin will decide to invade Ukraine but reaffirmed that US officials "saw with their own eyes" over 100,000 Russian troops amassing on the Ukrainian border. Sherman said that the US temporarily moved the US embassy to Lviv and will impose additional sanctions upon Russian invasion.

The New York Times reported on February 16 that the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) moved its Ukraine station from Kyiv to Lviv, near Ukraine's western border with Poland.⁶² The US Embassy in Ukraine previously relocated to Lviv on February 14, and the US State Department suspended consular services and ordered all non-essential staff to leave Ukraine on February 12 due to the threat of Russian aggression.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken stated the US has not seen a definitive Russian decision on invading Ukraine or any indication that Russian troops are withdrawing from Ukraine's borders on February 15.⁶³ Blinken reiterated that the Russian military can invade Ukraine on "very, very short notice" and that Russian actions are more important than Russian statements. Blinken also stressed the importance of sharing intelligence with Western partners and the public to "put Russia on notice" and deter aggression.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, UK Foreign Minister Liz Truss, French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian, and German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock discussed coordinating deterrents and costs to impose against Russia on February 15.⁶⁴ All parties reaffirmed their support for Ukrainian sovereignty and deterring Russian military aggression.

Politico reported on February 15 that the United States and its allies have not developed a unified sanctions plan to deter Russian aggression against Ukraine, quoting several US and European Union (EU) officials.⁶⁵ *Politico* reported that US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan told US lawmakers on February 14 that Germany and Poland still “need constant coaxing” into implementing a firm sanctions package. *Politico* added that sanctions would negatively impact European business with Russia and that US senators crafting sanctions bills “are poised to abandon” a sanctions package due to internal disagreements. Several US and EU officials additionally informed *Politico* they expect EU sanctions to lag US sanctions by several days, as European Union sanctions require a unanimous vote from all 27 member states.

US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman held a call with her French, German, UK, and Italian counterparts to evaluate their current diplomatic efforts with Russia on February 15.⁶⁶ The participants confirmed their commitment to diplomacy but warned Russia of harsh consequences should it escalate military activities near Ukraine. Sherman restated American support for Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity.

US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman and Canadian Deputy Foreign Minister Marta Morgan discussed Russia’s intensified military activity near Ukraine on February 15.⁶⁷ Sherman and Morgan stated that Canada and the US will coordinate a “massive” response to any further Russian aggression but reiterated their commitment to finding a diplomatic solution with Russia.

Canada Activity

France and Germany

NATO/EU Activity

Reuters reported on February 16 that NATO is considering establishing new multinational battlegroups in Central and Eastern Europe in response to the Russian military buildup near Ukraine.⁶⁸ *Reuters* reported that NATO defense ministers discussed setting up multinational battlegroups in Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary, and Slovakia as part of a wider effort to strengthen NATO’s deterrence and defense mechanisms on its eastern flank. NATO already has battlegroups stationed in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland. US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin announced on February 17 that the United States will deploy a US Army Stryker group to Bulgaria “in the coming days.”

Eastern and Central European Allies

Lithuania deployed instructors from an unspecified Lithuanian air defense battalion to Ukraine to train Ukrainian operators of the FIM-92 Stinger man-portable air-defense system on February 15.⁶⁹

Ukrainian Political Activity

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said that Ukraine’s only path is to join NATO in a BBC interview on February 17.⁷⁰ Zelensky said that joining NATO would guarantee Ukrainian security and that Ukraine’s NATO and European Union (EU) membership ambitions are about guaranteeing Ukrainian independence, not about NATO and the EU themselves. Zelensky has continuously reiterated that Ukraine will not concede to Russian demands that Ukraine not join

NATO or the EU.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky visited Ukrainian troops on the frontline in Donbas to check their readiness on February 17.⁷¹ Zelensky met with the heads of the Ukrainian governors of the Donetsk and Luhansk regional state administrations to inspect the formation of local territorial defense units and the overall security situation in the area. Zelensky additionally stressed the importance of maintaining morale amongst Ukrainian citizens in Donbas by countering Russian propaganda efforts and strengthening Ukrainian media influence in Donbas.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and European Council President Charles Michel discussed Ukraine's current security situation on February 17.⁷² Zelensky stated that there is no evidence of a Russian troop withdrawal from the Ukrainian border. Zelensky reported several proxy violations of the ceasefire and deemed the shelling of a Ukrainian kindergarten a provocation. Zelensky stressed the need for international diplomats and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's Special Monitoring Mission to remain in Ukraine as deterrents against further Russian aggression. Michel affirmed his support of Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic aspirations and the country's territorial integrity. Michel also pledged to discuss the information Zelensky provided with European leaders.

Ukrainian Defense Minister Oleksiy Reznikov discussed Russian aggression, the West's response, and Ukrainian air defense needs on February 17.⁷³ Reznikov stated that the Kremlin is using information blackmail tactics and admitted that Russian President Vladimir Putin may recognize the Luhansk and Donetsk People's Republics. Reznikov stated Ukraine does not plan to launch an offensive to return the Russian occupied territories to Ukraine. Reznikov stated that Ukraine must strengthen its air and missile defense, developing its own and when possible, sourcing weapon systems from partners. Reznikov also stated that Ukraine still aspires to join NATO and that Ukraine's former "non-aligned" status did not deter Russian invasion in 2014. Reznikov discussed financing Ukraine's decision to improve the living conditions and increasing the salaries of the Ukrainian Armed Forces. Reznikov also asserted that everything the West does primarily serves their own national interests and that many countries are currently supporting sanctions although they would prefer not to. Reznikov stated that Ukraine is ready to implement the Minsk II Accords and that there is no alternative to the Minsk II Accords.

Ukrainian Deputy Defense Minister Oleksandr Polyschuk and UK Defense Committee Head Tobias Elwood discussed opportunities for bilateral security cooperation on February 16.⁷⁴ Elwood reaffirmed the UK's steadfast support for Ukrainian sovereignty and promised close collaboration on cybersecurity, intelligence sharing, and joint-military planning.

The Ukrainian Defense Ministry (MoD) stated that Russia is increasing provocations in Donbas during a United Nations Security Council meeting on February 17.⁷⁵ The Ukrainian MoD said that the Russian-backed Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics shelled Ukrainian forces over 40 times in Novoaydarsky, Popasnyansky, and Toretsky between 0445 and 1300 on February 17. The Ukrainian MoD accused Russia of increasing shelling to further an information campaign justifying Russian armed aggression against Ukraine. Pro-Kremlin media outlets are mischaracterizing and amplifying the separatist shelling of schools that injured schoolchildren in Luhansk and Vrubivka villages, Luhansk Oblast, as Ukrainian Joint Forces shelling.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky held a meeting with Ukrainian Joint Forces Commander Oleksandr Pavluk, Donetsk Governor Pavlo Kyrylenko, and Luhansk Governor Serhiy Haidai on Ukrainian security and defense readiness in Mariupol,

Donetsk Oblast, on February 16.⁷⁶ Pavluk gave a report on the operational environment in Donbas. Zelensky additionally stressed the importance of increasing Ukraine's media presence in Donetsk and Luhansk to combat Russian disinformation campaigns.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky oversaw tactical security and defense force exercises in Rivne Oblast (on Ukraine's border with Belarus) as part of Ukraine's ongoing "Blizzard-2022" exercises on February 16.⁷⁷ Zelensky inspected foreign weapons sent to Ukraine, including Turkish drones and antitank systems, and met with operational staff to examine how servicemen participated in variety of training exercises using varied weapon systems.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba spoke with Polish Foreign Minister Zbigniew Rau about the security situation on the Ukrainian border and the (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe) OSCE Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine on February 16.⁷⁸ The ministers reiterated the importance of continued vigilance even after Russia claimed it withdrew some elements from near the Ukrainian border. Kuleba additionally noted that Russia's recognition of the self-proclaimed Luhansk People's Republic (LNR) would negatively impact international law and global security. Both ministers agreed on the importance of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine and encouraged Russian officials to act with transparency in accordance with the Vienna Document of 2011 and comply with Ukrainian defense requests.

Ukrainian Defense Minister Oleksiy Reznikov delivered an address on Ukrainian Unity Day to emphasize Ukraine's military readiness on February 16.⁷⁹ Reznikov stressed that Ukraine's military is at high readiness and that Ukraine is thoroughly protected and ready for any scenario. Reznikov stated that Ukraine is strengthening its defenses daily but does not intend to launch offensive action, stating he wishes to return Russian occupied territories to Ukraine through diplomatic – not military – means.

Ukrainian Railways announced the indefinite suspension of the Belarusian mineral fertilizers transport to Slovakia, Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic, Romania, the Commonwealth of Independent States, and the Baltic States in accordance with American sanctions against Belarusian entities on February 16.⁸⁰ The ban specifically pertains to fertilizers produced by Belaruskali and the Belarusian Potash Company, which were both subject to sanctions due to their affiliation with Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko's regime.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba and UK Foreign Minister Liz Truss discussed the situation on the Ukrainian border on February 15.⁸¹ Kuleba thanked Truss for British financial and security support and emphasized the need to counter Russia's proposition to officially recognize the Luhansk and Donetsk People's Republics. Truss affirmed support for Ukraine's initiatives in the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. The ministers pledged future cooperation between Poland, Ukraine, and the United Kingdom.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba met with Italian Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio in Kyiv to coordinate executing a comprehensive deterrence package against Russia on February 15.⁸² The participants emphasized their commitment to finding a diplomatic solution with Russia. Kuleba thanked Italy for its support for new European Union sanctions against Russia. Di Maio confirmed that Italy's embassy will continue to operate in Kyiv. Both leaders committed to strengthen cooperation in politics, technology, trade, and investments.

Ukrainian Defense Minister Oleksiy Reznikov and German Defense Minister Christine Lambrecht discussed regional security and deepening bilateral cooperation on February 15.⁸³ Reznikov informed Lambrecht of threats to Ukrainian and European security and proposed measures to reduce them. Both parties agreed that a diplomatic settlement to the current situation is necessary. Reznikov thanked Lambrecht for German assistance in developing the medical service of the Ukrainian Armed Forces. Lambrecht reaffirmed German support of the territorial integrity of Ukraine.

Ukrainian Permanent Representative to the United Nations (UN) Serhiy Kyslytsya appealed to UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres against the Russian proposal to formally recognize the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics (DNR and LNR) on February 15.⁸⁴ Kyslytsya reiterated that Russia's formal recognition of the DNR and LNR would indicate a conscious Russian withdrawal from the Minsk II Accords and would undermine any political-diplomatic settlement. Kyslytsya asked Guterres and UN member states to push Russia into seeking a resolution through existing diplomatic channels.

Ukrainian National Security and Defense Council Secretary Oleksiy Danilov stated on February 14 that 23 Ukrainian parliamentary MPs fled Ukraine and did not return for a parliamentary meeting on February 15.⁸⁵ Twelve of the 23 MPs who fled Ukraine are members of the pro-Russia Opposition Platform – For Life (OPZZh) party. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky warned that any parliamentary representative that leaves Ukraine “would face consequences”. No representatives fled to Russia; most MPs who fled are currently in European Union states.

Ukrainian Deputy Foreign Minister Denys Monastyrsky said that the February 15 Distributed-Denial-of-Service (DDoS) attack against Ukrainian government sites, banks, and other services was the largest cyberattack in Ukrainian history. Monastyrsky stressed that although the attack failed, it intended to inflict psychological and information pressure on Ukraine. Monastyrsky stated that Ukrainian cyber police units will remain vigilant in the case of any future DDoS attempts.

Ukrainian Military Activity

The Ukrainian Defense Ministry (MoD) said it was managing a still-ongoing distributed denial of service (DDoS) cyberattack on its website and Ukrainian state bank systems late on February 16.⁸⁶ The Ukrainian MoD said that the DDoS attack only overloaded the affected website servers by exploiting existing vulnerabilities and did not shut down the provider or hack the website itself. The Ukrainian MoD also said that its technical experts will continue to repair vulnerabilities and strengthen its cyber infrastructure to stop the DDoS attack and guard against future attacks. The Ukrainian MoD did not specify the actors conducting the attack. The perpetrators are likely Russia-backed. The Ukrainian MoD website is functional as of February 17.

Belarus Activity

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko spoke about maintaining Russian force deployments to Belarus, opening a new Russian-Belarusian “training center,” hosting Russian nuclear weapons in Belarus, and committing Belarusian sailors to combined Russian naval units on February 17.⁸⁷ Lukashenko stated that Russian forces in Belarus will remain as long as necessary and that he can send Russian forces back to Russia “within a day” if he so chooses. Lukashenko stated that he and Russian President Vladimir Putin will decide on how long to

keep Russian forces in Belarus when they meet on February 18. Lukashenko denied the need to open any new Russian military bases in Belarus, claiming that Russian bases in Belarus are “not needed from a military point of view.” Lukashenko stated that building new Russian bases in Belarus would be a waste of money given that Russia can already rapidly mobilize and deploy forces into Belarus within 24 to 48 hours and that the Union State’s Regional Grouping of Forces (RGV) is 65,000 personnel strong. Lukashenko stated that Russia may leave “ammunition” and other “equipment” (likely referencing Iskander tactical ballistic missiles and other heavy equipment) in Belarus following exercises to prevent the need to “carry it back and forth” between Russia and Belarus. Lukashenko stated that Moscow and Minsk are planning to open a fourth Russian-Belarusian training center where Russian missile specialists will teach Belarusians how to operate Iskander tactical ballistic missiles. Lukashenko stated that Belarus would resume hosting Russian nuclear weapons in Belarus if Western threats necessitate it. Lukashenko also stated that Belarus is interested in training Belarusian sailors in Kaliningrad or Murmansk who would then serve in combined Russian naval units. Belarus is landlocked and does not have a navy. Lukashenko also stated that Belarus will follow the Kremlin’s lead and would recognize the independence of the Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics if the Kremlin recognizes them.

The Belarusian Ministry of Defense (MoD) provided a readout on Union Resolve 2022’s main component exercises for February 17 on February 17.⁸⁸ The MoD stated that unspecified Belarusian elements conducted exercises to destroy an enemy that broke defensive lines at the Gozhsky Training Ground in Grodno, Belarus. The MoD stated that unspecified Russian airborne elements conducted airborne landing exercises at the Brest Training Ground. The MoD stated that unspecified Belarusian special forces would conduct anti-reconnaissance and sabotage exercises in an unspecified location in Gomel Oblast. The MoD stated that unspecified Russian motorized rifle elements are deployed in concentration areas in Mozyr and Rechitsa, Gomel Oblast, to prepare to conduct anti-reconnaissance and anti-sabotage exercises. The MoD stated that Belarusian and Russian special forces elements are conducting special training on ambush, reconnaissance, and night tactics in Marina Gorka. The MoD stated that Belarusian mechanized elements and Russian naval infantry elements would conduct a mock battle on defending lines in Baranovichi. The MoD stated that Russian air defense elements would conduct air defense exercises in Luninets, Brest, Belarus. The MoD also stated that unspecified Russian and Belarusian elements continue conducting exercises throughout Belarus in Osipovichi, Mozyr, Polesky, and Pinsk.

Russian and Belarusian forces conducted combined arms exercises to destroy an enemy airborne assault force at the Osipovichi Training Ground on February 17.⁸⁹ Russian airborne elements, unspecified rocket and artillery elements, and Russian and Belarusian aviation participated in the exercises. Russian airborne forces deployed to a forward defensive line to block an enemy advance. Russian Su-35 pilots engaged enemy aircraft and Russian and Belarusian pilots of Yak-130, Su-25, and Mi-24 aircraft provided air support. Elements of Belarus’ 336th Rocket Artillery Brigade and other unspecified artillery elements destroyed enemy columns with multiple launch rocket systems (MLRS) and 122mm artillery. Russian and Belarusian missile elements created a “joint group of missile forces” which included Belarusian Polonez rocket artillery systems and Russian Iskander short-range ballistic missile elements.⁹⁰ Unspecified air defense elements conducted exercises to strike enemy helicopters with man-portable air-defense systems. Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko and Belarus Defense Minister Viktor Khrenin presided over these exercises.

The Belarusian Ministry of Defense stated that elements of the Belarusian 147th Anti-Aircraft Missile Regiment redeployed to its permanent base in Bobruisk, Mogilev Oblast, Belarus, on February 17.⁹¹

Motorized rifle elements of the Belarusian 6th Mechanized Brigade conducted counterattack exercises with artillery and aviation air support at the Gozhsky Training Ground in Grodno, Belarus, on February 17.⁹²

Motorized rifle elements of the Belarusian 339th Mechanized Battalion of the Belarusian 120th Mechanized Brigade conducted close combat exercises at the 227th Training Ground near Barysaw, Minsk, Belarus, on February 17.⁹³

An unspecified number of Russian Su-35 pilots and Belarusian Su-30 pilots conducted joint air combat exercises in an unspecified location in Belarus on February 17.⁹⁴

Unspecified Russian Eastern Military District rocket artillery elements conducted live fire exercises with multiple launch rocket systems at the Obuz-Lesnovsky Training Ground in Baranovichi, Belarus, on February 17.⁹⁵

Russian naval infantry elements of the 155th Naval Infantry Brigade conducted air defense exercises with man-portable air-defense systems at the Obuz-Lesnovsky Training Ground in Baranovichi, Belarus, on February 17.⁹⁶

Belarusian Foreign Minister Vladimir Makei stated that no Russian servicemen or military equipment will remain in Belarus after the conclusion of the Union Resolve-2022 joint Russian-Belarusian military exercises on February 16.⁹⁷ Makei claimed that Russia and Belarus did not violate any international laws by conducting joint military exercises. Makei accused the West of artificially staging a crisis around Ukraine to prevent “Russia from playing a decisive, important role in ensuring security in the region and in the world.” Makei accused the West of conducting “information terrorism” to demonize Belarus and Russia.⁹⁸ Makei claimed that Ukraine “does not fulfill” the Minsk II Accords. Makei noted that Belarus will respond if escalations on Belarus’ western and southern borders intensify. Makei said Belarus is not interested in invading Ukraine, especially not during Union Resolve 2022 exercises.⁹⁹ Makei added that Belarus does not want to fight but must monitor Western provocations.¹⁰⁰ Makei criticized Ukraine for banning the import of Belarusian fertilizers, claiming that Minsk is developing new measures to prevent any harm to Belarus’ economy.¹⁰¹ Makei announced that Belarus will soon use Russian ports for shipping Belarusian cargo.¹⁰² Makei commented that Russia and Belarus are discussing interstate road connection but are unable to currently implement it due to the COVID-19 pandemic.¹⁰³ Makei stated that post-Soviet countries – likely referencing Ukraine – will soon find the Union State “attractive” to join.¹⁰⁴ Makei also addressed a reported incident where unknown actors removed the Belarusian flag from a Belarusian consulate in Dnipro, Ukraine, resulting in the Belarusian Foreign Ministry summoning the Ukrainian ambassador.¹⁰⁵ Makei said Belarus had “a set of very serious measures” to firmly respond to any Ukrainian military provocations, stating that Belarus must respond to attacks “otherwise neighbors will begin to perceive it as weakness.” Makei also accused the European Union of ignoring the human rights of the migrants remaining at the Belarusian-Polish border.¹⁰⁶

The Belarusian Ministry of Defense stated that Belarus’ defense attaché in Ukraine observed Ukraine’s “Blizzard 2022” command staff exercises in an unspecified location to increase transparency and reduce tension on February 16.¹⁰⁷

The Belarusian Ministry of Defense (MoD) provided a readout on Union Resolve 2022’s main component exercises for February 16 on February 16.¹⁰⁸ The MoD stated that unspecified Belarusian elements conducted exercises to destroy an enemy that broke defensive lines at the Gozhsky Training Ground in Grodno, Belarus. The MoD stated that unspecified Belarusian

special forces elements conducted protection exercises against reconnaissance and sabotage groups at the Brest Training Ground. The MoD stated that unspecified Belarusian special forces and Russian airborne elements would conduct anti-reconnaissance and sabotage exercises in an unspecified location in Gomel Oblast. The MoD stated that unspecified Russian motorized rifle elements are deployed in concentration areas in Mozyr and Rechitsa, Gomel Oblast, to prepare to conduct anti-reconnaissance and anti-sabotage exercises.

The MoD stated that Belarusian mechanized elements and Russian naval infantry elements would conduct a mock battle on defending lines in Baranovichi. The MoD stated that unspecified Russian airborne elements and unspecified Russian and Belarusian missile and artillery elements would conduct exercises to destroy an enemy tactical airborne assault element at the Osipovichi Training Ground. The MoD stated that Russian air defense elements would conduct air defense exercises in Luninets, Brest, Belarus. The MoD stated that Russian Aerospace Forces elements are providing air support for ground forces from the Ruzhansky and Osipovichi aviation training grounds. The MoD also stated that unspecified Russian and Belarusian elements continue conducting exercises throughout Belarus in Marina Gorka, Pinsk, and Polesky.

Unspecified elements of Belarus' 103rd Airborne Brigade conducted unspecified "combat training" exercises in an unspecified location in Gomel Oblast, Belarus, on February 16.¹⁰⁹ The elements of the 103rd brigade operated in cooperation with a special police detachment of the Gomel branch of the Belarusian Internal Affairs Directorate. The 103rd brigade is permanently based in Vitebsk in northeast Belarus.

Unspecified elements of the Belarusian 6th Mechanized Brigade conducted exercises to defend against an enemy who had broken the defensive line at the Gozhsky Training Ground in Grodno, Belarus, on February 16.¹¹⁰

Unspecified Belarusian Air Force and Air Defense Forces conducted an exercise to intercept a Mi-24 helicopter that intercepted Belarusian airspace in an unspecified location in Belarus on February 16.¹¹¹

Unspecified elements of the Belarusian 11th Mechanized Brigade conducted exercises with tank, motorized rifle, and artillery elements at the Obuz-Lesnovsky Obuz-Lesnovsky Training Ground in Baranovichi, Belarus, on February 16.¹¹²

Russian Eastern Military District and Belarusian air defense elements conducted joint air defense exercises to repel an enemy air raid in an unspecified location in Belarus on February 16.¹¹³ Russian elements operated S-400 air defense systems and Belarusian elements operated S-300 systems in coordination with a unified target detection system and a single air defense command.

Russian Su-35 pilots of the Eastern Military District and Belarusian Su-30 pilots conducted air defense exercises in Brest, Belarus, on February 16.¹¹⁴ Russian pilots intercepted Belarusian pilots who imitated enemy aircraft that violated Belarusian airspace. Russian pilots forced the Belarusian pilots to land at the Belarusian air base in Baranovichi.

Russian Su-35 pilots of the Eastern Military District and Belarusian Su-30 pilots conducted a force-on-force aerial combat dogfight in an unspecified location in Belarus on February 16.¹¹⁵

Unspecified motorized rifle elements of the Eastern Military District and unspecified Belarusian elements conducted small arms exercises to defend a line against an enemy mechanized attack in Brest, Belarus, on February 16.¹¹⁶

Satellite imagery observed a new pontoon bridge over the Pripjat River in Gomel, Belarus, on February 15.¹¹⁷ The bridge is approximately six kilometers from Belarus' border with Ukraine. The Belarusian Ministry of Defense previously stated on that Union Resolve 2022 exercise tasks would include crossing the Pripjat River on February 11.

Ukrainian Defense Minister Oleksiy Reznikov and Belarusian Ambassador to Ukraine Igor Sokol discussed bilateral cooperation and Ukrainian military exercises on February 14.¹¹⁸ Reznikov shared the Ukrainian Armed Forces' Blizzard 2022 exercise plans to minimize tension between the two states.

Satellite imagery observed a likely Russian force concentration near Vepry, Gomel, Belarus, on February 12.¹¹⁹ This location is approximately 5 kilometers from Belarus' border with Ukraine.

Russian Narratives of the Day

February 16

Russian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova asked *Bloomberg*, *The New York Times*, and *The Sun* to publish a schedule complete with proposed dates for Russia's invasion on February 16.¹²⁰ Zakharova's statement ridiculed reported US intelligence assessments that Russia would invade Ukraine on February 16.

Kremlin-affiliated military commentator Alexei Leonkov claimed on February 16 that US will strike Ukraine's Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (NPP) to stage a provocation in Ukraine.¹²¹ Leonkov argued that the NPP is an important strategic target as it generates 50 percent of Ukraine's nuclear power. Leonkov claimed that the US is familiar with the NPP's capabilities as it is the only power plant that US experts studied in Ukraine. Leonkov claimed that the US could replicate the Chernobyl disaster to intimidate European countries.

Russia is setting conditions to conduct military operations against Ukraine and/or in Belarus in the coming weeks or months. The Russian Federation has positioned military forces around Ukraine's border and near the border with Belarus able to initiate offensive operations on very short notice with very little warning. Russian officials and media outlets have been setting conditions in the information space to support such operations. This document is not intended as a forecast or an assessment of the likelihood of any such Russian activities, all of which are also consistent with Russian non-military lines of effort against Ukraine, Belarus, the US, and NATO.

Possible Russian military actions:

- 1) Overt deployment of Russian conventional military forces into Belarus on the pretext of defending against planned NATO aggression.
- 2) Overt deployment of Russian conventional military forces into the Donbas region of Ukraine ostensibly to preempt and prevent a Ukrainian attack on the region.

- 3) Invasion of Ukraine beyond occupied Donbas and Crimea with scenarios ranging from limited incursions (possible) to a full-scale mechanized drive on Kyiv (unlikely).

These activities can be mutually reinforcing and are in no way mutually exclusive.

- Russian forces and information operations are postured to support overt deployments into both Donbas and Belarus simultaneously.
- They could conduct those operations and also drive into unoccupied Ukraine simultaneously, although they would likely require more reinforcements on the Ukrainian border than have yet been observed.
- They could alternatively first deploy into Donbas and Belarus and then invade unoccupied Ukraine as a subsequent phase.

ISW has been forecasting since October 2020 that Russia would deploy its own ground forces into Belarus at some point. We have not forecasted that Russia would deploy its own troops into Donbas, but such a development would not be inconsistent with the general trend of our assessments. We have consistently held that an invasion of unoccupied Ukraine is highly unlikely and would not occur without a major change in the situation and a visible Russian information campaign to set conditions for such an action. We stand by that assessment.

This document is not a forecast or an assessment. It lays out the indicators we are using to refine our assessments and forecasts, noting which ones have tripped, which have partially tripped, and which have not tripped. It then presents the dominant narrative from the Kremlin for each day starting on November 22, followed by a run-down of key activities by Ukraine and other states. This is an interim document, which we expect to update regularly. We present this interim assessment and forecast, along with indicators, to help frame ongoing discussions about Russian actions. This is not a finished analytical product.

Military-Political Indicators

Tripped:

1. An increase of Russian command and control (C2) elements inside Donbas or in southern or western Russia near the Russian-Ukrainian border. – *Likely tripped, inferred from 8th Combined Arms Army (CAA) announcement of command post exercise in Donbas, and Ukrainian claims of increased Russian logistics support activities in Donbas throughout November 2021.*¹²² *Ukrainian military intelligence additionally reported on December 14 that Russian officers began meeting with units commanders in Russia's proxy 1st and 2nd Corps in Donbas.*¹²³
2. Decreased bandwidth on Russian railways for commercial enterprises since October.¹²⁴ – *The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) is likely moving lots of hardware.*
3. Mobilization of the Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) and Luhansk People's Republic (LNR) militias. – *Likely tripped given DNR/LNR reserves reportedly mobilized under 8th CAA leadership on November 22.*¹²⁵
4. Mobilization of artillery elements at the regiment and brigade level. – *Arguably tripped with the Russian acknowledgement of significant mobilizations in the Southern Military District on December 1. The Kremlin confirmed military mobilizations in Opuk, Crimea; many artillery elements of the 58th CAA are likely still located in Opuk after the April 2021 buildup.*
5. Increased rotary and fixed wing deployments near Ukraine – *Arguably tripped. Inferred from a New York Times (NYT) report on January 10 that Russia deployed additional*

attack and transport helicopters and ground attack fighters closer to Ukraine in an unspecified past time frame, citing anonymous US officials.¹²⁶

6. MDCOA: Kremlin deploys ground forces to Belarus. – *Tripped on January 17.*
7. MDCOA: Activations/mobilization/heightened readiness of the Russian Strategic Rocket Forces (nuclear weapons). – *We will very likely not see this in the open source if it occurs, but it would be an indicator that an operation is imminent or already underway. Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu has made public statements suggesting that the SRF are at heightened alert, however.¹²⁷ Further partially tripped on January 2 after TASS reported that Russia's nuclear triad will hold command staff exercises in early 2022 as part of Grom exercises. Grom exercises typically occur in the fall, however. Grom exercises in early 2022 could provide cover to actual nuclear forces mobilization. Tripped further with exercises on January 25, 2022.*

Partially Tripped:

1. Increased volume of video recordings capturing Russian hardware moving in western Russia towards Ukraine. – *We have observed an increase in video volume in November. Threshold: We still have not seen the same quantity of video as we saw in April, but we are steadily approaching that point.*
2. The Kremlin issues some form of political ultimatum to Kyiv or calls Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky in for senior talks. – *Arguably tripped by notable Kremlin-aligned think tank scholar Fyodor Lukyanov's November 24 article in which he almost says that if NATO does not give Russian President Vladimir Putin a solid promise that Ukraine won't join NATO, there will be war similar to the Russia-Georgian war of 2008.¹²⁸ There is still no formal Kremlin statement of an ultimatum or a call for Zelensky talks.*
3. More Russian deployments, mobilizations, or snap exercises at scale (maneuver elements at the brigade, regiment, and/or multiple battalion tactical group level from the 1st Tank Army, and the 20th, 8th, and 41st CAAs).
 1. 20th CAA – *Tripped. We may not see this occur in the open source (OSINT) if/when it occurs. Approximately 700 snipers, likely of the 20th CAA, began conducting reconnaissance and sniper exercises near the Ukrainian border on December 2.¹²⁹ Russia's Western Military District (WMD) announced elements of the 20th Combined Arms Army (CAA) will conduct brigade-level exercises near the Ukrainian border in Voronezh, Belgorod, Bryansk, and Smolensk oblasts on January 11.¹³⁰*
 2. 1st Tank Army – *Likely tripped. The 1st Tank Army is likely establishing an assembly area in Voronezh, Russia. Russian authorities on December 11 issued a Notice to Airman (NOTAM) covering the Pogonovo Training Ground in Voronezh from December 16-22.¹³¹ The Russian Ministry of Defense stated on December 9 that unspecified tank units (approximately 200 personnel) of the Western Military District conducted live fire training with battalion-sized artillery elements at the Pogonovo and Krintsa training grounds in Voronezh.¹³² Russian social media users observed approximately two battalions of T-80 and T-72 tanks in Maslovka, Voronezh, on December 8-11,¹³³ and also observed Buk air defense systems likely of the 49th Air Defense Brigade of the 1st Tank Army at railheads in Voronezh on December 8.¹³⁴ Social media users observed T-80s, likely of the 4th Tank Division and equipment of the 2nd Tank Division, in Maslovka, Voronezh, in mid-November.¹³⁵ The likely deployment of elements of two divisions and air defense units of the 1st Tank Army indicates significant elements of the army deploying to Voronezh. The deployment of the 1st Tank Army to Voronezh, as opposed to*

Belarus, indicates that the most dangerous course of action (MDCOA) of a mechanized drive to Kyiv from Belarus is less likely.

3. *8th CAA –Tripped with the DNR and LNR reserve mobilization on November 22 and announcement of large Southern Military District exercises on December 1 and January 14.¹³⁶*
4. *41st CAA – Likely partially tripped. Independent OSINT observers claim they observed more trucks of the 41st CAA deploy via rail from Siberia towards Yelnya on December 1.¹³⁷ Previously observed elements of the 41st CAA are still at Yelnya as of December 1.¹³⁸ The Russian Ministry of Defense additionally announced it formed a new Tank Support Fighting Vehicle (BMPT) company—possibly at Yelnya—on December 1.¹³⁹*
4. *Mobilization of Russia’s Black Sea naval elements. – Partially tripped as of December 7. Two large landing ships of the Russian Black Sea Fleet loaded naval infantry for amphibious assault exercises at the Opuk Training Ground in Crimea on December 7.¹⁴⁰ The Caesar Kunikov and Novocherkassk large landing ships of the Black Sea fleet onboarded an unspecified number of naval infantry at an unspecified location for future exercises at Opuk on an unspecified future date. More than 500 marines of the Russian Black Sea Fleet began conducting exercises at unspecified Crimean training grounds on December 3.¹⁴¹ This mobilization does not constitute mobilization at scale but is significant as Black Sea Fleet naval infantry’s first public battalion-sized mobilization since the crisis began in October 2021. Black Sea Fleet naval aviation held an exercise of only 10 crews of Su-27 and Su-30 on November 24.¹⁴² Missile ship Shuya of the Black Sea Fleet conducted an exercise on November 26 in response to the announcement of the USS Arleigh Burke’s deployment to the Black Sea.¹⁴³ The Black Sea Fleet’s S-400 air defense units stationed in Crimea conducted readiness exercises on December 15.¹⁴⁴*
5. *Mobilization of Russia’s Airborne Forces (VDV) – Partially tripped with the December 22 announcement of brigade-sized exercises by the 7th Airborne Division in Crimea and Novorossiysk.¹⁴⁵*

Not Tripped:

1. *Mobilization of Caspian Sea Fleet elements in the Black Sea near Ukraine. – We may not see this occur in the open source if/when it occurs. Caspian Sea Fleet elements may still be in the Black Sea left over from the April 2021 buildup. Over 300 naval infantry of the Caspian Flotilla conducted exercises with Southern Military District (SMD) air support at the Adanak Training Ground in Dagestan on December 7.¹⁴⁶ These exercises do not trip this indicator but are significant as the Caspian Flotilla naval infantry’s first battalion-sized exercises since the crisis began in October 2021. At least two Caspian Flotilla landing craft deployed to the Black Sea in fall 2021.¹⁴⁷*
2. *Most Dangerous Course of Action (MDCOA): The Kremlin escalates the migrant crisis in Belarus. The Kremlin would likely do so in order to set conditions for deployment of Russian ground forces into Belarus.*

Information Domain Indicators

Tripped:

1. *The Kremlin publicly defines red lines. – Tripped on December 1 when Putin stated he insists on “legal guarantees” that NATO will not expand further eastward towards Russia and called for formal negotiations with the US.¹⁴⁸ Partially tripped when Putin defined NATO*

deployments of “shock weapon systems” to Ukraine as one Kremlin “red line” on November 30.

2. Belarus claims NATO is building up military forces near Belarus. – *The Belarusian MoD accused Poland of forming a “shock group” near Belarus on November 11 and accused Lithuania and Latvia of building their own groups on November 23.*¹⁴⁹ *Threshold: Russian media has not been emphasizing this information operation yet. If the Kremlin media bolsters it, then a Russian deployment to Belarus and the MDCOA is more likely.*
3. Russian claims that weapon shipments to Ukraine destabilize the situation. – *Tripped on November 22.*¹⁵⁰ *Russian MFA spokesperson Maria Zakharova claimed on December 15 that the presence of 10,000 NATO servicemen in Ukraine impedes the implementation of the Minsk Agreements.*¹⁵¹
4. Kremlin warns about a “repeat of Srebrenica.” – *Tripped on December 10. Putin said that the situation in Donbas resembles a genocide on December 9. Putin stated that “Russophobia is the first step towards genocide,” and that current events in Donbas are “very reminiscent of a genocide.”*¹⁵² *The head of Russia Today’s Russia and FSU desk resurfaced the Srebrenica meme on November 23.*¹⁵³ *The last time the Kremlin prominently mentioned the Srebrenica meme was in December 2019, when Putin warned that a lack of amnesty for DNR and LNR fighters would result in a second Srebrenica.*¹⁵⁴ *News anchors on primetime Kremlin-run TV claimed on December 10 that Ukraine is carrying out a “genocide against the Russian nation.”*¹⁵⁵
5. Intensified Kremlin information operations claiming NATO is deploying forces into Ukraine or creating “NATO bases” inside Ukraine. – *Tripped on December 15 and January 14. Russian MFA spokesperson Zakharova claimed on December 15 that NATO has 10,000 servicemen in Ukraine, including 4,000 Americans.*¹⁵⁶ *Sergey Lavrov accused the UK of constructing bases in Ukraine and a naval base on the Sea of Azov on January 14.*¹⁵⁷

Partially Tripped:

- MDCOA: Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko requests Russian ground forces in Belarus. – *Partially tripped on November 29 with Lukashenko’s statement that Belarus will support Russia during any military escalation in Donbas. Belarusian Defense Minister Viktor Khrenin announced a joint military exercise with Russia on the Belarusian-Ukrainian border on an unspecified future date. Khrenin additionally announced Belarusian forces will begin major exercises on December 1.*¹⁵⁸
- Russian claims that Kyiv has de facto wholesale abandoned the Minsk Agreements and Russia must therefore act to protect Donbas. – *Overall not tripped, but some memes that buttress this have been circulating.*
 1. Russian claims that “Zelensky cannot be reasoned with” or “Zelensky is abandoning the Minsk Agreements.” – *partially tripped for a long time. Threshold: This meme has been on medium-low burner since spring 2020 after Zelensky rejected the Kremlin’s call to implement the Steinmeier formula – one of the Kremlin’s preferred interpretations of the Minsk Agreements. This would move to fully tripped if there is an invigorated Kremlin media push around a centralized narrative that “Kyiv has completely disregarded the Minsk Agreements.” This push has not occurred, and this narrative has not left the backburner.*
 2. Russian claims that “Germany and France are de facto allowing Kyiv to get away with ignoring the Minsk Agreements.” – *Tripped on November 21.*¹⁵⁹
- Sustained or intensified Kremlin information operations claiming Ukraine is attacking or preparing to attack Donbas. – *Overall, not tripped, but the Kremlin has increased its information operations supporting this narrative throughout December.*
 1. Kremlin claims Ukraine is attacking civilians. – *Not tripped yet.*

2. Kremlin claims Ukraine is amassing forces near Donbas. – *Tripped on December 1.*¹⁶⁰
 3. Kremlin claims Ukraine is attacking “ethnic Russians” or “Russian citizens.” – *Partially tripped as of November 29 when Russian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova said Russia will continue its humanitarian assistance for “Russian citizens” in Donbas.*¹⁶¹ *The Kremlin also admitted a first batch of 100 Russian passport holders in Donbas to join Putin’s ruling United Russia Party on November 30.*¹⁶² *This development could support a Russian information operation about Ukrainian attacks against “Russian citizens in Donbas.” The Kremlin has not yet claimed Ukraine is attacking ethnic Russians or Russian citizens in Donbas as of November 30.*
 4. Kremlin claims Ukrainian forces are using TB2 drones or Javelins against civilians in Donbas. – *Not tripped as of December 15.*
 5. Kremlin claims Ukraine is violating the demilitarized zones in Zolote, Stanitsa Luhanska, and Petrivske. – *Partially tripped as of November 28. The LNR People’s Militia claimed that Ukrainian Army forces entered the disengagement zone in Zolote, Luhansk, on November 28. The LNR claimed that it observed two soldiers of Ukraine’s 24th Mechanized Brigade inside former Ukrainian-held positions in the frontline village of Zolote.*¹⁶³ *Thresholds for this indicator include separatist claims of Ukrainians violations of the two other Petrivske and Stanitsa Luhanska demilitarized zones (not tripped yet), and large scale violations, such as full battalion deployments to Zolote, Petrivske, and Stanitsa Luhanska. Russian proxy claims that two soldiers were observed in the Zolote demilitarized zone occupies a low place on the threshold scale for this narrative.*
- Senior Kremlin officials and Russian media pundits increasingly discuss the conditions under which Russian intervention in Ukraine is necessary, acceptable, or desirable. – *Partially tripped on December 27 when Russian State Duma Deputy Vladimir Zhirinovskiy called for Russian strikes against Ukraine and the West on New Year’s Eve.*¹⁶⁴
 - Official statements that Russia is “prepared to intervene if necessary” to prevent humanitarian catastrophe in Ukraine or secure Russian interest vis-à-vis NATO. – *Partially tripped after Sergey Lavrov gave an interview on December 31 in which he accused Ukraine of perceiving NATO support for Ukraine as “carte blanche for a military operation” against Donbas and stated that Russia will take “all necessary measures” to protect “Russian citizens” in Donbas.*¹⁶⁵
 - MDCOA: Titushki (paid provocateurs) actions in Kyiv, Odesa, Kharkiv, Mariupol, Sumy, or other significant Ukrainian cities. – *Partially tripped on January 31.*¹⁶⁶

Not Tripped:

1. The Kremlin/Russian media stops denying a buildup around Ukraine – *Not tripped yet.*
2. Kremlin claims that actual or likely humanitarian catastrophe in Ukraine necessitates overt Russian intervention. – *Not tripped yet.*¹⁶⁷
3. Kremlin claims that Russians who oppose direct action in Ukraine are “Western agents” or victims of Western propaganda. – *Not tripped yet.*¹⁶⁸
4. Senior Kremlin officials openly advocating for overt intervention in Ukraine. – *Not tripped yet.*¹⁶⁹
5. A fear campaign warning of an impending humanitarian catastrophe in Ukraine targeting ethnic Russians or Russian citizens outside occupied Donbas. – *Not tripped yet, though Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov gave an interview on December 31 in which he accused Ukraine of perceiving NATO support for Ukraine as “carte blanche for a military operation” against Donbas and stated that Russia will take “all necessary measures” to protect “Russian citizens” in Donbas.*¹⁷⁰

6. Russian media entities supporting these narratives with a high volume of messaging in a centrally directed manner to create a propaganda echo chamber in Russia's domestic information space. – *Not tripped yet.*¹⁷¹
7. MDCOA: A concerted Russian information operation to demoralize the Ukrainian population ahead of a likely Russian offensive against Ukraine. – *Overall, not tripped, but the Kremlin has increased its information operations supporting this narrative throughout December.*
 1. Overt threats that Russia would intend to capture Kyiv, Kharkiv, Mariupol, and other significant Ukrainian cities. – *Not tripped yet.*
 2. The high costs that war with Russia would entail for Ukraine. – *Not tripped yet.*
 3. The inevitability of decisive Russian Victory in such a war. – *Partially tripped on December 31.*¹⁷²
 4. The West will not support Ukraine in such a war. – *Not tripped yet.*
 5. Political capitulation to the Kremlin would preempt the war. – *Not tripped yet.*
 6. Ukraine is not really a sovereign state is controlled by the West. – *Partially tripped on December 31.*¹⁷³

Kremlin Narratives / Memes of the Day

February 16

- **Russian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova asked *Bloomberg*, *The New York Times*, and *The Sun* to publish a schedule complete with proposed dates for Russia's invasion on February 16.**¹⁷⁴ Zakharova's statement ridiculed reported US intelligence assessments that Russia would invade Ukraine on February 16.
- **Kremlin-affiliated military commentator Alexei Leonkov claimed on February 16 that US will strike Ukraine's Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (NPP) to stage a provocation in Ukraine.**¹⁷⁵ Leonkov argued that the NPP is an important strategic target as it generates 50 percent of Ukraine's nuclear power. Leonkov claimed that the US is familiar with the NPP's capabilities as it is the only power plant that US experts studied in Ukraine. Leonkov claimed that the US could replicate the Chernobyl disaster to intimidate European countries.

February 11

- **Kremlin-sponsored media continued to amplify claims that states near Ukraine, such as Latvia, are preparing for an influx of Ukrainian refugees on February 11.**¹⁷⁶ TASS reported that Latvian Foreign Minister Edgars Rinkevics discussed preparing for "secondary migration" after Ukrainian refugees immigrate north from Poland. Rinkevics reiterated that there is no need to "get too fond of any apocalyptic scenarios now" and that the Latvian government wants to prepare for one of many "worst case scenario" plans. A misleading TASS headline presented Rinkevics' statements as a sign of an imminent refugee crisis.

February 7

- **Russian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova accused NATO members of exerting "sanction and political pressure" against Russia and intervening in Russia's domestic politics on February 7.**¹⁷⁷ Zakharova claimed that the West sees Russia as a "competitor, rather than a partner." Zakharova added that a high number of "fake" Western reports "suggests that a provocation is obviously being prepared," falsely citing an erroneous *Bloomberg* headline about a Russian invasion of Ukraine.¹⁷⁸ Zakharova

also claimed that the West invented the Russian invasion threat to initiate a “heroic battle [against Russia],” launch a provocation, and announce its victory.

February 4

- **Russian media amplified statements by former Ukrainian Internal Affairs Minister Arsen Avakov said escalations will end soon and the Ukrainian government will undergo early parliamentary and presidential elections after a de-escalation on February 4.**¹⁷⁹
- **Kremlin-sponsored media amplified a CNN report about Ukrainian soldiers being in denial about a Russian invasion on February 4.**¹⁸⁰ Russian media also accused a CNN reporter of not noticing Ukrainian heavy armored vehicles in Donbas which have been reported on by Russia’s proxy republics. Russian media framed the report as proof that Russia did not threaten to invade Ukraine.

February 2

- **Kremlin-sponsored media miscontextualized Polish National Security Bureau Head Pawel Soloch’s statements to suggest that Poland is preparing for an influx of Ukrainian refugees on February 2.**¹⁸¹ Russian media previously amplified a narrative that Poland seeks a Russo-Ukrainian war to secure cheap refugee labor from Ukraine.¹⁸²

February 1

- **Kremlin-sponsored media reported that Ukrainian National Security and Defense Council Secretary Oleksiy Danilov said that “using [the] Russian [language] is very dangerous” on February 1.**¹⁸³ Danilov joked that because the Kremlin seeks to defend Russian-speaking populations, it is dangerous to speak Russian anywhere in the world. Russian media suggested that Danilov warned against using the Russian language, implying that the Ukrainian governments seeks to oppress Russian speakers in Ukraine.
- **Kremlin-sponsored media reported that Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba “is ready for talks with Russia but wants Russia to make the first step” on February 1.**¹⁸⁴ Kuleba said that Ukraine is “ready for constructive negotiations” but that Russia must first match Ukrainian efforts and interest in peace settlement. Russian media implied that Kuleba sought a Russian invitation for negotiations.
- **Pro-Russian Odesa Oblast Rada MP Oleksiy Albu told Kremlin-sponsored media that Poland is interested in military conflict in Ukraine because Poland needs cheap refugee labor on February 1.**¹⁸⁵

January 31

- **Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said Russian President Vladimir Putin will evaluate the US’s response to Russian security demands “whenever he will see fit” on January 31.**¹⁸⁶ Peskov commented that proposed UK sanctions against Russian businesses are “worrisome” and noted that Russia will retaliate.¹⁸⁷ Peskov reiterated that the West has been amplifying alarmist information campaigns surrounding Ukraine.
- **Russian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova ridiculed UK State Secretary Liz Truss’ threat of sanctions against Russian oligarchs on January 31.**¹⁸⁸ Zakharova sarcastically said “no momentary British financial interests can be more important than democracy and freedom.”

January 29

- **Kremlin-sponsored media falsely reported that Pentagon Press Secretary John Kirby said the US would reduce its number of military exercises in Europe if Russia reciprocated on January 29.**¹⁸⁹
- **Kremlin-sponsored media reported that NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg told a French newspaper that the Allies are not unified in their position to supply Ukraine with weapons on January 29.**¹⁹⁰

January 28

- **Kremlin-sponsored media amplified the CNN report that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky argued with US President Joe Biden on January 28.**¹⁹¹ TASS misquoted a Ukrainian Presidential Administration official stating that fake claims about Zelensky-Biden call “empower tensions.” TASS refuted the Ukrainian official’s denial of any confrontation, suggesting that two leaders possibly argued over the US refusal to supply high-tech weapons and deploy troops to Ukraine. Russian media alleged that Biden told Zelensky US will not impose any preventative sanctions on Russia and declined Ukraine a NATO membership prospect.
- **Russian State Duma Speaker Vyacheslav Volodin said that “Russia and Ukraine need peace; the US and European countries do not need nuclear war” on January 28.**¹⁹² Volodin said that Ukrainian pro-Kremlin opposition leader Viktor Medvedchuk wants to negotiate with Russia, but that the Ukrainian government rejects such proposals because it knows that “Russia will not fight Ukraine.” Volodin claimed that Washington is not content with Russo-Ukrainian negotiations, as US “does everything” to escalate relations between Kyiv and the Kremlin. Volodin accused Ukrainian political elite of lacking “national orientation” to support interests of its citizens and claimed that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky is power-hungry. Volodin said that Ukraine’s parliament must realize that dialogue and mutual respect “is always better” in defending Ukrainian citizens’ interests.

January 27

- **Russian Security Council Deputy Chairman Dmitry Medvedev said on January 27 that the US made future talks the on restriction of strategic offensive weapons “extremely complicated” by withdrawing from various agreements.**¹⁹³ Medvedev likely responded to a US offer to compromise on Russian security demands and restart START Treaty. Medvedev said that Ukraine “has become to a certain degree a toy in the hand of NATO, and primarily of the US.”¹⁹⁴ Medvedev accused the US of using Ukraine “as an instrument of geopolitical pressure on Russia” and China. Medvedev also accused NATO of “encroaching” on Russian borders and attempting to establish a “new military base” with strike missiles by offering Ukraine NATO membership.¹⁹⁵ Medvedev said Russia is not interested in establishing military bases in Latin America as to not infringe on its partners’ sovereignty.¹⁹⁶ Medvedev stated that Russo-Chinese relations serve as a “balancing pole in the global balance of power.”¹⁹⁷

January 26

- **Russian State Duma Speaker Vyacheslav Volodin claimed that proposed US sanctions against Russian President Vladimir Putin show that “Washington wants a loyal and controlled Russian president” on January 26.**¹⁹⁸ Volodin claimed that the US tries to install a loyal Russian president via “sanctions, provocations, and information attacks.”

January 25

- **Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) leader Denis Pushilin commented on Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky’s out-of-context quote about Ukraine needing to “move onto offensive actions” on January 25.**¹⁹⁹ Pushilin said that it is strange that Zelensky asked his intelligence service to begin an offensive during a Ukrainian Intelligence Day celebration. Pushilin added that “no one is fighting a real threat to Ukrainian sovereignty,” implying that Ukraine is a failing state. Kremlin-sponsored media largely did not amplify Zelensky’s January 24 statements.
- **Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov accused the US of informational and physical escalation around Ukraine, prompting Russia to observe the situation with “great concern” on January 25.**²⁰⁰ Peskov added that such escalations will not affect US-Russia talks as “negotiations are actually completed at the current stage.”²⁰¹ Peskov said that before the Kremlin develops its course of action, Russia will “need to get the notorious text” response from the US this week.²⁰²
- **Kremlin-sponsored media amplified Ukrainian Deputy from the Servant of the People Party Bohdan Yarenenko’s claims about Ukraine’s Western partners on January 25.**²⁰³ Yarenenko said that despite the Russian military buildup at Ukrainian borders, “it is not Russians who play psychological games with escalations to extremes, but Ukrainian partners.” Yarenenko implied that Ukraine is in a challenging information sphere where Kyiv cannot downplay the Russian threat, nor could it ask American publications to refrain from “excessive informational and psychological pressure.”²⁰⁴ Russian media cropped Yarenenko’s statement on Russian invasion threat to suggest that the deputy accused the US of producing fake alarmist reports, while abandoning Ukraine in the face of escalations.

January 24

- **Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov claimed that the Ukrainian government has concentrated a “huge number of forces and equipment at the line of contact” in preparation for “offensive actions” against Donbas on January 24.**²⁰⁵ Peskov said that there is a “higher than before” threat that Ukrainian forces will begin a provocation in Donbas. Peskov added that any “defensive or offensive” weapon can “inspire the hotheads in Kyiv to start this operation.”²⁰⁶ The Kremlin is escalating its narrative of a Ukrainian invasion of Donbas likely to set conditions for its own operation in southeast Ukraine or to secure further diplomatic concessions from the US and NATO.
- **Kremlin-sponsored outlets amplified reports of Kyiv-based embassies evacuating their nonessential staff on January 24.** Russian media vaguely reported that the US and UK evacuated nonessential staff and diplomatic families, claiming that “some staff” will be leaving Ukraine.²⁰⁷ Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said that by disseminating information about the departure of their diplomats, US and NATO can provoke “increased tension.”²⁰⁸ TASS claimed that France is evacuating its diplomats and their families from Kyiv following the US and UK example, although there is no official information available from Paris.²⁰⁹ Russian media reported that Japan is considering evacuating Japanese citizens and embassy personnel from Ukraine based on US and international responses.²¹⁰ TASS reported that Berlin will sponsor transport fees for diplomat families to return to Germany.²¹¹ Russian media also reported that Swiss, Lufthansa, Austrian Airlines, and KLM airlines refused to park overnight in Kyiv amid Western reports of Russian invasion of Ukraine.²¹² The Kremlin likely seeks to imply that the international community is turning away from Ukraine while largely misreporting diplomatic protocol.
- **Russian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova said the Kremlin clarified all possible US questions about Russian security demands on January 24.**²¹³ Zakharova added that the Russian “position does not change” on anticipating a written response to all Russian demands from the US.

- **Russian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova denied *Bloomberg's* claim that Chinese President Xi Jinping asked Russian President Vladimir Putin to refrain from invading Ukraine before the Beijing Olympics on January 24.**²¹⁴ *Bloomberg* reported on January 22 that China will deter Russia from invading Ukraine between January 28 to March 20 to maintain its own diplomatic and commercial interests.²¹⁵ Zakharova exclaimed that she did not expect “this level of disinformation” from *Bloomberg*, citing that the publication always reaches out to Russian Foreign Ministry officials for an official comment. Zakharova claimed that the West now spreads disinformation via official channels such as the United Kingdom’s accusation of the Kremlin attempting to install a pro-Russian leader in Ukraine and traditional outlets, instead of social media.²¹⁶ Zakharova’s response contradicts the official Kremlin’s complete denial narrative of any Ukrainian invasion.

January 23

- **Russian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova claimed that the West is preparing the information space for “a number of major provocations” including unspecified “military provocations” on January 23.**²¹⁷ Zakharova claimed that the West conditioned the information space via both social media and traditional outlets such as *The New York Times* and *Bloomberg* – criticizing their reports on China deterring Russian invasion of Ukraine and the Kremlin’s evacuation of Russian diplomatic staff in Kyiv. Zakharova accused the British Foreign Ministry of pushing fake official information on the Kremlin staging a coup in Ukraine and installing a pro-Russian former Ukrainian deputy Yevhen Murayev. Zakharova stated that the UK purposely published the article in the middle of the night so the Kremlin could not immediately refute the allegations.

January 20

- **Kremlin-sponsored media claimed that German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock’s meeting with Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov on January 18 changed Berlin’s mind in favor of signing a gas contract with Russia on January 20.**²¹⁸ Russian press and online outlets implied that Baerbock did not maintain her usual strong position on Nord Stream-2 certification, implying that the Western policy on Russian is malleable and disjoint. Russian TV featured similar narratives on January 18-19.²¹⁹

January 19

- **Kremlin Spokesman Dmitry Peskov stated that Moscow hopes for written responses from the West on the Kremlin’s demanded security guarantees “in days” on January 19.**²²⁰
- **TASS amplified a story in which the leader of Ukraine’s governing Servant of the People Party said he thinks that Western media “pumped up” the perceived threat of a Russian intervention against Ukraine on January 19.**²²¹ TASS’ reporting insinuated that even Ukrainian political leadership thinks that a Russian offensive against Ukraine is Western alarmism.
- **Kremlin-sponsored media claimed that Ukraine’s National Guard conducted aviation, artillery, and drone combat readiness exercises in Donetsk, Luhansk, Kharkiv, and Sumy on January 19.**²²² Russian media alleged that Ukrainian forces intensified shelling and used mortars for anti-sniper warfare. Russian media claimed that the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe’s Special Monitoring Mission (OSCE SMM) observed a Ukrainian howitzer 20 kilometers from Donetsk. Russian media claimed that OSCE SMM also observed Ukrainian howitzers, “Grad” multiple launch rocket systems, and S-300 air defense systems near Mariupol, Donetsk Oblast.

- **Kremlin-sponsored media pushed a narrative that former Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko seeks to regain power in Ukraine after Poroshenko suggested that US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken needs to meet with different Ukrainian political forces on January 19.**²²³ Poroshenko said that Blinken should meet not only with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky but with all other democratic forces in Ukraine. Russian media claimed that Poroshenko resorted to his “traditional anti-Russian rhetoric” by calling for the West to levy sanctions against Russia and provide Ukraine with weapons. The Kremlin will likely continue to leverage the Ukrainian government’s criminal charges against Poroshenko to advance a narrative that there is a growing power struggle and internal instability in Ukraine.
- **Russian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova compared Ukrainian nationalists to Norwegian far-right domestic terrorist Andres Behring Breivik and said that reports of evacuation at the Russian embassy evacuation in Kyiv are a “provocation” on January 19.**²²⁴ Zakharova said that Ukrainian extremists committed far more crimes against Donbas residents than Breivik, who murdered 77 and wounded 150 victims. Zakharova said that the West actively ignores Ukrainian radicals adopting Nazi values and symbols within their units. Zakharova said the US collaborated with the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) to conduct an unsuccessful “information special operation” to attack Russian diplomatic staff. The Kremlin continues to push the narrative that the West supports and contributes to Ukrainian neo-Nazism to wage a war against Russia.

January 18

- **Kremlin-sponsored media promoted a fake story about Belarusian military aircraft contesting Ukrainian airspace on January 18.**²²⁵ Russian media quoted a Ukrainian Telegram channel which falsely claimed that Lviv, Lutsk, and Vasilkiv cities responded to a combat alert in connection with three Belarusian military aircraft fighters entering Ukrainian airspace on January 18. Neither Ukrainian nor Belarusian officials released any statements acknowledging the alleged incident.
- **Kremlin-sponsored media reported that Ukraine’s State Border Service is installing helipads and barbed wire fences near the Ukrainian-Belarusian border to prepare for escalations with Belarus on January 18.**²²⁶ Russian media paraphrased Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko’s claim that Ukraine amassed 10,000 servicemen while conducting the “Polisya” special operation near the Belarusian border to imply potential Ukrainian preparations for a provocation against Belarus.
- **Russian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova denied the *New York Times* (NYT) report about Russian diplomats evacuating from Ukraine on January 18 and claimed that Ukrainians “regularly” threaten Russia’s embassy and consulate in Ukraine.**²²⁷ Zakharova said the NYT did not reach out to the Russian embassy before publishing their report. Zakharova stated that the Russian embassy in Kyiv and consulate in Lviv continue to operate despite a recently alleged Molotov cocktail attack on the consulate and provocations from “Ukrainian radicals and Ukrainian security forces” against Russian diplomatic staff in Ukraine.
- **Russian Governor of Crimea Sergey Aksyonov and Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) leader Denis Pushilin said all Slavic people “will be together” once again at a celebration of the anniversary of the 1654 Ukrainian Cossack consolidation into the Russian Empire on January 18.**²²⁸ Aksyonov did not specify when “history will put everything in its place,” but implied that Ukraine's unification with Russia would provide economic prosperity and collective opportunities for all involved. Pushilin called for the DNR’s full integration with Russia into one “big country with great opportunities and possibilities of a sovereign state.” Another Russian Crimean official added that Ukrainian Cossack leader

Bohdan Khmelnytsky was a hero for reunifying the Ukrainian state with Russia after realizing that Ukrainians “would never become part of [Western] Europe” and were “abandoned and useless.” The Kremlin continues to advance narratives about Ukrainian dependency on Russia and Europe’s disinterest in Ukraine’s independence and best interests.

- **Russian Foreign Intelligence Service Director Sergey Naryshkin said that “state terror that takes place on the territory of modern Ukraine” is comparable to the Nazi occupation of Soviet territories on January 18.**²²⁹ Naryshkin characterized the 2014 Maidan protests as a “bloody coup d’etat” that led to a civil war managed by Ukraine’s elite and nationalists. Naryshkin added that Ukraine’s “corrupt-oligarchic” government gives orders to kill ethnic-Russians and anyone who disagrees with the Ukrainian government. Naryshkin alleged that Kyiv is choreographing the criminal charges against former Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko to raise the Ukrainian government’s own reputation. This claim supports the Kremlin’s narrative that Poroshenko and current Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky are both anti-Russian radical nationalists.²³⁰

January 17

- **Russian Permanent Representative to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Alexander Lukashevich said the situation in Donbas is getting “significantly worse” and Ukrainian leadership “does not exclude a forceful scenario” in Donbas on January 17.**²³¹

January 14

- **Kremlin-sponsored media amplified pro-Russian Ukrainian MP Yuriy Boyko’s statement that Kyiv should focus on bringing peace to Donbas rather than joining NATO on January 14.**²³² Boyko stated that both the administrations of current Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and previous Ukrainian president Petro Poroshenko stubbornly pushed for NATO membership and neglected the majority will of the Ukrainian people. Boyko said that recent US-Russia, NATO-Russia Council, and Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)-Russia summits are beneficial for Ukraine because leading global powers can resolve the Ukrainian conflict diplomatically. The Kremlin is advancing narratives that Ukraine’s capitulation to the Kremlin is the only way to resolve the conflict in Donbas and that Zelensky is the same as Poroshenko.

January 13

- **Russian Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Maria Zakharova accused Ukrainian forces of increasing attacks against Donbas on January 13.**²³³ Zakharova accused Ukraine of increasing attacks in Donbas and that the civilian population is suffering. Zakharova condemned the west for providing Ukraine with weapons and accused Ukraine of “sabotaging” the Minsk II Accords and refusing to dialogue with the Kremlin’s proxies in Donetsk and Luhansk.
- **Russian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova accused the US and NATO of significantly “enlarging military development” in Ukraine by allocating \$200 million in defense funding to Kyiv in December 2021 on January 13.**²³⁴ Zakharova said the Kremlin has concerns that US and NATO also promote “aggressive militaristic rhetoric” and plan joint military exercises within Ukraine. Zakharova said that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky’s readiness to participate in the Normandy Four “looks simply populist” because Ukraine did not abide by the Minsk Accords.²³⁵ Zakharova said that the West supports Ukraine’s violation of the Minsk Accords. The Kremlin continues to

push the narrative that the West manipulates the Ukrainian government to advance the West's crusade against Russia.

- **Kremlin-sponsored media amplified a segment of Polish Foreign Minister Zbigniew Rau's speech about the elevated chance of war at the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) summit with Russia on January 13.**²³⁶ Rau said that "the risk of war in the OSCE region today is much greater than ever in the last 30 years" in reference to the Kremlin's non-starter security demands and threats against Ukraine and NATO.²³⁷ The Kremlin media did not include this context likely to push a narrative that the West seeks to conduct a war against Russia or reinforce the narrative about the inevitability of war if the West does not meet Russia's demands.
- **Russian State Duma Vice-Speaker Petr Tolstoy said that Russia should restore the borders of the Russian Empire and said that the Baltic states and Finland would voluntarily "crawl back" to Russia within the next ten years on January 13.**²³⁸ Tolstoy did not specify how the Kremlin would achieve this conquest.

January 12

- **Russian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova attacked US Under Secretary for Political Affairs Victoria Nuland's January 11 briefing on January 12.**²³⁹ Zakharova responded to Nuland's hypothetical statement that if Nuland were a Russian citizen, she would invest money spent on fielding military units near Ukraine on Russian domestic infrastructure and healthcare.²⁴⁰ Zakharova retorted that the US could fix its own declining infrastructure by reducing US military bases in Europe and ceasing all financial support for color revolutions and opposition leaders like Belarusian opposition leader Svetlana Tikhanouskaya.²⁴¹ Kremlin-sponsored media amplified Nuland's statement that Washington is influencing Germany and the European Union (EU) to delay the approval of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline on January 11.²⁴² Russian media is pushing a narrative that the US disregards EU interests in the American effort to advance US efforts against Russia.
- **Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov accused US officials of issuing "aggressive statements" about the US-Russia strategic security dialogue on Russian security guarantees on January 12.**²⁴³ Peskov said that Russia will continue conducting military exercises because they are transparent and are not related to negotiations with the West.²⁴⁴ Peskov additionally falsely stated that Russia "does not shower [dialogue partners] with threats and ultimatums," unlike the US.²⁴⁵

January 11

- **Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov's compared threats of US sanctions against Russia as an American "information artillery barrage before negotiations" on January 11.**²⁴⁶ The Kremlin is likely pushing a narrative to depict the US as inflexible on security negotiations for Russia's domestic audience.
- **Kremlin-sponsored media outlet *Izvestia* amplified retired Norwegian Lieutenant General Robert Mood's article to falsely imply that a Norwegian officer proposed to admit Russia to NATO on January 11.**²⁴⁷ Mood published an article on January 9 in which he asked a rhetorical question of whether it is possible to envisage a "more defensive NATO that is open to everyone, including Russia," given that admitting former adversaries, like Germany, into NATO helped liberalize those states.²⁴⁸ Kremlin media miscontextualized Mood's article and suggested that an active Norwegian officer advocated admitting Russia into NATO to fix all current foreign policy problems between Russia and the West.²⁴⁹ The Kremlin is likely supporting a narrative that there is rift between European Union and NATO countries on relations with Russia.

- **Russian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova said that White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki is “incompetent” and undermines US leadership on Russian state television on January 11.**²⁵⁰ Zakharova’s comments followed Psaki’s claim that Russian media is misreporting the outcomes of the January 10 US-Russia strategic dialogue summit. Russian television often derides Psaki’s character and intelligence likely to create a recognizable antagonist figure for Russia’s domestic audience.
- **The Russian Foreign Ministry used increasingly irreverent rhetoric towards a tweet from a Polish member of the European Parliament on January 11.** Former Polish Foreign Minister and current Polish member of the European Parliament Radoslaw Sikorski tweeted that Russia is a “serial rapist” and that NATO will kick “Russia in the balls” on January 10.²⁵¹ Russian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova responded that Russia is feminine and insinuated that Sikorski “fell victim to the concept of gender diversity.”²⁵² Zakharova has made similar irreverent statements in the past, but the tone of her statement is uncharacteristic of the Foreign Ministry’s current serious tone following the US-Russia strategic stability talks on January 9-10. Zakharova’s statement could be an early indicator of a Russian information operation to create contempt for the West among Russia’s domestic audience.

January 7

- **TASS miscontextualized Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov’s statements following January 10 talks with US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman to suggest that Ryabkov was concerned about a Ukrainian or joint US-Ukraine invasion of Russia.**²⁵³ TASS reported that Ryabkov was concerned about Ukrainian missiles striking Russia and Ukrainian soldiers “marching on Red Square.” Ryabkov simply referred to a concern of Ukrainian or joint US-Ukrainian provocations against Donbas, not an attack against Russia proper.
- **Kremlin-sponsored media misrepresented Ukrainian Deputy Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration Olga Stefanishina’s statement on maintaining diplomatic channels with Russia to avoid military escalations on January 10.**²⁵⁴ Russian media implied that Kyiv “confirmed its desire to cooperate with Moscow” after NATO declared “its readiness for a military conflict with Russia in case of failed Eastern European security assurances negotiations.” Russian media is likely advancing an information operation to imply that Ukraine is a collapsing state that wants to resume relations with Russia to avoid devastating consequences from a Western-waged war against Russia.
- **Kremlin-sponsored media amplified claims that Ukraine is facing “African hunger” and “economic and social collapse” under its current government and is introducing food stamps on January 10.**²⁵⁵ Russian media claimed that Ukraine’s food industry could collapse with rapidly increasing gas prices. The Kremlin is likely advancing a narrative that Ukraine is a collapsing state in need of Russian energy support.
- **Kremlin-sponsored media claimed that Ukrainian Ambassador to Germany Andriy Melnik issued an ultimatum to Berlin, demanding that Germany abandon Russia’s Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline on January 10.**²⁵⁶ Russian media claimed that Melnik demanded that Germany reverse its veto on providing Ukraine with weapons. The Kremlin continues to advance narratives to drive wedges between NATO and EU members and suggest that that the West will ultimately abandon Ukraine.
- **Kremlin-sponsored media quoted former Ukrainian Defense Minister Anatoly Hrytsenko calling on Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky to give up on regaining Crimea on January 10.**²⁵⁷ Russian media quoted Hrytsenko saying that there is a “Russian spirit” in Donbas and that 80 percent of Donbas residents want to unite with

Russia. The Kremlin is likely advancing a narrative on Zelensky's inevitable capitulation to Russia targeted at Russia's domestic population.

- **Bloomberg reported on January 10 that Kremlin-sponsored media deescalated its negative portrayal of Ukraine since early December in a pattern “almost identical” to Russian information operations during the Russian troop buildup near Ukraine in April 2021.**²⁵⁸ Bloomberg claimed that Russian anti-Ukraine narratives decreased in early December 2021 following the confirmation of the US-Russia and NATO-Russia summits planned for mid-January 2022. Bloomberg also noted that negative Russian media coverage of Ukraine decreased in April 2021 after the announcement of the June 2021 Geneva summit between US President Joe Biden and Russian President Vladimir Putin.

January 7

- **Kremlin-sponsored media misconstrued the Estonian defense minister's concern over the Collective Security Treaty Organization's deployments to Kazakhstan, stating that Estonian fears of Russian deployments are completely baseless on January 7.**²⁵⁹ Russian media claimed that Russian troops in Kazakhstan do not pose a threat to the Baltics because Kazakhstan is geographically far from the Baltics. Estonia's defense minister said that Russian actions have not been transparent and that the fog of war creates insecurity. This advanced an existing Russian media narrative that Russia does not pose a military threat to Ukraine or any other state.
- **Kremlin-sponsored media dismissed White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki's concern over the legality of the Collective Security Treaty Organization peacekeeping deployment to Kazakhstan on January 7.**²⁶⁰ Russian media has refrained from alleging US involvement in the protests in Kazakhstan ahead of mid-January US-Russia and NATO-Russia summits as of January 7.

January 5

- **Some Kremlin-sponsored media outlets began claiming that the West initiated “color revolution” protests and a coup in Kazakhstan to destabilize Russia ahead of US-Russia and NATO-Russia summits in mid-January on January 5.**²⁶¹ The Kremlin has not launched a coordinated information campaign on this narrative yet, however. Senior Kremlin officials and new sources have not yet referred to the protests in Kazakhstan as a color revolution. Some Russian media implied that the Kremlin must think about saving ethnic Russians in Kazakhstan in the event of a coup.²⁶²
- **Russian State Duma Deputy Konstantin Zatulin claimed that Kazakh protests have an unspecified “common planning center” on January 5.**²⁶³ Zalutin said unspecified initiators orchestrated numerous protests throughout Kazakhstan involving young suburban people who are “susceptible to nationalist propaganda.” Zalutin said that the West is not involved with organizing the protests, however Kazakh officials must promptly respond to prevent future Western provocations in Kazakhstan and Russia.²⁶⁴
- **Russian State Duma Vice-Speaker Boris Chernyshov said that protests in Kazakhstan are following the scenario from the 2004 Ukrainian Orange Revolution on January 5.**²⁶⁵ Chernyshov implied that the United Kingdom and United States orchestrated political protests following successful Russia-Kazakhstan talks at the Commonwealth of Independent States on December 28.²⁶⁶ Chernyshov claimed that protests could not advance from high gas prices to political riots without a “reason.” Kremlin-sponsored media will likely attribute emerging Kazakh protests to Western provocations ahead of US-Russia and NATO-Russia summits in mid-January.
- **Kremlin-sponsored media advanced a narrative on January 5 that German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock seeks dialogue with the Kremlin to resolve**

tensions at the Ukrainian border ahead of her planned visit to Washington on January 5.²⁶⁷ Russian media included Baerbock's statement that NATO's power lies in diplomacy rather than military capability. The Kremlin likely seeks to sow division among European Union (EU) members, NATO members, and the US by advancing a narrative that the United States disregards EU security interests.

- **Kremlin-sponsored media claimed that the European Union (EU) “expressed dissatisfaction” towards the United States and NATO for excluding the EU from upcoming US-Russia and NATO-Russia talks, citing Western publications on January 5.**²⁶⁸ The Kremlin likely seeks to drive wedges between NATO and EU members by advancing a narrative that the US is destroying Western blocs by disregarding EU security concerns.

January 4

- **Kremlin-sponsored outlet *RIA Novosti* claimed that the US and NATO seek to turn Finland into a new “Ukraine-like” buffer state with Russia on January 4.**²⁶⁹ *RIA Novosti* claimed Finland is reserving the right to join NATO because Helsinki is neglecting the real threat of Finland losing its sovereignty and neutrality to the culturally different “Anglo-Saxon” NATO alliance.
- **Kremlin-sponsored media claimed on January 4 that Ukrainian forces detained and charged a Luhansk People’s Republic (LNR) officer in Luhansk on December 27 to support a Ukrainian information operation.**²⁷⁰ Ukrainian government officials detained and criminally charged a LNR militant after he attempted to cross the line of demarcation on December 27.²⁷¹ Russian media claimed that SBU likely hoped to capture a Russian volunteer for a Ukrainian information campaign. Russian media claimed this detention was a planned Ukrainian Security Service (SBU) operation given Ukrainian media’s rapid coverage, lack of information about the Ukrainian unit that detained the militant, and the alleged lack of military equipment on the detainee. Russian media further claimed that Ukraine cut water supply from a water station to the LNR on January 2.²⁷²
- **A Russian State Duma Deputy from Crimea said if Ukraine invades Crimea or Donbas, then the “Ukrainian Army will face an unenviable fate” on January 4.**²⁷³ The deputy said that a Ukrainian offensive will result in many Ukrainian prisoners of war, desertions among the Ukrainian military, and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky charged under an international tribunal. Russian officials are increasingly publicly discussing how a Russian war with Ukraine would result with a decisive Russian victory.
- **Kremlin-sponsored media emphasized that Ukraine faced the lowest levels of Russian gas transit in the past two years on January 4, 2021.**²⁷⁴ Russia’s Foreign Ministry stated that Russia has no obligation to transfer all Europe-bound gas through Ukraine.²⁷⁵ Russian media is setting conditions to push the narrative that “Ukraine will freeze in the winter” without Russian gas.
- Kremlin-sponsored media quoted former US President Donald Trump’s Advisor Cory Mills on January 4 to imply that current US President Joe Biden will be “weak” in upcoming talks with Moscow based on Biden’s “foreign policy failures” in Afghanistan and Taiwan.²⁷⁶

January 2

- **Russian State Duma Deputy Vyacheslav Volodin called on the European Union, Council of Europe, and Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe to denounce Ukrainian marches celebrating the birthday of Ukrainian nationalist figure Stepan Bandera on January 2.**²⁷⁷ The Kremlin continues to push the narrative that Western institutions are supporting the rise of neo-Nazism and Russophobia in Ukraine. This

narrative can support future Kremlin information operations about Ukrainian nationalist threats against Donbas that necessitate Russian military intervention.

December 31

- **Kremlin-sponsored media reported that Russia's military can "defeat Ukraine in less than ten minutes" citing an interview from the ex-head of the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry's Information Department Oleg Voloshin on December 31.**²⁷⁸ Voloshin said that Ukrainian Armed Forces are not prepared for "modern high-tech war." Russian media cited Voloshin's previous statements that the Russian military could defeat Ukraine in a week because it would be unprofitable for Kyiv to maintain a war. Russian media is increasingly pushing a narrative suggesting a decisive Russian victory in a war against Ukraine.

December 28

- Kremlin-sponsored media amplified a former Ukrainian Minister of Economy's statement on December 28 encouraging Kyiv to refrain from calling Russia an "aggressor" in a bid to promote dialogue between Kyiv and Russian President Vladimir Putin.²⁷⁹

December 26

- Russian State Duma Member Mikhail Delyagin on December 26 said we should expect a Ukrainian attack against Crimea, Rostov-on-Don, Belgorod and Bryansk in February or March 2022.²⁸⁰ Delyagin said that the West is preparing Ukraine for this attack.
- Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said further NATO expansion is "a matter of life and death" for Russia in a TV interview on December 26.²⁸¹ Peskov said if Ukraine intensifies military activities against Donbas, then "there will be a question of Ukrainian statehood."²⁸²

December 24

- Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said that NATO enlargement and strike missile systems deployments to Ukraine will provoke "serious military risks" and a "large-scale conflict in Europe" on December 24.²⁸³
- Kremlin-sponsored media quoted a former Ukrainian Security Service (SBU) officer on December 24 stating that Ukrainian Armed Forces will use chemical weapons to attack schools, hospitals, and mass gatherings in Ukrainian-controlled eastern Ukraine.²⁸⁴ Russian media is continuing to spread Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu's claim that Ukrainian forces and US private military companies will use chemical weapons to attack Donbas.

December 23

- **Kremlin media outlets amplified former Central Intelligence Agency officer Philip Giraldi's "prediction" that US efforts to train Ukrainian forces would result in "disastrous consequences" for both the US and Ukraine on December 23.**²⁸⁵

December 21

- **Pro-Kremlin media outlets amplified US Pentagon Spokesperson John Kirby's December 20 statement that the US Air Force will not curtail its activities in the Black Sea.** Russian media condemned Kirby's statement that US forces will continue to operate where international law allows the US to do so.²⁸⁶ This information operation can support Russian efforts to claim that the US has violated or wholesale rejected the Kremlin's demanded "red lines" on security guarantees.²⁸⁷

December 15

- **Russian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova accused the United States and NATO of aggravating the situation in Ukraine by supplying Kyiv with weaponry and training on December 15.**²⁸⁸ Zakharova said that the presence of 10,000 NATO servicemen in Ukraine – 4,000 of which are American – does not help create conditions for the implementation of the Minsk agreements. The Kremlin is escalating its narrative that western support for Ukraine is preventing Kyiv from implementing the Minsk Agreements.

December 10

- **Anchors on primetime Russian state TV claim a “genocide against the Russian nation” is occurring in Ukraine on December 10.**²⁸⁹ Kremlin media is increasingly claiming that Ukraine is carrying out a “genocide” against ethnic Russians in Ukraine. The Kremlin could leverage these false claims as a justification for overt military deployments in Donbas or military action against Ukraine.

December 10

- **Kremlin-sponsored media misquoted Former Ukrainian Foreign Minister Pavlo Klimkin that the West mistrusts Ukraine—likely to push the narrative of Western abandonment of Ukraine—on December 10.**²⁹⁰ Klimkin said that the West does not know if Ukraine has a concrete national security plan, causing uncertainty among Western partners. Russian media misconstrued Klimkin’s statements to imply that the West does not trust an unstable Ukrainian government. The Kremlin is advancing a narrative that the West will not defend Ukraine in the case of a military confrontation due to Ukrainian domestic concerns.
- **A known Russian information operations asset in Ukraine suggested on December 10 that Ukraine and the West will conduct a joint military provocation against Russia in 2022.**²⁹¹ Former pro-Russian Ukrainian Member of Parliament Ilya Kiva said a joint military provocation between Ukraine and the West against Russia would allow the West to block Nord Stream 2.²⁹² Kiva is a known Russian asset who has participated in information campaigns designed to undermine faith in the Ukrainian government and provoke violent protests in Ukraine.²⁹³

December 9

- **Putin said that the situation in Donbas resembles a genocide on December 9.** Putin stated that “Russophobia is the first step towards genocide,” and that current events in Donbas are “very reminiscent of a genocide.”²⁹⁴ This is a significant Kremlin rhetorical inflection and is the first time Kremlin leadership has framed events in Ukraine as a genocide since the crisis began in October 2021. This likely marked the beginning of a new Kremlin information operation to support Russian efforts to justify future Russian military activities in Ukraine. The Kremlin and its media apparatuses have not yet wholesale pushed the “genocide” meme as of December 11.
- **Russian Chief of the General Staff Valery Gerasimov threatened Ukraine on December 9 that Russia will suppress any Ukrainian “provocations” in Donbas.** Gerasimov said, “any provocations of the Ukrainian authorities to resolve the problems of Donbas by force will be suppressed.”²⁹⁵ The Kremlin has not yet fully accused Ukraine of deciding to use force in Donbas as of December 11.
- **Kremlin Spokesman Dmitry Peskov accused NATO of increasing its military presence in Greece to contain Russia on December 8.**²⁹⁶ Peskov said that NATO and

US forces are shipping weapons through the Port of Alexandroupolis and concentrating in Greece to create new NATO bases to contain Russia.

- **Russian Southern Military District (SMD) Commander Alexander Dvornikov said that NATO's military buildup near Russian borders is among the SMD's main security threats on December 9.**²⁹⁷ Dvornikov also included the possibility of an escalation in Ukraine, Nagorno-Karabakh, and the ongoing war in Syria among the SMD's main priorities.
- **Kremlin and proxy republic narratives about alleged Ukrainian weapon deployments closer to Donbas began unifying around December 9.** Zakharova reiterated the Kremlin accusation that Ukraine is deploying heavy equipment and artillery to Donbas on December 9.²⁹⁸ The LNR militia accused Ukraine's armed forces of deploying four BTR-80 armored personnel carriers near the outskirts of Voitovo Village, Luhansk, and seven BTR-80s to Raygorodokon, Luhansk, on December 9.²⁹⁹
- **Zakharova said on December 9 that negotiations with Ukraine for a peaceful settlement have "reached an impasse."**³⁰⁰ Zakharova said the regular Trilateral Contract Group meeting held on December 7 and 8 ended in vain. The Kremlin is likely setting information conditions to claim that Ukraine has wholesale abandoned the Minsk Agreements.
- **Russian Permanent Representative to the Organization for Security Cooperation Europe (OSCE) Alexander Lukashevich alleged that Ukraine is militarizing in violation of the Minsk Agreements on December 9.**³⁰¹ Lukashevich said that Ukraine is outfitting its forces in Donbas with Turkish Bayraktar TB2 drones. Lukashevich also accused Turkey, the United States, Germany, the European Union, and France of supporting Kyiv's militarization efforts by providing weapons, financing weapons purchases, or participating in international military exercises.

December 8

- **Zakharova said Russia issued a protest note to the US embassy in Moscow on December 8 in response to US jets "endangering civil aircraft" in the Black Sea on December 3.**³⁰² Zakharova denounced NATO's expansion to Russian borders and its threat to international passenger airways.

December 7

- **Kremlin-sponsored media coordinated a response to US Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs Victoria Nuland's Senate testimony on December 7.** Peskov denied that Russia seeks to restore the Soviet Union.³⁰³ Kremlin media manipulated Nuland's discussion of Russian military expansion to imply that the Russian army has "significant superiority" over Ukraine.³⁰⁴ The Kremlin notably did not release a coordinated narrative regarding US President Joe Biden and Putin's videoconference immediately following their call on December 7.
- **Russian news agency TASS published an article on December 7 claiming that Zelensky may strip Donbas residents of their Ukrainian citizenship.**³⁰⁵ The article speculated that a potential Ukrainian policy change on dual citizenship regulations that Zelensky discussed on December 1 could enable Zelensky to deprive Donbas residents of opportunities to obtain Ukrainian citizenship.

- **Russian media falsely claimed the OSCE observed Ukraine deploying tanks and howitzers to Donbas on December 7.**³⁰⁶ The OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine observed 30 Ukrainian tanks and 17 Ukrainian howitzers at two railway stations in Ukrainian government-controlled areas of Donetsk and Luhansk on December 6.³⁰⁷ The OSCE stated this hardware was in compliance with withdrawal lines.

December 6

- **Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) Deputy Secretary General Valeriy Semerikov said NATO's provocations are unnoticed by international organizations in an interview on December 6.**³⁰⁸ Semerikov stated that NATO, "under a far-fetched pretext," is expanding military infrastructure and deployments in Eastern Europe. Semerikov added that NATO exercises near CSTO member states increased in other regions.³⁰⁹

December 5

- **Kremlin-sponsored media accused Ukrainian Armed Forces of deploying 17 tanks and two armored personnel carriers to three Ukrainian government-controlled settlements in eastern Ukraine on December 5.**³¹⁰ Russian media only specified that Ukraine deployed the T-64 tanks to Artyomivske, Donetsk Oblast. Russian media also claimed that Ukraine deployed the 20th Electronic Warfare Battalion to Ukrainian government-controlled eastern Ukraine to suppress Organization for Security and Cooperation Europe (OSCE) unmanned aerial monitoring in Zolote, Novoivanovka, and Orekhovo, Luhansk Oblast, on December 4.³¹¹ The OSCE did not report any Ukrainian deployments in the region on December 4-5.³¹²
- **Zakharova accused NATO of endangering civilian aircraft over the Black Sea on December 5.**³¹³ Russia's Federal Air Transport Agency claimed that a Russian airline Aeroflot flight from Tel Aviv to Moscow had to change directions over the Black Sea because of a NATO reconnaissance aircraft on December 3.³¹⁴ Zakharova denounced increased NATO activity near Russian borders.³¹⁵
- **Zakharova responded to White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki's characterization of the Kremlin as a "provocateur" on December 5.**³¹⁶ Zakharova chastised Psaki and referenced the United States' military actions in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Vietnam, Belgrade, Baghdad, the depositions of Saddam Hussein and Muammar Gaddafi, and alleged US participation in color revolutions worldwide.

December 3

- **Kremlin-sponsored media manipulated Norwegian Foreign Minister Anniken Huitfeldt's November 30 interview to falsely suggest that Norway opposes any NATO force presence near any Russian border on December 3.**³¹⁷ Huitfeldt said that it is in Norway's security interests for Norwegian vessels to accompany NATO ships and planes when NATO conducts exercises near Russia's northern sea border with Norway.³¹⁸ Russian media falsely said Norway condemned all NATO operations along Russian borders.

December 2

- **Zakharova decried the NATO foreign ministerial meeting which occurred in Riga on December 2.**³¹⁹ Zakharova said on December 2 that the Kremlin has defined Ukraine's accession to NATO as a long-term "red line." Zakharov stated that NATO's increased cooperation with Ukraine is the "de facto beginning of NATO's assimilation of [Ukraine's]

military infrastructure” to support NATO military operations against Russia. Zakharova reiterated that NATO must halt its eastward expansion to resolve the current situation.

- **Kremlin-sponsored media conducted a coordinated information campaign stating that military action is “highly likely” in Donbas and Crimea following Zelensky’s speech to the Ukrainian Parliament on December 1.**³²⁰ Peskov said that the “Kyiv regime is determined to use all opportunities, including force, to encroach on [Crimea],” on December 2.³²¹ Peskov stated that the likelihood of Ukrainian military activity in Donbas is “still high.”³²² Kremlin media that targets Western audiences is supporting this meme.³²³ A centralized intensified Kremlin information operation claiming Ukraine will attack Donbas or Crimea would indicate that Russian military operations in Donbas are likely imminent. The Kremlin has not elevated this meme to reach that threshold as of December 2.
- **Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said on December 1 that Russia knew about a claimed Ukrainian deployment of 125,000 troops near Donbas for a while.**³²⁴ Lavrov’s December 2 statement buttresses a meme about a claimed Ukrainian deployment of 125,000 troops to Donbas that first appeared in the Russian information space on December 1.³²⁵ Lavrov stated that Ukraine accumulated troops under the guise of seasonal troop rotation. Lavrov accused the West of concealing the Ukrainian troop movements.

December 1

- **Zakharova said that Ukraine undermined the Minsk Agreements by deploying 125,000 troops to Donbas on December 1.**³²⁶ Zakharova stated that NATO states are preparing to send military personnel to Ukraine and claimed that London intends to send 600 British servicemen to the “Ukrainian civil war.” Zakharova said Kyiv is using a bill passed in August to forcefully return Donbas to Ukraine and exit the Minsk Agreements. Zakharova said Western media created mass “hysteria” about a potential Russian invasion in a bid to cover Ukrainian military developments in the east.

November 30

- **The Russian Foreign Ministry (MFA) issued a rebuttal to NATO’s statement that NATO poses no threat to Russia on November 30.**³²⁷ The MFA said NATO threatens Russia because the alliance seeks to expand in Russia’s “eastern flank,” is “uncontrollably” expanding in Europe, and breaches treaties. The MFA said Russia is acting in a “purely defensive nature” against NATO’s purposeful provocations executed via “large-scale” and “unplanned” exercises in the Black Sea. The Kremlin will increase information pressure against NATO in tandem with Russia’s military buildup against Ukraine in winter 2021-2022.
- **Lavrov said the United States “surrounded” Russia with its military bases during a November 30 speech.**³²⁸ Lavrov said Russia observes daily Western troop and equipment deployments near Russia under the guise of being in response to Russian military exercises. Lavrov said NATO lied for 30 years about not expanding towards Russian borders. Lavrov said that the United States intervenes in other states’ domestic affairs under the guise of “spreading democracy,” refuses international cooperation, and disregards their obligations in the United Nations.

November 29

- **Kremlin-sponsored media mischaracterized an annual Ukrainian exercise authorization bill to claim Zelensky is violating the Minsk Agreements by allowing foreign troops to participate in training exercises in Ukraine in 2022.**³²⁹

Zelensky registered an annually recurring bill to authorize foreign military deployments to Ukraine for training exercises to Ukraine's Parliament on November 29.³³⁰ Russian media falsely framed Zelensky's bill as Ukrainian preparations to attack Donbas.³³¹

November 28

- **Peskov accused “Anglo-Saxon media” of driving false “hysteria” about a Russian attack against Ukraine on November 28.** Peskov said “this hysteria, which is now being whipped up in the Anglo-Saxon media, in the Ukrainian media and is supported by Ukrainian politicians headed by the head of state—we consider it absolutely unacceptable.”³³² Peskov said that accusations against Russia may be an attempt for Ukraine to conduct a military offensive against Donbas: “...we have already said that this escalation may be an attempt to hide [Ukraine's] own preparations for a military solution to the Donbas problem.”³³³
- **The LNR People's Militia claimed that Ukrainian Army forces entered the disengagement zone in Zolote, Luhansk, on November 28.** The LNR claimed that it observed two soldiers of Ukraine's 24th Mechanized Brigade inside former Ukrainian-held positions in the frontline village of Zolote.³³⁴ Zelensky ordered Ukrainian forces to withdraw from Zolote in November 2019 as part of an experimental disengagement.³³⁵ Ukrainian disengagement from Zolote (and two other frontline positions at Stanitsa Luhanska and Petrivske) was very likely a Kremlin condition for the December 2019 Normandy Format talk in Paris, France. Kremlin and Kremlin proxies have not claimed Ukrainian violations of Stanitsa Luhanska and Petrivske demilitarized zones as of November 28.

November 27

- **Russian propaganda is increasingly targeting the US and “US propaganda” about a Russian invasion in Ukraine.** Russian Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) Director Sergey Naryshkin said on November 27 that the United States is trying to inflame the conflict in Donbas by spreading false propaganda alleging a planned Russian invasion of Ukraine.³³⁶ “The [Americans'] goal is to try to push the poorly-controlled Kyiv authorities to rekindle the conflict...with renewed vigor.” Naryshkin continued to deny any Russian invasion plans. A central Russian information operation is pushing this meme. Naryshkin made this statement on Rossiya 1 (primetime tv news) and mainstream Kremlin outlets (*Sputnik*, *Izvestia*, *RIA Novosti*, *TASS*, and others) are recirculating it. This is likely the key narrative of the weekend for the Russian domestic information space. Conditioning Russian citizens to perceive all reports of a Russian invasion as being American propaganda is likely a key Kremlin information objective for the weekend of November 27-28.

November 26

- **Russia's representative to the OSCE, Alexander Lukashevich, accused Kyiv of conducting a disinformation operation about a Russian offensive to justify NATO's expansion in Ukraine and near Russian borders on November 26.** Lukashevich said Kyiv is spreading falsehoods about Russian aggression to “justify the current build-up of NATO's potential and activity near the Russian borders, to create the preconditions for the enhanced military development of the territory of Ukraine by the alliance, and finally to justify Kyiv's sabotage of the Minsk Agreements.”³³⁷

November 25

- **Zakharova focused on framing Kyiv as an increasingly belligerent aggressor in Donbas at the MFA briefing on November 25.** She said the Ukrainian government is fueling the situation in Donbas and “pushing for military (force) resolution of the conflict

inside of Ukraine,” as the Ukrainian government feels it can do so unpunished.³³⁸ Zakharova also talked about Ukraine increasingly using prohibited weapon systems in Donbas.

- **Lukashevich accused Ukraine of attacking freedom of speech in Ukraine on November 25.** Lukashevich cited the recent staff firings at the *Kyiv Post* and Zelensky’s ban of pro-Russian opposition media outlets in February 2021.³³⁹ This meme can support efforts to reinforce the narrative that Kyiv is targeting Russian entities.

November 24

- **Shoigu says Russia's nuclear capabilities and armed forces need to maintain combat readiness in light of the increased activity of NATO countries near Russia's borders.**³⁴⁰
- **Peskov says that Secretary of the Russian Security Council Nikolai Patrushev’s narrative on November 23 about Ukraine potentially facing a migration crisis was “well-reasoned.”**³⁴¹
- **Reserve Colonel Oleg Zhdanov said, “the United States is deliberately escalating tension around the situation on the Russian-Ukrainian border.”**³⁴²
- **Fyodor Lukyanov—a prominent Kremlin foreign policy thinker—published an article in which he almost says that if NATO does not give Putin a solid promise that Ukraine will not join NATO, there will be war similar to the Russia-Georgian war of 2008.**³⁴³

November 23:

- **Peskov said, “the lack of progress in the implementation of the Minsk Agreements is a significant irritant and trigger that leads to the level of tension in Europe as a whole,” on November 23.**³⁴⁴
- **Secretary of the Russian Security Council Nikolai Patrushev stated that Ukraine might face a refugee crisis.** He blamed the West for de facto establishing a protectorate in Ukraine and destroying Ukraine’s economy, and stated that “any moment the situation [in Ukraine] can explode and millions of refugees will run to seek shelter in other places.”³⁴⁵
- **Shoigu stated that the US Global Thunder-22 exercises included ten strategic nuclear bombers postured against Russia.**³⁴⁶ The Pentagon responded on November 24 and said, “These missions were announced publicly at the time, and closely planned with [Strategic Command], [European Command], allies, and partners to ensure maximum training and integration opportunities as well as compliance with all national and international requirements and protocols.”
- **Chairman of the State Duma Defense Committee Andrei Kartapolov announced the risk of a repeat of the Afghan scenario in Ukraine.** Kartapolov said “All US efforts to ‘help’ Ukraine are leading it to an abyss.” Kartapolov urged people to recall “how the American adventure in Afghanistan ended.”³⁴⁷

November 22:

- **The press bureau of Russia’s Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) issued a statement claiming that Washington is spreading false information about**

Russian preparations for an attack against Ukraine. “The provocative policy of the United States and the European Union, which deliberately strengthens Kyiv’s sense of permissiveness and impunity, is of extreme concern. We observed a similar situation in Georgia on the eve of the 2008 events.”³⁴⁸

Updates on Key States’ Activities

Russia

The Russian Foreign Ministry (MFA) threatened that Russia will take “military-technical measures” in a published response to the US and NATO response to Russian security demands in Europe on February 17.³⁴⁹ The 11-page document states that the US did not give a “constructive response” to the basic elements of the Russian draft treaty: a moratorium on NATO expansion, a revocation of the 2008 NATO Bucharest Summit Declaration that Ukraine and Georgia are eligible to become NATO members, a moratorium on establishing military bases on the territory of former Soviet and current non-NATO states, not deploying strike weapons near Russia, and rolling back NATO to its 1997 posture when the Russia-NATO Founding Act was signed. The document states that the US and NATO continue to ignore Russia’s “red lines and core security interests” and Russia’s “sovereign right to protect them.” The document states that Western demands to withdraw troops from “Russian territory” and threats of sanctions are “unacceptable and undermine the prospects for reaching real agreements.” The document states that US unwillingness to provide legally binding guarantees will “force Russia” to respond, “including through the implementation of [unspecified] military-technical measures.” The document states that the US did not confirm commitment to observing the “immutable principle of the indivisibility of security.” The document states that Washington is unwilling to “abandon its counterproductive and destabilizing course of creating advantages for itself and its allies at the expense of Russia’s security interests.” The document states that NATO’s “Open Door” policy runs contrary to NATO states’ “basic commitments” in the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe to not “strengthen one’s security at the expense of the security of others.” The document called on the US and NATO to “return to fulfilling their international obligations in the field of maintaining peace and security.” The document reiterates that the Kremlin “expects concrete proposals” from NATO members on the “forms of legal consolidation” to renounce further NATO expansion. The document states that Washington’s proposals on arms control and risk reduction measures, while desirable, will not be sustainable in the long run “even if they can be agreed upon” because NATO refuses to stop actions that undermines Russia’s security. The document states that Russia continues to advocate an “integrated approach to strategic issues” and that the Kremlin proposes to engage in the joint development of a new “safety equation.” The document reiterates that de-escalating the situation in Ukraine necessitates “forcing Kyiv to comply” with the Minsk II Accords, withdrawing all Western military instructors and advisors from Ukraine, ceasing all NATO exercises with Ukraine, and withdrawing all foreign weapons from Ukrainian territory.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov met with Italian Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio on February 17.³⁵⁰ Lavrov said that the West is trying to place all the blame for the war in Ukraine on Russia and reiterated that Ukraine must implement the Minsk II Accords “in strict accordance with the way they were approved by the United Nations Security Council.” Lavrov expressed hope that Italy would not support new European Union sanctions against Russia but instead continue “the traditions of Italian diplomacy... not to threaten constantly, not to announce any punishments, but to look for agreements.” Lavrov also reiterated that

Russia and the West will not “resolve anything” until they agree on “key positions on which security in Europe depends: non-expansion of NATO to the east, non-deployment of strike weapons, respect for the military-political configuration in Europe that existed at the time of the signing of the Russia-NATO Founding Act [in 1997].”

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov accused the West of intentionally fueling tensions and stated that “Russia will decide how and by what means it will ensure its security” on February 17.³⁵¹ Lavrov called NATO’s “Open Door” policy towards Ukraine “arrogant” and criticized NATO and European Union interventions in “neutral” European countries. Lavrov also stated that deescalating tensions around Ukraine depends on the West, not Russia. Lavrov accused the West of intentionally manipulating the Minsk II Accords to vilify Russia.

Kremlin Spokesman Dmitry Peskov held a press conference to discuss Russian national security interests on February 17.³⁵² Peskov decried reports of shelling between the Ukrainian Armed Forces and Kremlin proxy militias, adding that any form of escalation risks igniting a wider conflict. Peskov stated that Moscow remains open to the possibility of diplomacy and encouraged NATO leaders to revisit their position on Russian security guarantees. Peskov criticized French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian for leaking details of the phone conversation between Russian President Vladimir Putin and French President Emmanuel Macron on the proposed recognition of the Donetsk People’s Republic and Luhansk People’s Republic, arguing that such distortions are dangerous.

Russian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova stated that White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki does not know the true death toll of civilians in Donbas and urged Psaki not to speculate on February 17.³⁵³ Zakharova responded to Psaki’s statement that Russian statements on discovering mass graves in eastern Ukraine are misinformation. Zakharova deemed Psaki arrogant and presented photos of tombstones of those that she alleged the Ukrainian Armed Forces killed as evidence supporting Russian claims.

The Kremlin claimed that Ukrainians are committing genocide against Donbas residents in a report to the United Nations (UN) Security Council on February 17.³⁵⁴ The Russian report mischaracterized Russian-backed separatist shelling against Ukrainian forces as Ukrainian shelling against Luhansk Oblast schools, and alleged the attacks are a component of a wider genocide against ethnic Russians in Donbas. The Russian report to the UN and the continued mischaracterization of Ukrainian violence in Donbas are components of wider Russian information campaigns that Russia will likely use to justify offensive activity if it decides to launch an offensive.

The Kremlin expelled US Deputy Ambassador Bartle Gorman from Moscow on February 17.³⁵⁵ Russian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova said that Russia expelled Gorman in retaliation for the US expulsion of an unnamed diplomat and the September 2021 US demand that 55 Russian diplomats leave the United States in 2022. Zakharova claimed that this “visa war” is not Russia’s fault. US Embassy Spokesperson Jason Rebholz said that Gorman had a valid Russian visa and had been in the country for less than three years, referring to a previous Russian policy of forcing US diplomats to stay in Russia no longer than three years. A US State Department spokesperson stated that the US considers the expulsion an unprovoked and escalatory step.

The Russian Defense Ministry (MoD) said that it is redeploying Southern Military District (SMD) elements from Crimea to the Caucasus in multiple separate readouts on February 17.³⁵⁶ MoD Spokesperson Major-General Igor Konashenkov said that unspecified SMD elements are redeploying to their permanent bases in Chechnya and Dagestan, and 1st Tank Army elements are moving to their permanent deployment in Nizhny Novgorod Oblast. The MoD reported that the redeploying SMD elements have exited Crimea through rail and road checkpoints along the Kerch Strait. The Kremlin claims these troop withdrawals reaffirm its assertions of Western hysteria over the Russian military buildup near Ukraine. US and NATO stated say that despite these Russian claims, there are no indications that Russia is decreasing its force presence along the border with Ukraine.

The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) said that it redeployed unspecified elements of a Western Military District (WMD) logistic support brigade to an unspecified location on February 17.³⁵⁷ The MoD stated that these WMD support elements travelled over 900 kilometers from an unspecified training ground where they were previously conducting regular winter exercises. The Kremlin claims that these troop withdrawals indicate its lack of aggressive intent against Ukraine.

Twenty ships of the Caspian Flotilla deployed from their base in Makhachkala to exercise areas in the Caspian Sea to conduct command and staff exercises on February 17.³⁵⁸ The ships will conduct anti-mine exercises during their transit. Unspecified naval tactical groups will conduct air defense and naval combat, and naval rocket and artillery.

Regiment-sized artillery elements of the 49th Combined Arms Army conducted artillery fire exercises at the Molokino Training Ground in Krasnodar on February 17.³⁵⁹

Unspecified Russian Southern Military District special forces elements conducted exercises to covertly deploy special forces personnel behind enemy lines using Mi-8 helicopters at the Kadamovsky Training Ground in Rostov on February 17.³⁶⁰

Russian Permanent Representative to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Alexander Lukashevich chastised Western claims about a Russian attack against Ukraine that did not occur on February 16.³⁶¹ Lukashevich said that the West changed its narratives about the Russian invasion of Ukraine and that the West falsely accused Russia of planning to attack Ukraine. Lukashevich additionally said that Ukraine has fallen under the control of Western “external management” who have militarized Ukraine instead of encouraging Ukraine to implement the Minsk II Accords. Lukashevich said that the West and Ukrainian nationalists have undermined Ukraine’s sovereignty; Lukashevich claimed that Ukrainian “nationalist battalions” did not allow Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky to withdraw forces from eastern Ukraine in November 2019. Lukashevich called on the West to stop “fostering ideas of aggressive nationalism in Ukraine” and reiterated that Ukraine implementing the Minsk II Accords is “the only way to peacefully, politically, and diplomatically resolve the conflict.”

Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov claimed that there is a “high probability” that Ukraine will attempt to forcefully resolve the Donbas conflict on February 16.³⁶² Peskov said that the Kremlin is concerned about a “dangerous concentration of Ukrainian troops” near the line of contact in Donbas, which suggests that a Ukrainian offensive

is “quite likely.” Peskov that the whole world is witnessing Ukraine starting a civil war within its borders. Peskov added that there is a “high level of danger” for a Ukrainian attack on Donbas despite weeks of intensive international negotiations on de-escalation – likely implying that Ukrainian offensive plans led to diplomatic dialogue. Peskov also denied Russia’s involvement in the large-scale DDoS cyberattack on Ukrainian government websites, banks, and media monitoring non-profit organizations on February 15.³⁶³ Peskov stated that Russian President Vladimir Putin reviewed the bill on recognizing the Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics (DNR and LNR).³⁶⁴ Peskov stated that Russia’s recognition of the DNR and LNR “does not correlate with the Minsk agreements,” noting that Putin’s main task is to resolve the Donbas crisis through “the implementation of the Minsk [II Accords].” Peskov stated that Putin has a “very contradictory” opinion on Kyiv’s readiness to implement the Minsk II Accords because Ukrainian leadership claims commitment to the agreements, while fearing that its implementation “will mean the collapse of Ukraine.”³⁶⁵ Peskov claimed that Kyiv continuously evades implementing its obligations. Peskov emphasized that the distribution of Russian passports in Donbas does not violate the Minsk II Accords because “citizens of the self-proclaimed republics experience extreme social problems to the fact that they are rejected by their homeland.”³⁶⁶ Peskov concluded that the Kremlin issues Russian passports “for humanitarian reasons” to provide the DNR and LNR with social and financial services. Peskov criticized US President Joe Biden’s appeal to Russia, claiming that Russians would be more likely to believe the US if the speech did not contain sanction threats.³⁶⁷ Peskov added that Biden should have called on Ukrainians to “not shoot at each other.” Peskov added that Putin will not respond to Biden’s speech. Peskov noted that the Kremlin welcomes Biden’s readiness to “start serious negotiations” with Russia and stated that such dialogue would “require flexibility from both sides,” political will, and demonstration of real commitment.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov stressed the “unacceptability of Western actions leading to accelerated militarization” in Ukraine to Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu on February 16.³⁶⁸ Lavrov warned that Western military-technical cooperation with Ukraine may lead to dangerous developments in Donbas. Lavrov noted the lack of an alternative framework to the Minsk II Accords, the Normandy Four format, and Trilateral Contact Group if Ukraine does not strictly comply with its existing agreements in the Minsk II Accords. Lavrov called on Turkey to contribute to the development of a “constructive and responsible response to Russian proposals” and informed Cavusoglu of Russian initiatives to ensure long-term legal security guarantees in Europe.

Russian Security Council Deputy Secretary Mikhail Popov accused the West of conducting “hybrid war” against Russia on February 16.³⁶⁹ Popov claimed that the US conducted a similar information operation ahead of the US 2003 invasion of Iraq by exaggerating Iraq’s possession of weapons of mass destruction. Popov added that European Union (EU) states “will be bound by responsibility” for increasing weapons and ammunition transfers to Ukraine under US guidance. Popov claimed that Ukraine’s Armed Forces, mercenaries, and nationalist formations will “very likely” use EU military aid in “provocations against the Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics (DNR and LNR). Popov accused the US of attempting to “limit the scope of planned operational and combat training of the Russian Armed Forces, as well as to control any movements of [Russian] troops on [Russian] national territory.” Popov stated that the US demanded to deploy its troops to Western Europe to “tighten [US] control” over Europe with an expanded military presence. Popov claimed that the US uses hybrid warfare against Russia to divert attention from US domestic problems and revive the US’ “rapidly lost world domination.” Popov stated that Russia is waiting to see what security conditions will change during the NATO summit in Madrid scheduled for June 2022.

The Young Guard of the United Russia Party (MGER) – a Kremlin-led youth direct-action political group – signed cooperation agreements with Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics’ (DNR and LNR) public youth organizations on February 16.³⁷⁰ Over 9,000 activists of the DNR “Young Republic” and LNR “Young Guard” will participate in Kremlin-approved political activism with MGER members. A “Young Republic” representative claimed that DNR and LNR activists will have the same advocacy rights as MGER members. MGER claimed that DNR and LNR residents’ participation in Russian State Duma elections in September 2021 enabled this cooperation.

Kremlin newspaper *Izvestia* reported that its sources in the Russian Ministry of Defense stated that elements of Russia’s 3rd, 42nd and 150th motorized rifle divisions began redeploying to permanent bases after completing exercises on February 16.³⁷¹ The 3rd Motorized Rifle Division is default postured against Ukraine from its permanent bases in Boguchar and Valuyki. The 150th Motorized Rifle Division is also postured against Ukraine from its permanent bases in Rostov. The 42nd Motorized Rifle Division’s permanent bases are in Chechnya. This reported redeployment is only a genuine withdrawal from Ukraine for the elements of the 42nd Motorized Rifle Division if the redeployment to its home bases even occurs at all.

Russian Baltic Fleet air defense elements conducted air defense exercises with S-400 air defense systems in an unspecified location on February 16.³⁷² Pilots of unspecified naval aviation helicopters, Su-27, Su-24, and Su-30 aircraft simulated air targets for S-400 crews.

The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) stated that Southern Military District elements began redeploying from Crimea to permanent bases in Stavropol on February 16.³⁷³ The Russian MoD also stated that unspecified Southern Military District logistics, tank, motorized rifle, and artillery elements, likely of the 58th Combined Arms Army but possibly other formations, began redeploying to permanent bases in Dagestan, North Ossetia, and other unspecified locations. Imagery observed elements of Russia’s 291st Motorized Rifle Regiment redeploy from Crimea to mainland Russia.³⁷⁴ The Russian MoD stated that it would service and prepare these elements for the “next stage of combat training.”³⁷⁵

The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) stated that unspecified Western Military District tank elements began redeploying to permanent bases after finishing exercises on February 16.³⁷⁶ The Russian MoD stated that it would service and prepare these elements for the “next stage of combat training.” The Russian MoD did not provide any additional details. It is unclear whether this statement applied to 1st Tank Army elements that deployed closer to Ukraine in Belgorod or Voronezh or to different elements.

Russian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova denied Ukraine’s accusations of “unusual” Russian military activities near the border with Ukraine on February 15.³⁷⁷ Ukraine requested that the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) investigate Russian military activity near the Ukrainian border under the framework of the OSCE Vienna Document of 2011. Zakharova accused Ukrainian Armed Forces of engaging in “unusual activity” but stated that Russia complied with the request due to its “commitment to openness in the military field.”

The Russian Foreign Ministry-sponsored World Coordinating Council of Russian Compatriots discussed efforts to protect the rights of Russian citizens and promote Russian unity around the world on February 15.³⁷⁸ The World Council of Russian Compatriots committed to promoting public diplomacy and engaging with Russian diaspora youth to preserve the Russian language and culture. The participants also stated that economic cooperation and patronage will strengthen Russian unity.

Two Russian Black Sea Fleet anti-submarine ships conducted air defense exercises in the Black Sea on February 15.³⁷⁹

Russian President Vladimir Putin responded to the Russian State Duma’s appeal to immediately recognize the Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics (DNR and LNR) on February 15.³⁸⁰ Putin stated that the Kremlin “must do everything to solve the problems in Donbas” but first see whether Germany and France can influence Kyiv to implement the Minsk II Accords. Putin stated that Kyiv refused to comply with the Minsk II Accords and has made no progress on constitutional reform, amnesty for proxy fighters, local elections, or granting Donbas more legal autonomy. Putin added that the Kyiv has not adopted German proposals on how to implement the Minsk II Accords via a Kremlin-amenable process. Putin accused the Ukrainian government of ignoring opportunities for a peaceful dialogue, “massively and systematically” violating human rights, and institutionalizing discrimination against the Russian-speaking population. Putin reiterated that “what is happening in Donbas today is genocide.”

The Russian State Duma sent an appeal to Russian President Vladimir Putin to recognize the Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics (DNR and LNR) on February 15.³⁸¹ 351 Russian MPs supported this resolution. Duma Speaker Vyacheslav Volodin stated that the Duma will immediately send Putin the bill, which Volodin claims seeks to offer Russian citizens and compatriots in Donbas “help and support.” Volodin noted that “recognition of the DNR and LNR will create grounds for ensuring security guarantees and protecting the inhabitants of the republics from external threats, as well as for strengthening international peace and regional stability.” Volodin added that the DNR and LNR can begin the process for international recognition after Russia recognizes them.

Russian President Vladimir Putin and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz discussed Russia’s security demands and military buildup near Ukraine in Moscow on February 15.³⁸² Scholz stated that Ukraine’s membership in NATO is not on anyone’s agenda and that “everyone knows this for sure” during a joint press conference with Putin. Scholz also noted that the West has different positions on NATO expansion and Russian security concerns. Scholz said that “it is unacceptable that there may be a military dispute about an issue that is not on the agenda” in a separate press conference to German language media.³⁸³ This statement indicates a risk that Germany may unilaterally make concessions on not allowing Ukraine into NATO. Scholz additionally said that Russian recognition of the Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics would be “a political catastrophe” for the Minsk II Accords. Scholz added that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky promised that the Trilateral Contact Group will discuss all Kremlin-demanded provisions on Kyiv granting Donbas more legal autonomy, amending the Ukrainian Constitution, and preparing to conduct local elections in Donbas. Putin and Scholz agreed to further discuss the issue of the German government banning Russian TV channel *RT* in Germany and the Kremlin banning German outlet *Deutsche Welle* in Russia. Putin emphasized the significance of Russia’s and Germany’s close economic and energy relations and claimed that the Nord Stream 2 pipeline “is a purely commercial

project, and there are no politics and no political undertones here.” Putin stated that gas transit through Ukraine will continue even after 2024 if there is European demand and profit. Putin stated that Germans should thank the Nord Stream-1 gas pipeline for cheap energy prices.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov announced that he sent individual messages to Western states’ foreign ministers asking them to clarify their positions on Russia’s security demands during his meeting with Organization for Security and Cooperation Organization (OSCE) Chairman-in-Office and Polish Foreign Minister Zbigniew Rau on February 15.³⁸⁴ Lavrov stated that his messages call on the US, Canada, and European foreign ministers to clarify questions surrounding OSCE principle on the “indivisibility of security.”³⁸⁵ Lavrov accused the West of ignoring its obligation in the Astana and Istanbul Declarations to consider the evolution of the security situation in Europe when the West expanded NATO. Lavrov noted that Western states must answer why they are violating the principle of the indivisibility of security before it is possible to jointly reduce tensions and strengthen European security for all.

Lavrov reiterated that the Kremlin sees “no alternative to the full and consistent implementation” of the Minsk II Accords and reiterated the Kremlin’s goal to establish direct dialogue between Kyiv and Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics (DNR and LNR). Lavrov called on the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission (OSCE SMM) in Ukraine to improve its monitoring of human rights and freedom of the press violation throughout all Ukrainian regions. Lavrov specified that OSCE SMM cannot ignore “screaming facts that speak of rampant aggressive nationalism, neo-Nazism, and numerous facts of discrimination against the Russian-speaking population” in Ukraine. Lavrov also claimed that the OSCE SMM is undergoing a personnel rotation but feared that the US and NATO may use the withdrawal of its staff in the OSCE SMM to initiate aggression in Donbas. Lavrov compared the situation in Donbas to the situation in Kosovo during the Balkan wars in the 1990s, claiming that the death of an American citizen in Kosovo led to the withdrawal of the entire OSCE mission in Kosovo and opened the door to “NATO aggression against former Yugoslavia.”

Lavrov said that Russian President Vladimir Putin noted that Russia’s responses to the US and NATO are almost ready for distribution. Lavrov stated that “many would have a sigh of relief” if Ukraine abandoned its NATO accession aspirations.³⁸⁶ Lavrov stated that he found Rau’s proposal to hold informal “Renewed Dialogue on Security” talks in the OSCE “interesting” but expressed concerns that the format will not resolve Russia’s security concerns. Lavrov accused the West of refusing to structure the OSCE with an international legal framework, which would give the OSCE dialogue additional leverage.

Unidentified hackers conducted a distributed denial of service (DDoS) cyberattack against the website of the Ukrainian Defense Ministry, Ukrainian banks, and Ukrainian non-profit organizations on February 15.³⁸⁷ Unidentified hackers temporarily disabled the websites of Ukraine’s Culture and Information Policy Ministry, Ministry of Defense, and Foreign Ministry. The attack disrupted internet banking services for PrivatBank and Oshadbank. Hackers also disrupted Ukrainian news monitoring organizations that monitor Russian hybrid war threats, including *StopFake*, the *Ukrainian Crisis Media Center*, *VoxCheck*, *Detector Media*, and the *Institute of Mass Information*. The Ukrainian Center for Strategic Communications and Information Safety – a Ukrainian government entity – reported that the hackers may have resorted to petty mischief tactics because the attack did not result in large consequences.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken discussed matters on the US anticipating Russia's written responses to the US and NATO responses to Russia's security demands on February 15.³⁸⁸ Lavrov stated that the US will receive a Russian response within the coming days and warned against Western "aggressive rhetoric." Lavrov welcomed "pragmatic dialogue on the entire range of issues raised by Russia." Blinken reiterated concerns that "Russia has the capacity to launch an invasion of Ukraine at any moment" and emphasized the need for de-escalation.

Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov stated that Russian President Vladimir Putin did not make any official decisions regarding the bill on recognizing the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics on February 15.³⁸⁹ Peskov stated that Russia is committed to the implementation of the Minsk II Accords despite overwhelming public concern for the wellbeing of Donbas residents. Peskov claimed that Putin is "ready for negotiations" with the West on Russian security demands.³⁹⁰ Peskov ridiculed Western reports claiming to know the exact date of a Russian invasion of Ukraine, claiming that Putin "sometimes even jokes – asking to know if the exact time in hours when the war will start."³⁹¹ Peskov claimed that Western reports about potential Russian aggression are "a manic informational madness."

Russian Permanent Representative to the European Union Vladimir Chizhov said Russia that "will not invade Ukraine unless we are provoked to do that" on February 15.³⁹² Chizhov added that "if Ukrainians launch an attack against Russia, you should not be surprised if we counterattack." Chizhov claimed that a Russian counterattack would follow if Ukrainians "start blatantly killing Russian citizens anywhere – Donbas or wherever" by staging an incident or a provocation against Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics (DNR and LNR). Chizhov dismissed Western concerns about a Russian invasion claiming that Russia previously conducted the large-scale military exercise "Zapad-2021" in Belarus without significant Western alarmism.

Russian State Duma Chairman for the Committee on Labor, Social Policy, and Veterans Yaroslav Nilov claimed that recognizing the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics (DNR and LNR) would not impact Russian salaries on February 15.³⁹³ Nilov responded to Russian Communist Kazbek Taysaev's concern that Russians will experience pay cuts to support Donbas. New People Party MP Anton Tkachev also claimed that Russians might not be ready to give up their salaries and food "for the sake of the unobvious prospects for recognizing the DNR and LNR." Nilov claimed that Russia should provide aid to Russian citizens in Donbas because they cannot "be deprived of any measures of social support," which is "independent" from Russian incomes. Russian Communist Party Leader Gennady Zyuganov refused to comment on Taysaev's concern, stating that it is "necessary to stop this massacre, this big fight, and war" in Donbas.³⁹⁴ Zyuganov also urged Tkachev to consider that Russians should not worry about their "refrigerators" when "thousands of people are dying" in Donbas.

Russian First Deputy Chairman of the State Duma Committee on Commonwealth of Independent States Affairs Viktor Volodarskiy claimed that there are 870,000 Russian citizens and four million Russian "compatriots" in the Luhansk and Donetsk People's Republics on February 15.³⁹⁵

The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) stated that elements of the western and southern military districts began redeploying to permanent garrisons after

completing exercises on February 15.³⁹⁶ The MoD stated that although Russian forces are continuing large-scale for operational training across Russia, some Russian elements have completed their exercises and are redeploying to home garrisons. The Southern Military District (SMD) specifically stated that SMD units, including elements from the Russian North Caucasus that deployed to Crimea, began redeploying to permanent garrisons on February 15. Russia issued similar statements in December 2021 that did not result in Russia relaxing its force posture around Ukraine.³⁹⁷ Russia likely still has not decreased its force posture around Ukraine as of February 15. NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg and US President Joe Biden stated that NATO did not observe Russian force redeployments on February 15.

Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu visited the Russian naval base in Tartus, Syria, to preside over Russian naval exercises in the Mediterranean Sea on February 15.³⁹⁸

The Russian Black Sea Fleet conducted exercises to destroy a mock submarine with naval artillery in the Black Sea on February 15.³⁹⁹

Unspecified Russian Western Military District electronic warfare elements conducted training on protecting military convoys from drone and radio-controlled improvised explosive device threats on February 15.⁴⁰⁰

Unspecified air defense elements of the Western Military District conducted exercises with man-portable air-defense systems to protect convoys from air attack in Nizhny Novgorod on February 15.⁴⁰¹ The air defense elements may have covered elements of the 1st Tank Army.

Approximately 20 Russian Mi-25 and Mi-8 helicopters conducted night flight exercises in Stavropol on February 15.⁴⁰²

Unspecified battalion-sized sapper elements (500 personnel) of the Southern Military District began demining training at the Molokino Training Ground in Krasnodar on February 15.⁴⁰³

The Russian Ministry of Defense stated that over 50 fixed wing aircraft of the Southern Military District deployed to unspecified operational airfields to perform joint tasks with Black Sea Fleet naval aviation on February 15.⁴⁰⁴ Pilots of Southern Military District Su-27SM, Su-30SM, Su-24M, and Su-34 aircraft will escort Black Sea Fleet naval strike groups and assist in reconnaissance and airstrike tasks.

Unspecified 22nd Army Corps rocket artillery elements conducted counter-battery fire exercises with multiple launch rocket systems at the Opuk Training Ground in Crimea on February 15.⁴⁰⁵

Multiple motorized rifle battalion tactical groups (1,500 personnel), likely of the 49th Combined Arms Army, deployed to the Tsabal Training Ground on February 15.⁴⁰⁶ The Russian Ministry of Defense stated that the purpose of this activity is to test Southern Military District motorized rifle units' readiness and improve their combat coordination

Battalion-sized airborne infantry elements (500 personnel) of the 98th Airborne Division conducted airborne landing exercises in Kostroma Oblast on February 14.⁴⁰⁷

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and United Nations (UN) Secretary-General Antonio Guterres discussed ongoing talks with NATO and Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) member states about Russia's security demands on February 14.⁴⁰⁸ Lavrov and Guterres stated they share continued commitment to UN-Russia cooperation as the Russian Federation assumes the UN Security Council Presidency in February 2022. Lavrov also accused the US of violating the United Nations Headquarters Agreement by not issuing visas to Russian UN General Assembly delegation members.

Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov claimed that there are “large-scale movements of Ukrainian Armed Forces” in Donbas on February 14.⁴⁰⁹ Peskov claimed that various Ukrainian units deployed to the border zones of the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics, leading to “a significant escalation of the situation.” Peskov's statement is an inflection in Kremlin information operations pushing the narrative of a Ukrainian invasion of Donbas, given Peskov's seniority and influence in Kremlin messaging.

Kremlin Spokesman Dmitry Peskov said that a Ukrainian renunciation of its NATO aspirations would be a step towards a “meaningful response” to Russian security concerns on February 14.⁴¹⁰ Russian media misrepresented Ukrainian Ambassador to the United Nations Vadym Prystaiko's remarks on NATO to the BBC on February 13 as an indication of Ukraine's willingness to deter Russian aggression by abandoning its efforts to join NATO. Prystaiko clarified later on February 14 that Ukraine is not shifting its bid to become a NATO member seeks to strengthen bilateral relations with NATO states to accomplish its short-term deterrence aims.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov told Russian President Vladimir that US and NATO responses to Russia's security demands have been “unsatisfactory” yet suggested Russian diplomatic efforts to resolve the Ukrainian crisis “continue and increase” in a staged meeting broadcast on Russian primetime TV on February 14.⁴¹¹ Lavrov noted that the West ignored Russia's requests for a mutual moratorium on deploying intermediate-range and shorter-range missiles and a guarantee that NATO cease military exercises at its point of contact with Russia. Lavrov also criticized the West's fixation on de-escalating the situation in Ukraine as overlooking the threat that NATO states may soon unfairly dominate the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. Lavrov noted that Russia's initiatives since December 2021 have “shaken up” the Western states that have recently demonstrated an interest in security negotiations.

Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu reported to Russian President Vladimir Putin about the expulsion of a foreign submarine from Russian waters on February 14.⁴¹² Shoigu claimed that Russia's Pacific Fleet uncovered a likely US submarine during Russian naval exercises near Urup Island, in the Kuril Islands. Shoigu added that the submarine breached Russian territorial waters at the depth of four kilometers. Shoigu claimed that the expulsion took three hours. Kremlin-sponsored media claimed that a US Virginia-class class submarine previously entered Russian territorial waters near Kuril Islands on February 12 and ignored Russian requests to leave.⁴¹³ Russian media added that Pacific Fleet's frigate *Marshal Shaposhnikov* scared off the US submarine with unspecified “special measures.”

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said that the US response to Russia's security demands cannot "satisfy" the Kremlin because it ignored the Kremlin's key demands on February 14.⁴¹⁴ Lavrov reiterated Russia's demands are to secure NATO's non-expansion, non-deployment of strike weapons near Russia, and the reinstatement of NATO's 1997 borders.

Russian State Duma Speaker Vyacheslav Volodin said on February 14 that Duma will hold a "rating vote" on February 15 to determine which of two draft resolutions appealing to Russian President Vladimir Putin Chamber to formally recognize Russia's Donbas proxy republics.⁴¹⁵ Volodin said that the first version of the resolution proposed by the Russian Communist Party would be immediately submitted to Putin if passed. The second version, submitted by the ruling United Russia Party on February 14, calls on the Russian Foreign Ministry and other government agencies to provide feedback before sending the bill to Putin. The Duma Committee on Commonwealth of Independent States supported both versions of the resolution on February 14. The Duma, dominated by the ruling United Russia party, will almost certainly win the rating vote. Volodin said that the bill is extremely important, claiming that "Washington is escalating tensions, supplying weapons to Ukraine with European countries, while Kyiv continues to not comply with the Minsk agreements." Volodin added that Western support for Ukrainian provocations "poses threats and risks to the lives of [Russian] citizens and compatriots living in the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics." Neither bill would bind Putin to formally recognize the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics (DNR and LNR), but the Kremlin may intend to use recognition of the DNR and LNR as a pretext for the deployment of Russian forces to occupied Donbas.

Russian political parties expressed lack of a consensus on the appeal for an immediate consideration of the Donbas proxy republics as of February 14.⁴¹⁶ Fair Russia – For Truth Party (SRZP) Head Sergey Mironov announced that SRZP will advocate for the immediate consideration of the bill by Russian President Vladimir Putin's Chamber. The Russian Liberal Democrat Party (LDPR) announced that LDPR has not yet decided on a position regarding the appeal but would strongly support feedback on the bill from the Russian Foreign Ministry. Russian Communist Party Leader Gennady Zyuganov and the author of the bill said he supports additional consultations with Russian Foreign Ministry ahead of Putin's decision.⁴¹⁷ Zyuganov added that he would not want the Kremlin "to be late" in its decision as the US and the UK prepare the conflict and armies in Donbas to weaken Russia and the European Union. Zyuganov said that Russia "needs to throw a match to rumble [in Donbas]" and prevent Anglo-Saxon conflict.

Russian Black Sea Fleet naval aviation and anti-submarine ships conducted exercises to track a mock enemy submarine in the Black Sea on February 14.⁴¹⁸

Russian social media users observed a field hospital deploying through or to Belgorod on February 14.⁴¹⁹

The Russian Ministry of Defense announced that unspecified Western Military District air defense elements will conduct electronic fire training with S-400 air defense systems against air attacks in Leningrad on February 14.⁴²⁰

Brigade-sized (2,500 personnel) engineering and sapper elements of the Western Military District began large-scale field exercises at multiple unspecified training

grounds on February 14.⁴²¹ The Russian Ministry of Defense stated that these exercises are part of the standard winter training period and that the exercises will last until mid-March 2022.

Battalion-sized artillery elements (500 personnel) of the Western Military District conducted mortar fire exercises in Ryazan on February 14.⁴²²

Battalion-sized tank elements (over 500 personnel) of the 6th Combined Arms Army conducted maneuver and fire exercises in an unspecified location in Leningrad Oblast on February 14.⁴²³

Unspecified battalion-sized special forces elements (over 300 personnel) of the Southern Military District in Krasnodar deployed to an unspecified training ground for exercises on February 14.⁴²⁴

Unspecified battalion-sized motorized rifle elements (800 personnel) conducted company-level combined arms exercises in Karachay-Cherkessia and Stavropol on February 14.⁴²⁵ Commanders of reinforced companies conducted exercises to manage organic and attached units and manage reconnaissance and fire support elements in cooperation with army aviation and likely Russian Aerospace Forces attack aircraft. Mi-8 army aviation helicopters and Su-25SM3 attack aircraft of the 4th Air Force and Air Defense Army of the Southern Military District completed combat training tasks in a unified plan with commanders of unspecified “tactical groups of a motorized rifle formation” at the Kobu-Bashi and Nikolo-Aleksandrovsky training grounds.

Multiple reinforced companies of battalion tactical groups of multiple unspecified Southern Military District (SMD) combined arms armies, the Caspian Flotilla, and 22nd Army Corps began conducting “vertical envelopment exercises” (heliborne landings behind enemy positions) with motorized rifle elements and over 30 transport and assault helicopters in multiple locations across the SMD on February 14.⁴²⁶ These exercises occurred in multiple unspecified combined arms training grounds in Volgograd, Stavropol, Adygea, Chechnya, Dagestan, Karachay-Cherkessia, North Ossetia, Ingushetia, South Ossetia, and Abkhazia.

Open-source intelligence satellite imagery analysts observed that Russian forces previously deployed to multiple storage camps near Ukraine in Yelnya, Pogonovo, Rechytsa, Klinty, and Soloti began leaving those camps around February 14.⁴²⁷ Russian social media users observed likely 1st Tank Army elements in Pogonovo redeploy to Soloti, Belgorod, around February 12. Russian social media users observed likely 1st Tank Army elements in Kursk around February 5.⁴²⁸ Russian elements may be congregating in multiple assembly areas near Ukraine ahead of an offensive.

Kremlin-run news agency *Izvestia* reported on February 14 that unspecified operational detachments of the Russian Caspian Flotilla will deploy to the Black Sea.⁴²⁹ *Izvestia* did not specify the number of Caspian Flotilla ships or personnel deployed to the Black Sea. The readout states that the Caspian Flotilla ships are armed with “Caliber” cruise and “Onyx” hypersonic missiles and will strengthen the Russian Navy operational groups already in the Black Sea.

Unspecified coastal defense elements of the 22nd Army Corps conducted anti-tank exercises with anti-tank guided missiles in Crimea on February 14.⁴³⁰

Unspecified coastal defense mortar batteries of the 22nd Army Corps conducted fire support exercises with reconnaissance and signals elements at the Opuk Training Ground in Crimea on February 14.⁴³¹

Likely elements of the 1st Tank Army were observed deploying through Lipetsk Oblast by rail on February 13.⁴³² 1st Tank elements could be going from Moscow or Nizhny Novgorod towards Belgorod.

The Russian Ministry of Defense announced on February 13 that Russia's Strategic Rocket Forces completed a "month of rallying," including preparations for upcoming trainings, supporting new conscripts' adjustments to military service, and unifying combat units in field positions.⁴³³ Commanders of the Strategic Rocket Forces used the preparatory training period to provide new conscripts individual assignments and relay legal information relevant to their duties. Unit commanders will provide instructional, methodological, and practical training to conscripts to ensure law, order, and discipline in the military community throughout the month of February. This activity is likely preparation for Russia's nuclear triad strategic command and staff exercises, Grom 2022, which Russia reportedly will conduct in early 2022. The Grom nuclear readiness exercises in early 2022 could help obfuscate an actual Russian nuclear forces mobilization in the event of a Russian military operation against Ukraine.

Satellite imagery observed 50 Russian helicopters at an abandoned airbase near Novoozerne, Crimea, on February 13.⁴³⁴

Russian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova stated that "some countries" (referring to Ukraine and other European states) are using the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's (OSCE) Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine as a tool for possible provocation on February 13.⁴³⁵ Zakharova called on OSCE leadership to stop attempting to manipulate the mission by withdrawing national contingents of observers and to prevent the organization's involvement in political games. Zakharova deemed the tension artificially escalated and emphasized the need for diligent monitoring of the mission in accordance with its mandate.

The Russian Ministry of Defense stated on February 13 that more than 70 military columns transited through Krasnodar Krai in the past month (since January 13).⁴³⁶

Russian President Vladimir Putin and US President Joe Biden discussed Russia's escalating military buildup on Ukraine's borders on February 12.⁴³⁷ Biden stated that the US and its allies will "respond decisively and impose swift and severe costs on Russia" in the event of a Russian invasion of Ukraine. Biden reiterated that a Russian invasion of Ukraine would "diminish Russia's standing." The Kremlin stated that the conversation was "quite balanced and business-like" despite occurring "in an atmosphere of unprecedented hysteria by American officials about Russia's supposedly imminent invasion of Ukraine." The Kremlin stated that Biden said that it is "necessary to do everything possible to avoid the worst scenario in the context of the current situation around Ukraine." The Kremlin stated that it will

consider Biden's comments but expressed regret that the US has not responded to the Kremlin's security demands in Europe. The Kremlin accused Ukraine of trying to sabotage the Minsk II Accords and said that Western security assistance encourages Ukraine to conduct a provocation against Donbas and/or Crimea. The Kremlin stated that Ukraine seeks to return Crimea to Ukraine by force and stated that Ukraine's hypothetical NATO accession is fraught because it could pull NATO into direct conflict with Russia. The Kremlin stated that Putin and Biden agreed to continue contacts.

Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu and US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin discussed Russia's military build-up in Crimea and around Ukraine on February 12.⁴³⁸ The US and Russian readout provided no further details.

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Russian President Vladimir Putin and French President Emmanuel Macron held a phone call on February 12.⁴⁴⁰ The Kremlin readout states that the leaders had an "in-depth exchange of views" on Russia's demanded security guarantees and "overcoming the impasse" in resolving the war in Ukraine. Putin reiterated the "lack of a substantive response from the US and NATO" to Russian security demands and the "unwillingness of leading Western countries to push the Kyiv authorities" to implement the Minsk II Accords. The Kremlin stated that the leaders discussed "provocative speculations about an allegedly planned Russian 'invasion' of Ukraine, accompanied by a large-scale pumping of [Ukraine] with modern weapons." The Kremlin accused Western states of enabling Ukraine to conduct an offensive against Donbas.

Russian President Vladimir Putin and Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko discussed Western responses to Russian security demands on February 12.⁴⁴¹ The Kremlin readout stated that the leaders discussed "the situation around the reaction of the United States and NATO to Russian proposals for the development of long-term international legal guarantees of Russia's security" without providing further details. The Belarusian readout stated that the leaders discussed "issues of international relations, including the situation around Ukraine."

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov denounced US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken's concerns over "further military aggression against Ukraine in the coming days" as a "propaganda campaign" in a phone call on February 12.⁴⁴² Lavrov claimed that the US and its allies are encouraging Ukraine to sabotage the Minsk Accords and support a forceful resolution of the Donbas conflict. Lavrov told Blinken that the US and NATO responses to Russian security demands ignored Russia's main requests to cease NATO's eastward expansion and ensure the non-deployment of strike weapons systems near Russian borders. Blinken expressed interest in a diplomatic resolution of the crisis if the Kremlin deescalated and engages in "good-faith discussions" with the US. Blinken warned that if Russia further invades Ukraine, then the Kremlin will face a "resolute, massive, and united Transatlantic response."

Russian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova accused Western states of knowing about an impending military offensive against Donbas on February 12.⁴⁴³ Zakharova said that the evacuation of diplomats from Ukraine by the US, UK, Australia, Canada, and other countries indicates that Western states are aware of "military actions being prepared in Ukraine that could significantly complicate the situation in the security sphere."

The Russian Pacific Fleet claimed it intercepted and repelled a US Virginia-class submarine in Russian territorial waters near Urup Island in the Sea of Okhotsk on February 12.⁴⁴⁴ Russia summoned the US defense attaché in Moscow over the alleged incident. The US Navy denied the incident ever occurred.⁴⁴⁵

Unspecified logistics elements of a Combined Arms Army of the Western Military District conducted an exercise to mass refuel tank elements (likely of the 1st Tank Army) in Nizhniy Novgorod on February 12.⁴⁴⁶

Russian social media users observed likely elements of the Russian 4th Tank Division deploying towards Belgorod on February 12.⁴⁴⁷

Russia's Ambassador to Sweden Viktor Tatarintsev stated Russia "doesn't give a shit about Western sanctions" in an interview with the Swedish daily newspaper *Aftonbladet* on February 12.⁴⁴⁸

Russian social media users observed likely elements of the Russian 4th Tank Division deploying to Belgorod from Pogonovo on February 12.^v

Over 30 Russian ships, coastal defense, and naval aviation elements of the Russian Black Sea Fleet began maritime exercises in the Black Sea after departing from Sevastopol and Novorossiysk on February 12.⁴⁴⁹ The stated objective of the exercise is to protect Crimea's coasts, the Black Sea Fleet in Crimea, and maritime lines of communication.

Approximately 200 engineers and sappers of the 1st Tank Army conducted minelaying exercises at the Alabino Training Ground in Moscow on February 12.⁴⁵⁰

An unspecified number of motorized rifle battalion tactical groups of the Southern Military District (approximately 1,500 personnel) deployed to the Tsabal Training Ground in Abkhazia to conduct live fire exercises on February 12.⁴⁵¹

Chief of the Russian General Staff Valery Gerasimov and US Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Mark Milley had a phone call on February 11. The Russian Ministry of Defense stated they discussed "issues of international security."⁴⁵² The Joint Chiefs of Staff readout states they discussed "several security-related issues of concern."⁴⁵³

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Rudenko claimed that the Ukrainian government realizes that Western states manipulate Ukraine's internal affairs in an interview with *TASS* on February 11.⁴⁵⁴ Rudenko stated that Ukrainian government officials' statements downplaying the Russian threat to Ukraine indicates that the Ukrainian government has finally realized that the West is manipulating Kyiv with "hysteria about an impending Russian 'invasion.'" Rudenko stated that the West does not care about Ukrainian citizens' wellbeing.

Russia deployed at least 10 Su-34 aircraft to the Primorsko-Akhtarsk Air Base near the Sea of Azov around early-to-mid February 2022.⁴⁵⁵

Kremlin Spokesman Dmitry Pskov on February 11 announced that US President Joe Biden and Russian President Vladimir Putin will have a phone call on February 12.⁴⁵⁶ Pskov stated that the US side requested the call and did not provide any further details.

Russian President Vladimir Putin presided over a Russian Security Council meeting on “relations with Commonwealth of Independent States countries” within the framework of the “Eurasian Economic Community” and Collective Security Treaty on February 11.⁴⁵⁷ The Kremlin readout did not provide any further details.

Russian State Duma Speaker Vyacheslav Volodin said on February 11 that the Duma Council will consider the draft appeal to recognize the Donbas proxy republics on February 14.⁴⁵⁸ Volodin said the Duma Council will first consider the draft appeal to Russian President Vladimir Putin on the immediate recognition of Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics (DNR and LNR). Volodin added that the Duma Council will then send the draft to the Russian Foreign Ministry and other government structures to obtain feedback. Volodin stated that Duma party factions consulted on the draft appeal and that the Kremlin’s ruling United Russia Party called on the Kremlin to supply military equipment and social assistance to the DNR and LNR. Volodin added that the Russian Communist and the Fair Russia – For Truth Parties supported the draft appeal, while the Kremlin-controlled Liberal Democratic Party took an unspecified “radical” position. Volodin reiterated that the bill “is very serious” because it involves “protecting the lives of [Russian] citizens and compatriots living in the territory of the DNR and LNR.” Volodin said Ukraine’s failure to abide by the Minsk II Accords for seven years is an indicator that “it is necessary to look for a solution.”

Russian State Duma Committee on International Affairs First Deputy Head Vyacheslav Nikonov claimed that Ukraine is “preparing for a serious military provocation” on February 11.⁴⁵⁹ Nikonov claimed that US President Joe Biden’s February 10 statement calling on US citizens to leave Ukraine shows preparations for a full offensive. Nikonov added that the evacuation of 30,000 US citizens and 3,000 diplomatic staff “that rule Ukraine” and US large-scale arms supplies to Ukraine may be “some signal to attack” Donbas. Nikonov supported the Russian Foreign Intelligence Director Sergey Narushkin’s claims about a Ukrainian troop buildup along line of contact and noted that US elite and analysts are urging Ukraine to stage a provocation.

Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu, Russian Chief of the General Staff Valery Gerasimov, and UK Defense Minister Ben Wallace met in Moscow to discuss reducing tension in Europe on February 11.⁴⁶⁰ Shoigu stated that Russia was not responsible for the situation on the European continent “becoming more tense.” Shoigu suggested that Western countries “contribute to reducing tensions in Europe and stop supplying weapons to Ukraine.” Shoigu said that current issues “could be resolved quite calmly in a dialogue between all countries, without the threat of imposing certain sanctions.” The Russian readout states that Wallace said he was ready to consider issues of Russian security demands. Wallace reaffirmed the UK’s commitment to de-escalating the situation and finding a diplomatic solution which respects Ukraine’s sovereignty. Wallace said that Shoigu assured that Russia will not invade Ukraine. Wallace said he “made clear that any invasion would have severe consequences and destabilize the security of Europe.”

The Russian Defense Ministry canceled its Notice to Air Missions for naval exercises in the Sea of Azov on February 11.⁴⁶¹ The Russian Ministry of Defense still plans to conduct exercises in the Black Sea on February 13 to 19.

Satellite imagery observed Russian field hospitals at a camp in Novoozerne, Crimea, on February 11.⁴⁶²

Battalion-sized motorized rifle elements (500 personnel) of the Western Military District conducted mobile defense exercises with UAV reconnaissance support in Nizhny Novgorod on February 11.⁴⁶³

Regiment-sized air defense elements (over 1,200 personnel) of the 49th Combined Arms Army (CAA) conducted air defense exercises to eliminate simulated enemy air targets in unspecified training grounds in Krasnodar Krai and the North Caucasus on February 11.⁴⁶⁴ The personnel will continue exercises to prepare positions and equipment to defend against simulated enemy air attacks.

Artillery and coastal defense elements of the Russian Black Sea Fleet stationed in Crimea and Krasnodar Krai deployed to unspecified areas to conduct exercises on February 11.⁴⁶⁵ The elements used more than 40 units of military equipment to identify and eliminate simulated enemy ships. The troops also trained to quickly remove equipment from a conflict zone and establish new and concealed firing positions.

Crews of approximately ten Su-34 aircraft of the Southern Military District conducted simulated dogfights to gain air superiority without ground-based air defense systems in Rostov Oblast on February 11.⁴⁶⁶ Pilots performed simple and complex aerobatics to intercept and destroy enemy aircraft. The pilots additionally maneuvered at extremely low altitudes to avoid enemy air defense systems.

Over 500 personnel of the Western Military District conducted defensive exercises to withdraw Russian aircraft from airfields to protect against enemy precision ordinance in Tver on February 11.⁴⁶⁷ An unspecified number of S-300 air defense systems and Su-35S fighters conducted air defense exercises against simulated enemy forces that used electronic warfare systems and attempted to bomb Russian targets.

Approximately 200 personnel of the Black Sea Fleet conducted anti-submarine and sabotage defense exercises in Crimea on February 11.⁴⁶⁸

Unspecified battalion-sized elements (approximately 500 personnel) of the Western Military District conducted exercises to prevent an armored vehicle breakthrough in Moscow on February 11.⁴⁶⁹ The exercises featured stationary and moving targets that imitated combat vehicles.

Brigade-sized elements (over 5,000 personnel) of the Russian Western Military District (WMD) conducted an emergency response teams readiness check in multiple WMD garrisons on February 11.⁴⁷⁰ The personnel practiced reacting to an emergency situation to improve emergency response readiness.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and Italian Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio discussed Russian Security demands in Europe on February 10.⁴⁷¹ Lavrov shared his assessments of NATO and US written responses Russia's draft treaties. Lavrov

outlined the “the destabilizing nature of NATO’s actions in the military development of the post-Soviet space” and Western countries’ “reckless militarization of Ukraine.” Lavrov stated that Western states must demand that Kyiv implement the Minsk II Accords and other agreements reached within the Normandy Format and the Trilateral Contact Group.

Russian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova responded to the European Union’s (EU) collective response to Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov’s individual letters to EU member states on February 10.⁴⁷² Zakharova explained that EU states did not supply a substantive reaction to Russia’s call to implement the principle of equal and indivisible security. Zakharova stated that Russia cannot accept a collective response and that the Kremlin awaits detailed responses from each addressee rather than an invitation to continue dialogue. Zakharova cited the 1999 Charter for European Security and the 2010 Astana Declaration which state that no singular state or organization has primary responsibility for maintaining peace and stability in the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) region. Zakharova said that there is nothing further to discuss and that the West must fully implement the relevant agreements.

Russian Permanent Representative to the United Nations Office and Other International Organizations in Geneva Gennady Gatilov said that Russia never had plans to invade Ukraine on February 10.⁴⁷³ Gatilov repeated Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov’s January 28 assertion that “if it depends on Russia, there will be no war” and accused the West of hysteria and an unbridled propaganda campaign against Russia. Gatilov reiterated Russia’s diplomatic priorities are still to secure NATO’s non-expansion, non-deployment of strike weapons near Russia, and the reinstatement of NATO’s 1997 borders.

The Kremlin characterized the February 10 Normandy Format political advisors in Berlin, Germany, as unsuccessful.⁴⁷⁴ Kremlin Representative on the War in Donbas Dmitry Kozak stated that Ukraine has conducted a “complete bluff” with the Minsk II Accords and that “we are at zero, where the clock stopped” in March 2015. Kozak stated that it is “difficult to guess” whether Kyiv will decide to “solve” the conflict in Donbas by force and stated that Moscow hopes that Kyiv will have “enough prudence not to start hostilities against its own citizens.” Kozak stated that Germany, France, and Ukraine are not ready to implement the Minsk II Accords and that Kyiv continues to refuse to engage in direct dialogue with the Kremlin’s proxy republics. The political advisors of Russian, French, German, and Ukrainian leaders were unable to agree on a joint statement during the nine-hour meeting.

Satellite imagery observed Russian field hospitals in Gomel, Belarus, on February 10.⁴⁷⁵

Battalion-sized elements (500 personnel) of the 1st Tank Army conducted fire exercises in Nizhny Novgorod on February 10.⁴⁷⁶

Russian social media users observed likely Russian Special Operations Forces (SSO) elements in Smolensk, Russia, on February 9.⁴⁷⁷ Russian SSO forces are strategic-level special forces subordinate to the Russian Special Operations Forces Command. Such elements would likely participate in a Russian military operation in Ukraine.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and UK Foreign Minister Liz Truss discussed bilateral relations and Russian security guarantees in Moscow on

February 10.⁴⁷⁸ Lavrov repeatedly dismissed Truss's security concerns throughout the post-talk press conference and claimed the meeting was like talking to a deaf person. Lavrov criticized continued UK military aid to Ukraine and said that the West must end its continued interference in Russian and neighboring states' affairs. Lavrov said that Russia will regard any Western sanctions against any person or entity connected to the Russian government as an act of aggression. Lavrov downplayed Western alarm over the joint Russian-Belarusian Union Resolve 2022 exercises and Russian troop deployments near Ukraine as "incomprehensible." Lavrov said that the West will likely claim victory for achieving de-escalation when Russian troops return to Russia after Union Resolve 2022. Russian media mischaracterized Truss's initial confusion over Voronezh and Rostov Oblast belonging to Russia as a refusal to recognize Russian sovereignty over Russian territory.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said that Russia may advise Russian non-essential diplomatic personnel to evacuate Russian diplomatic missions in Ukraine on February 10.⁴⁷⁹ Lavrov implied that "Anglo-Saxons" from the US and UK may be preparing a provocation in Ukraine given some Western states' embassies in Kyiv evacuated non-essential staff. Lavrov said that Russia may similarly evacuate Russian staff due to US and UK threats in Ukraine.

The Russian State Duma Committee on Commonwealth of Independent States Affairs will likely submit a draft appeal to Russian President Vladimir Putin to recognize the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics (DNR and LNR) on February 15.⁴⁸⁰ The committee's chairman said on February 10 that the committee will decide on the bill and will send it to the Duma Council.

Kremlin Spokesman Dmitry Peskov said that Russian President Vladimir Putin notified French President Emmanuel Macron about the Kremlin's "main vision" for a Russian response to the US response on Russian security demands on February 10.⁴⁸¹ Peskov stated that Putin will formulate a response "whenever he deems it necessary." Peskov stated that Putin believes the US response ignored Russia's critical demands and only addressed secondary issues.

Russian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova accused the West of pushing Ukraine to undermine the Minsk II Accords on February 9.⁴⁸² Zakharova accused Kyiv of "sabotaging its commitments" and "often publicly demonstrating [the sabotage of the Minsk II Accords] with the connivance of [Kyiv's] Western patrons." Zakharova accused "American curators" of encouraging Kyiv's "disdainful attitude" towards the Minsk II Accords. Zakharova accused the US of trying to revise the Minsk II Accords and stated that efforts to revise the settled Minsk II Accords are "fraught with the destruction of the peace process." Zakharova said that the Kremlin has not received a "proper reaction" from Kyiv, the United States, France, or Germany. Zakharova condemned Western security assistance to Ukraine, including German helmets and body armor. Zakharova accused "Westerners" of "diligently closing their eyes" and ignoring Ukrainian aggression against Donbas. Zakharova said that the Kremlin is "convinced it is possible to achieve de-escalation of the situation around Ukraine" but that it necessitates Western states to stop shipping weapons to Ukraine, recalling Western military advisors from Ukraine, stopping joint exercises with Ukraine, and withdrawing all foreign weapons provided to Ukraine from Ukrainian territory. Zakharova called on the West itself to start implementing the Minsk II Accords and reiterated that implementing the Minsk II Accords "without alternatives" is the way to resolve the conflict in Donbas.

Russian Foreign Intelligence Service Director Sergey Naryshkin said that Ukraine is preparing for a full offensive against Donbas on February 10.⁴⁸³ Naryshkin accused the Ukrainian Armed forces of concentrating all combat-ready Ukrainian units on Ukraine's border with the proxy republics while receiving "tons of military equipment and ammunition" from US bases in Europe, the UK, and Canada. Naryshkin claimed that NATO's advisory contingent in Ukraine recently increased and noted reports about emerging jihadist militants among Ukrainian ranks. Naryshkin accused the Ukrainian State Security Service (SBU) of creating provocations at the line of contact in "the style of the fakes about white helmets in Syria," referring to previous Russian claims that the White Helmets group has staged fake chemical attacks in Syria. Naryshkin added that the West is rapidly expanding its media presence in Donbas to create disinformation about the conflict. Naryshkin denounced the recent Ukrainian law on Ukraine's Territorial Defense Forces as a violation of the Minsk II Accords as it intends to "seize the territories of people's republics and 'clean up' them according to the Croatian scenario" – a reference to ethnic cleansing. Naryshkin said that Russia cannot return to good and neighborly relations with Ukraine because the Ukrainian Parliament and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky are "no longer able to make independent decisions" due to being under the influence of nationalists and the West. Naryshkin noted that nationalists and the West seek to "destroy" the proxy republics and drag "Russia into the internal Ukrainian conflict." Naryshkin denied any Russian "aggressive plans against Ukraine," claiming that reports of a Russian invasion are a "malicious and very dangerous lie that continues to multiply."⁴⁸⁴ Naryshkin claimed that US intelligence officials regularly and deliberately leak misleading reports to destabilize regions worldwide. Naryshkin also accused the US of "economic aggression" with illegal sanctions. Naryshkin stated that the Western world "has not fully realized how dangerous the threat of growing mistrust between states is to the existence of mankind."

The Federal Security Service (FSB) announced that it detained 14 individuals for allegedly making false improvised explosive device threats on February 10.⁴⁸⁵ The FSB accused a Ukrainian student of organizing the threats. The FSB stated it is searching for anyone involved in a mass internet campaign to make bomb threats against Russian educational, healthcare, administrative, and transportation facilities in late 2021 to early 2022.

The Black Sea Institute for Strategic Studies reported on February 10 that the Russian military will close the Black and Azov Seas to international traffic to conduct military and artillery exercises from February 13 to 19.⁴⁸⁶ The Black Sea institute warned that the blockade would leave no passage for merchant ships and called for responses at the "highest international level." This action may indicate that Russia is preparing to conduct a naval blockade of Ukrainian ports.

Russian Western Military District Commander Alexander Zhuravlev checked the capabilities of the 1st Guards Tank Army elements stationed in Moscow Oblast on February 10.⁴⁸⁷ Zhuravlev heard reports from officials on units' combat readiness, weapon and military equipment conditions, and barracks' conditions.

The Russian large amphibious assault ships *Korolev*, *Minsk*, *Kaliningrad*, *Pyotr Morgunov*, *George the Victorious*, and *Olenegorsky Gornyak* from the Northern and Baltic Fleets arrived at Sevastopol Port in the Black Sea on February 10.⁴⁸⁸ This Russian ship detachment passed through the Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits on February 8. The Russian Defense Ministry claims that these deployments are part of planned Russian naval exercises in January to February 2022.

Regiment-sized motorized rifle elements (approximately 1,500 personnel) stationed in Abkhazia redeployed to the Nagvalou and Tsabal training grounds to participate in exercises beginning on February 10.⁴⁸⁹ Motorized rifle elements overcame difficult mountainous terrain. The troops will conduct exercises with reconnaissance, artillery, and thermobaric artillery units.

An aviation brigade of the Western Military District completed training exercises on February 10 in the Pskov Oblast.⁴⁹⁰ Participants completed practical and theoretical tests to target ground targets.

Battalion-sized naval infantry elements (approximately 500 personnel) of the Southern Military District (SMD) participated in a tactical defense exercise at the Raevsky Training Ground in Krasnodar Krai on February 10.⁴⁹¹ Naval infantry fired at simulated light armored vehicles, low-flying air targets, and mock enemy infantry.

Unspecified artillery elements (over 700 personnel) of the 49th Combined Arms Army conducted live fire exercises at the Nikolo-Aleksandrovsky Training Ground in Stavropol on February 10.⁴⁹² Artillery elements used 120-mm mortars to strike targets at distances from 800 to 1,300 meters. Servicemen additionally worked on target detection and developing communication between units, crews, unmanned aerial vehicles, and motorized rifle units.

An unspecified number of Mi-35 attack helicopters of the Southern Military District exercised to strike ground facilities in Rostov on February 10.⁴⁹³ Attack helicopter crews completed single and group reconnaissance flights, complex aerobatics, and air combat tasks at low altitudes. The tactical flight exercises allowed pilots to improve their skills in detecting and destroying ground targets and mock enemy aircraft. The crews practiced flying at low altitudes and bypassing enemy air defense systems.

Unspecified air defense elements (approximately 1,000 personnel) of the Southern Military District stationed in Volgograd relocated to the Kapustin Yar Training Ground to join ongoing exercises on February 10.⁴⁹⁴ Air defense elements will detect and destroy small aircraft and cruise missiles using Tor-M2 anti-aircraft missile systems.

Battalion-sized elements (over 500 personnel), likely of the 177th Naval Infantry Regiment (permanently based on the Caspian Sea but recently deployed to Krasnodar), conducted defensive exercises in Krasnodar on February 10.⁴⁹⁵ The personnel defended against lightly armored targets, low-flying air targets, and infantry. The personnel also developed capabilities to drive armored personal carriers on rough and unpredictable terrain.

Brigade-sized signals elements (approximately 2,000 personnel) of the Western Military District (WMD) completed training to establish large-scale secure communication across the WMD on February 9.⁴⁹⁶ WMD Commander Alexander Zhuravlev stated that the training was vital for ensuring that control points can send and receive large amounts of time-sensitive information. The training utilized Redut-2US complexes, R-419L1, R-419-MP, and “Andromeda-D” radio relay stations, R-431-AM radio stations, and portable satellite communication stations to coordinate stable communication exchanges using open, closed, and satellite channels.

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov and Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Pankin said that a potential US deployment of Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) systems near Kharkiv would be US “military-technical pressure” and “blackmail” against Russia on February 9.⁴⁹⁷ Pankin said the deployment of THAAD systems to Ukraine would be a “stupid thing” that would lead “the situation further and further into a dead end from which it would be difficult to find a way out.” TASS initially reported on February 7 that an anonymous diplomatic source told TASS that Kyiv requested that the US deploy “several divisions” of THAAD systems near Kharkiv.⁴⁹⁸ It is unclear whether the US is even considering deploying THAAD systems to Ukraine; the Kremlin may be simply accusing the US of considering deploying such systems as part of a Russian information operation.

Russian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova said that there no alternative to the Minsk II Accords in Ukraine because there are no other proposed working options on February 9.⁴⁹⁹ Zakharova condemned US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken’s statement that the Minsk II Accords can be implemented if the accords are prioritized correctly. Zakharova stated that “the US supports the revision of the set measures,” and claimed this will lead to the “destruction of the peace process.” Zakharova reiterated that “American curators” encourage Ukraine’s “disdain” for the Minsk II Accords.

Russian Permanent Representative to the United Nations Vasily Nebenzia stated that Ukraine needs to “come to the conclusion that dialogue with Donbas is the only way to resolve the conflict” on February 9.⁵⁰⁰ Nebenzia added that the West helps Ukraine to further violate the Minsk II Accords by pumping Kyiv with offensive weapons while ignoring a Ukrainian military buildup near the frontline in Donbas. Nebenzia claimed that Russia has not officially declared “any malicious plans towards Ukraine.”

Battalion-sized elements (over 400 servicemen) of the 49th Combined Arms Army of the Southern Military District (SMD) began week-long anti-drone exercises in the Stavropol region on February 9.⁵⁰¹ These exercises comprise the active phase of a bilateral exercise that will use an unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) as a mock enemy to simulate defending units against enemy fire. Army aviation will support the motorized rifle units in maneuvers during the active tactical phase. Riflemen will use light self-propelled artillery installations and various small arms to complete the exercise.

Over 2,500 artillery crewmen of the 49th Combined Arms Army of the Southern Military District (SMD) began multi-stage military exercises on February 9.⁵⁰² SMD troops deployed in the Stavropol and Krasnodar Territories and the Adygea and Karachay-Cherkessia regions of Russia will develop shooting capabilities using the self-propelled howitzers, anti-tank missile systems, and multiple launch rocket systems. The servicemen deployed to designated training grounds while repelling simulated air attacks and enemy reconnaissance groups. The servicemen will also refine their skills in deploying and responding to live fire while concealing their military equipment. Air defense and aviation units will additionally coordinate with motorized rifle and tanks elements for tactical training under live fire.

An unspecified Southern Military District motorized rifle unit conducted an unknown number of battalion-level training exercises at several training grounds on February 9.⁵⁰³ The tactical exercises occurred at night and tested command and control

skills and redeploying under enemy air strikes in simulated radioactive and biologically contaminated terrain. In the exercises, each involving approximately 400 troops, occurred at the Prudboy training ground, and in Stavropol, Adygea, Chechnya, Dagestan, Karachay-Cherkessia, North Ossetia, Ingushetia, and bases in Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

The 1st Tank Army of the Western Military District (WMD) announced that since the beginning of 2022, their unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) have been used for over 1,000 hours and 3,000 kilometers in various tactical exercises on February 9.⁵⁰⁴ The exercises involved defeating targets that imitate enemy manpower and military equipment under various climatic conditions.

Over 1,000 servicemen on the 42nd Rocket Division of Russian Strategic Missile Forces (nuclear weapons) performed maneuvering and reconnaissance exercises with 100 units of equipment in at unspecified locations in Sverdlovsk Oblast, Russia, on February 9.⁵⁰⁵ Personnel additionally conducted counter-reconnaissance and counter-sabotage operations against mock enemies. The exercises aim to bolster the overall strength and cohesion of the Strategic Missile Forces.

200 Western Military District crewmembers and ten aircraft performed exercises with Su-35 and MiG-31 aircraft in the Tver region on February 9.⁵⁰⁶ The exercise tested the unit's interception, combat, and communication capabilities.

Unspecified motorized rifle elements of the 58th Combined Arms Army of the Southern Military District (SMD) began bilateral tactical company exercises involving reconnaissance and fire tasks on February 9.⁵⁰⁷ Servicemen will conduct more than 30 exercises at 15 unspecified training grounds in the next three weeks (until March 2). Motorized infantry used counter-battery and sniper firing systems during a company-level exercise while motorized rifle and tank elements participated in a training battle. Company commanders additionally used counter-sniper and counter-battery tactical groups during the exercise.

Unspecified Russian Southern Military District military intelligence units began reconnaissance exercises in Volgograd, Astrakhan, Stavropol, Adygea, North Ossetia-Alania, and Karachay-Cherkessia on February 9.⁵⁰⁸ The reconnaissance exercises include detecting enemy personnel in inclement weather, correcting artillery fire against a target, and scouting enemy positions. The exercises utilized 200 equipment pieces, including an SBR-3 short range reconnaissance station, armored vehicles, armored personnel carriers, and BTR-82A armored personnel carriers. The readout did not specify an end date for these reconnaissance exercises.

Russian Permanent Representative to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Alexander Lukashovich criticized the OSCE Polish Chairmanship's Renewed OSCE European Security Dialogue initiative on February 8.⁵⁰⁹ Lukashovich said that Russia does not support the proposed Renewed OSCE European Security Dialogue because it does not reflect Russia's commitment to negotiations with the United States and NATO. Lukashovich also emphasized that Western OSCE participants must understand Russia's security concerns and the meaning of "indivisibility of security" before the OSCE can enact meaningful changes. Lukashovich also urged the Polish Chairmanship to strengthen existing OSCE efforts to address geographic and thematic dysfunction and current election observation methods in lieu of the security dialogue initiative.

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Pankin gave an interview about Western sanctions against Russia to RT on February 8.⁵¹⁰ Pankin said that European Union and US sanctions against Russia, including potentially excluding Russia from the SWIFT international banking system, are baseless and that Russia is conducting “significant efforts” to protect Russia’s “legitimate trade and economic relations” from sanctions. Pankin said that US congressional legislators have “lost touch with reality” and “live in a realm of their own phobias regarding [Russia].” Pankin said that Russia does not seek to politicize Russian energy supplies to Europe and stated that accusations about Russia’s “alleged interest in a gas crisis in the EU” are unfounded and “anti-Russian propaganda.”

Russian State Duma Committee on International Affairs Chairman Leonid Slutsky and Serbian President Alexander Vucic discussed the “situation in Eastern Europe” on February 8.⁵¹¹ Vucic and Slutsky “expressed their hope that the trend of active high-level [Russia-Serbia] meetings will continue” and discussed Russian-Serbian economic cooperation. Vucic thanked Russia “for its support in protecting the territorial integrity of Serbia” and expressed hope that the US and Russia will find a peaceful solution for the war in Ukraine.

A detachment of large amphibious assault ships of the Russian Northern and Baltic fleets began passing through the Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits en route to the Black Sea on February 8.⁵¹² The Russian Large Landing Ships (BDKs) *Korolev*, *Minsk*, and *Kaliningrad* entered the Dardanelles Strait on February 8. The amphibious assault ships *Pyotr Morgunov*, *George the Victorious*, and *Olenegorsky Gornyyak* will arrive in the Black Sea by February 9. The Russian Ministry of Defense claims these deployments are part of planned Russian naval exercises throughout January and February 2022. Commander-in-Chief of the Navy Admiral Nikolai Evmenov will lead naval exercises in the region to protect Russian national interests in international waters. More than 140 warships and support vessels, more than 60 aircraft, 1,000 units of military equipment, and around 10,000 military personnel will carry out these exercises around the world throughout February.

Artillery crewmen of the Southern Military District (SMD) stationed in Dagestan, Karachay-Cherkessia, and North Ossetia trained with over 100 units of weapons and military equipment as a component of reconnaissance and fire complexes (ROK) on February 8.⁵¹³ Electronic warfare units of the SMD employed the Infauna radio interference system to identify coordinates of simulated enemy formations. Artillery crewmen of rifle and marine formations then fired anti-tank missile systems (ATGMs) at a simulated enemy. The exercises also tested new tactical methods for conducting ATGM combat at long range.

S-400 crews of the Eastern Military District carried out exercises to detect and capture targets against simulated enemy aircraft in the Khabarovsk Territory on February 8.⁵¹⁴ Russian forces successfully met the standards for transferring anti-aircraft missiles from “marching” to “combat” positions. The troops then employed electronic missile launches to fully eliminate enemy aircraft. The servicemen also trained to disguise their defensive positions and conceal weaponry from enemy detection.

Black Sea Fleet marine corpsmen and Southern Military District (SMD) army corpsmen carried out a maneuvering and positional defense exercise on the seacoast in Crimea on February 8.⁵¹⁵ As part of the exercises, tactical group subdivisions carried out anti-amphibious defense tasks and live-firing drills in order to simulate and train for the dynamic tactical realities of combat.

Servicemen of the Black Sea Fleet Marine Corps carried out a driving and control exercise with BTR-82A armored personnel carriers in the Krasnodar Territory on February 8.⁵¹⁶ The exercises included 20 combat vehicles and practiced driving combat vehicles over various water depths, maneuvering in challenging coastal areas, and complying with safety protocols.

An unspecified number of Su-25SM3 aircraft of the Krasnodar-based aviation assault regiment conducted aerial maneuver and combat exercises in Krasnodar Krai on February 8.⁵¹⁷

Battalion-sized Western Military District electronic warfare elements (over 450 personnel) conducted exercises to defeat an enemy UAV air attack in Leningrad Oblast on February 8.⁵¹⁸

Unspecified Russian motorized rifle reconnaissance elements conducted tactical intelligence exercises in Volgograd on February 8.⁵¹⁹ Military intelligence officers practiced organizing reconnaissance patrols, reconnaissance in force, and ambush tasks.

Director of the Federal Security Service (FSB) Alexander Bortnikov announced that Russian special services and law enforcement prevented six planned terrorist attacks on educational institutions in Moscow, Crimea, the Tver Region, Ingushetia, Stavropol, and Kabardino-Balkaria on February 8.⁵²⁰ Bortnikov's statement follows an announcement made by President Vladimir Putin in December 2021 that Russian security agencies achieved a "radical reduction" in terrorist threats in the past year. Bortnikov encouraged continued vigilance of educational institutions to prevent any future attacks.

More than 100 personnel of S-400 crews of the Central Military District began air defense exercises planned to end in late March on February 8.⁵²¹ The crews will conduct pre-fire training through the end of February. These air defense elements will carry out air defense live fire exercises at the large training ground in Astrakhan in late March 2022.

Russian President Vladimir Putin and French President Emmanuel Macron held a press conference in Moscow after their five-hour meeting on Russian security demands in Europe on February 7.⁵²² Putin reiterated that Russian demands have three key elements: NATO's non-expansion, not deploying strike weapons systems near Russian borders, and reducing NATO's "military potential and infrastructure" to its form in 1997 when the Russia-NATO Founding Act was signed. Putin reiterated that the US and NATO ignored these central concerns in their January 26 written response. Putin said that he discussed NATO Article 10's Open Door Policy with Hungarian President Viktor Orban and stated that NATO is not obliged to admit any eligible state into the alliance just because it can. Putin characterized NATO as an aggressor, stating that NATO's 2019 military strategy document directly defines Russia an adversary and claimed that NATO is moving military equipment closer to Russian borders. Putin accused NATO of dictating to Russia how Russia can and cannot move its own

troops within Russian territory. Putin accused Kyiv of setting “course for dismantling the Minsk Agreements.” Putin decried the lack of Ukrainian progress in implementing political concessions on Ukrainian constitutional amendments, amnesty for proxy fighters, local elections in Donbas, or special autonomy for Donbas. Putin said he promised former Ukrainian president Petro Poroshenko political asylum in Russia if he had any problems implementing the Minsk Accords while Poroshenko was Ukrainian president. Putin also accused Ukraine of “massive systemic human rights violations” and discrimination against Russian-speakers. Putin said there is no alternative to the Minsk Accords and demanded that Ukraine implement them while making a vulgar joke about forcing Ukraine to do so.

Macron said that he hears the Kremlin’s complaints but stated that he does not believe that NATO and Europe should engage in a “partial revision of the treaties of the last 30 years, our fundamental principles, or the limitation of the rights of some European countries that have not accepted existing treaties.” Macron stated, “we cannot nevertheless collectively expose ourselves to the risk of another confrontation of spheres of influence.” Macron stated that he does not believe we are “forced to choose between new rules or a game without rules” since “Russia is committed to the principle of sovereignty” and that destabilizing the European continent is in no state’s interest. Macron said that the EU and Russia must build security guarantees for EU member states and Ukraine, Georgia, Belarus, and Russia. Macron said that the “coming days” will be decisive and will require “dense discussions” that he and Putin will continue. Macron said that mediation is “France’s vocation” and France’s “new role”; Macron said that “[France’s] role is to carry the voice of the European Union and take into account various difficult circumstances in dealing with such big neighbors as Russia, which plays a decisive role in our security.”

1,500 servicemen of the Western Military District (WMD) took part in a tactical shooting course in Nizhny Novgorod to simulate assaults and practice communicating in densely populated urban areas on February 7.⁵²³ The exercises also included motorized riflemen and focused on developing modern combat methods in uncomfortable positions.

300 personnel of the 144th Motor Rifle Division participated in tactical exercises with Orlan-10 unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) at the Alabino training ground on February 7.⁵²⁴ The personnel used UAVs to discover enemy posts and reconnaissance routes with infrared images. Electronic warfare units also took part in the exercises in order to simulate interacting with electronic countermeasures.

Russian social media users observed possible elements of the 2nd Tank Army of the Central Military District deploying closer to Ukraine, possibly to Yelnya, Smolensk, on February 5.⁵²⁵ Elements of the 2nd Tank Army could be deploying to Yelnya after the 41st Combined Arms Army vacated Yelnya to redeploy to Bryansk in early February.

Kremlin Spokesman Dmitry Peskov stated that the Kremlin does not expect “decisive changes” regarding the situation in Ukraine ahead of French President Emmanuel Macron’s meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin on February 7.⁵²⁶ Peskov said that the Kremlin expects that Putin and Macron will have a “very substantive and lengthy discussion” on the situation in Ukraine and Russian security guarantees. Peskov said that the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline is unlikely to be a central discussion topic.

Retired Russian Colonel-General Leonid Grigoryevich Ivashov, head of the All-Russian Officers Assembly, a Russian veteran's organization, wrote an open letter to President Vladimir Putin and called Russian escalation around Ukraine “artificial” on February 7.⁵²⁷ Ivashov stated that Russian history reflects certain “just” wars fought in the interest of vital state security, but noted that the current security situation in Ukraine does not necessitate the current military build-up. Ivashov stated prior conflicts during the Soviet era were fought in response to justifiable external threats that are absent in current circumstances. Ivashov suggested that Russian aggression against Ukraine reflects the internal weaknesses of Putin’s regime. He added that any invasion would incur tens of thousands of casualties on both sides and force Russia into the status of an international pariah.

Russia’s Southern Military District (SMD) conducted air regiment exercises to simulate scrambling and relocating SMD aircraft from an airfield under attack in Volgograd on February 7.⁵²⁸

Battalion-sized elements (approximately 600 personnel) of the 34th Motorized Rifle Brigade (Mountain) and army aviation helicopter crews conducted company-level force-on-force exercises in Karachevo-Chekassiya on February 7.⁵²⁹ Reinforced companies of the 34th brigade conducted exercises against other companies of the brigade to locate and destroy enemy forces. Companies operated with unspecified reconnaissance, artillery, and tank elements.

Regiment-sized motorized rifle elements (over 1,000 personnel) of the 150th Motorized Rifle Division conducted training on driving combat vehicles in difficult terrain conditions at the Kadamovsky Training Ground in Rostov on February 7.⁵³⁰

Regiment-sized motorized rifle elements (over 1,000 personnel) of the 205th Motorized Rifle Brigade conducted exercises to destroy armored personnel carriers with grenade launchers at the Nikolo-Alexandrovsky Training Ground in Stavropol on February 7.⁵³¹

The Russian Ministry of Defense announced on February 7 that over 600 special forces personnel of the 49th Combined Arms Army in Krasnodar will conduct tactical exercises to destroy a mock terrorist camp in Krasnodar.⁵³²

Regiment-sized artillery elements (over 1,000 personnel) of the Southern Military District conducted rocket and artillery fires with UAV reconnaissance support at the Prudboy Training Ground in Volgograd on February 7.⁵³³

200 Russian Black Sea Fleet personnel conducted a “special” tactical exercise loading 40 pieces of military equipment and Marine Corps personnel onto the large landing ships *Orsk* and *Novocherkassk* in Cossack Bay, Sevastopol on February 7.⁵³⁴ The Black Sea Fleet personnel also practiced organizing BTR-82A armored personnel carriers and securing equipment. The Russian Defense Ministry said this exercise is a component of standard winter combat training and daily military activities.

Battalion-sized artillery elements (over 300 personnel) of 1st Tank Army conducted live-firing tactical exercises at the Alabino Training Ground in Moscow

on February 7.⁵³⁵ The exercises included firing on full-sized targets to simulate interacting with enemies from both self-propelled and towed howitzers.

Roughly 1,000 soldiers from the Russian Baltic Fleet began a two-week exercise in Kaliningrad on February 7 to strengthen engineering capabilities and reconnaissance.⁵³⁶ The Russian Baltic fleet is conducting exercises near Kaliningrad to review reconnaissance and engineering practices amid the military buildup in the region. These exercises will rehearse placing anti-tracking mines, clearing mines and improvised explosive devices (IEDs), responding to armor and personnel carrier movements, and defending against ambush attacks. Many units from the Western and Southern Military District are performing similar combat exercises in Belarus and occupied portions of eastern Ukraine and Crimea.

The Black Sea Fleet's (BSF) Crimean Naval Base conducted communications and navigation combat training for BSF forces on February 6.⁵³⁷ An unspecified number of Russian Black Sea Fleet vessels conducted exercises at the Crimean Naval Base to improve readiness for freedom of navigation operations (FONOPS) and combat preparedness. The exercise rehearsed visual and electronic contact with simulated targets to determine the length of time required to eliminate adversaries and surface situation navigation. The BSF conducted the exercises amid an ongoing Russian naval buildup in the Black Sea. The Russian BSF will likely conduct further exercises in the coming weeks with other Russian vessels deploying to the region.

The Russian patrol boat "Vasily Bykov" conducted the combat course task "K-2" in the Black Sea on February 6.⁵³⁸ The crew of the "Vasily Bykov" also practiced anti-aircraft firing against a simulated enemy as part of practical exercises. Sailors then formulated algorithms to ensure the survivability of the ship when unprotected.

Russian Black Sea Fleet and Southern Military District artillery elements conducted artillery exercises in Crimea on February 5.⁵³⁹ Multiple launch rocket systems, howitzer artillery, and mortar elements conducted fires and changed firing positions to defeat enemy reconnaissance. The units used UAVs for target acquisition.

Unspecified elements of the Russian 22nd Army Corps conducted protection exercises to defend key infrastructure in Crimea from sabotage groups on February 5.⁵⁴⁰

Russian Ambassador to the US Anatoly Antonov stated that US claims of a Russian false flag operation against Ukraine are baseless and intended to legitimize a Ukrainian offensive against Donbas on February 4.⁵⁴¹

The Kremlin exploited a false *Bloomberg* headline published on February 4 to amplify its information campaign against Western reports of Russian troop buildup around Ukraine.⁵⁴² *Bloomberg* published the headline "Russia Invades Ukraine" around 4pm on February 4, later explaining the headline was prepared as one of the scenarios in case Russia attacks Ukraine and posted accidentally. Russian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Mari Zakharova called Western "propaganda" about Russian invasion a "crime against the planet and democracy."⁵⁴³ Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said the headline is an example of "what consequences can occur in the atmosphere of extreme tension."⁵⁴⁴ Peskov reiterated that such messages can lead to "irreparable consequences." Russian State

Duma Deputy Andrey Klimov claimed that the US planned for a Russian invasion to happen at the start of the Olympics, but *Bloomberg* ended up jumping the gun too early.⁵⁴⁵ Duma Deputy Head of International Affairs Alexei Chepa claimed that the article release was not a mistake and carries high risks.

The *Washington Post* reported on February 6 that Russia has 83 battalion tactical groups (BTGs) deployed close to Ukraine as of February 4.⁵⁴⁶ The *Washington Post* reported that seven anonymous sources familiar with US intelligence assessments state that the 83 BTGs are 70 percent of the Russian combat power necessary for a full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The *Washington Post* reported that the White House stated it does not have intelligence on whether Russian President Vladimir Putin has decided to conduct a full-scale invasion of Ukraine but that this extreme scenario is increasingly likely.

The Conflict Intelligence Team (CIT) OSINT group observed that the elements of Russia's 41st Combined Arms Army in Yelnya redeployed to Bryansk, closer to the Ukrainian border on February 4.⁵⁴⁷ The 41st Combined Arms Army elements may deploy to Klinty, Bryansk, (approximately 35 miles from the Russian-Ukrainian border) where elements of the Russian 144th Motorized Rifle Division are permanently based.

Russia likely began deploying personnel from central Russia closer to Ukraine in early February.⁵⁴⁸ Russian social media users filmed a large group of Russian soldiers with baggage at the railway station in Buynaksk, Dagestan, on February 5.⁵⁴⁹ Russian soldiers began sharing videos of poor field camp conditions in Rostov and Crimea on social media on February 5.⁵⁵⁰ Russia deployed at least 6 Il-76 military transport planes from central Russia westward closer towards Ukraine on February 5. These planes likely transported personnel of the 41st Combined Arms Army whose equipment has been deployed near Ukraine's border since April 2021. One of the transport planes may have deployed Russian National Guard personnel closer to Ukraine.

Russian Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Maria Zakharova exploited Ukrainian government officials' claims that a Russian offensive against Ukraine is unlikely on February 4.⁵⁵¹ Zakharova said that Ukrainian officials' statements that there are no impending Russian invasion risks indicate that "Ukrainian authorities have suddenly realized that the West is simply using [Ukraine] for [the West's] own political interests." Zakharova stated she hopes the Ukrainian government will "stop dancing to the tune of their NATO mentors." Zakharova said that Western security assistance to Ukraine makes it more difficult to find a peaceful solution to the conflict in Donbas and that "Anglo-Saxon politicians" are in a "fictional fantasy world." Zakharova called on NATO states to immediately stop "whipping up hysteria" and stop military supplies to Kyiv. Zakharova said that the new cooperation format among Poland, the United Kingdom, and Ukraine is doomed to fail and compared it to the 1882 Triple Alliance which resulted in "militaristic horror and a split of Europe."

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov denied US accusations that the Kremlin is planning to use a staged video implicating Ukraine of attacking Donbas or Russia to justify Russian intervention against Ukraine on February 4.⁵⁵² Lavrov called the US accusation a "fabrication" of a "delusional nature."

Kremlin Spokesman Dmitry Peskov denied US accusations that the Kremlin leaked the US and NATO response to Russia's security demands on February 4.⁵⁵³

US Under Secretary for Political Affairs Victoria Nuland stated that the US government is “almost sure” that Russian actors leaked the document to Spanish newspaper *El Pais*.

Russian Permanent Representative to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Alexander Lukashevich stated that there is no evidence for an upcoming Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 3.⁵⁵⁴

Lukashevich said that Ukraine’s “external curators” are “increasingly maniacally speculating” about a Russian invasion of Ukraine. Lukashevich accused Ukraine of trying to sabotage the implementation of the Minsk II Accords. Lukashevich stated that Western military support for Ukraine violates the Minsk II Accords. Lukashevich called on Ukraine’s “external curators” to “stop the destabilizing militarization of Ukraine and whipping up the expectations of a ‘war’” and fully implement the Minsk II Accords.

Unspecified coastal defense and naval infantry elements of the Russian Black Sea Fleet conducted mobile defense exercises with T-72 tanks and BTR-82 armored personnel carriers likely in Crimea on February 4.⁵⁵⁵

Over 2,000 personnel of the Western Military district underwent training to drive in snowy conditions in trucks, armored personnel carriers, infantry fighting vehicles, and tanks in Voronezh on February 4.⁵⁵⁶

Regiment-sized motorized rifle, sniper, and reconnaissance elements (over 1,500 personnel) of the 49th Combined Arms Army conducted squad- and platoon-level small arms fire exercises in Stavropol on February 4.⁵⁵⁷

Unidentified platoon-sized special forces elements (100 personnel) conducted a heliborne landing exercise with 10 Mi-28 and Mi-8 helicopters in Pskov on February 4.⁵⁵⁸

Regiment-sized artillery elements (over 1,000 personnel) of the 20th Motorized Rifle Division conducted artillery fire exercises with multiple launch rocket systems, self-propelled howitzers, mortars, and anti-tank guided missiles at the Prudboy Training Ground on February 4.⁵⁵⁹

Battalion-sized air defense elements (over 500 personnel) conducted air defense exercises against a massed missile attack with S-300 systems in the Voronezh Oblast on February 4.⁵⁶⁰

Russian State Duma Committee for Commonwealth of Independent States First Deputy Chairman Viktor Vodolatsky said on February 3 he expects the Kremlin to open the Russian market to the Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics’ (DNR and LNR) industrial products in the first quarter of 2022.⁵⁶¹ Vodolatsky said that the Russian Ministry of Agriculture already worked out licensing, certification, and registration documents for DNR and LNR food goods. Vodolatsky stated that four United Russia deputies have been pushing for DNR and LNR integration and working on trade legislation. Vodolatsky added that Russian President Vladimir Putin’s decree on humanitarian assistance on November 15 to the DNR and LNR enabled these policies.

Battalion-sized elements (over 300 personnel) of the 1st Tank Army deployed to the Mulino Training Ground in Nizhny Novgorod for exercises on February 3.⁵⁶²

Electronic warfare elements of the Western Military District (over 500 personnel) conducted exercises to disrupt enemy communications across multiple unspecified training grounds in the Western Military District on February 3.⁵⁶³

Battalion-sized air defense elements (over 500 personnel) of the Western Military District conducted air defense exercises with S-300 and Pantsir-S1 air defense systems in Voronezh on February 3.⁵⁶⁴

Regiment-sized Baltic Fleet elements (over 1,000 personnel) conducted a joint staff training with command and control bodies in Kaliningrad on February 3.⁵⁶⁵

Russian social media users observed Russian National Guard (Rosgvardia) elements in Voronezh on February 2.⁵⁶⁶

Russian President Vladimir Putin discussed Ukrainian security and Russian security demands with UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson on February 2.⁵⁶⁷ Putin noted “Kyiv’s sabotage of the Minsk agreements” and NATO’s hesitancy to “adequately respond to justified Russian concerns” while, he claimed, hiding behind its Open Door membership policy.

Russian President Vladimir Putin said that Russia must “develop” and strengthen the “Russian World” on February 2.⁵⁶⁸ Putin said that the Russian World is “multi-confessional,” “multinational,” and “huge,” and stated that although Russia did not create the Russian World, Russia has a “mission” to “strengthen it, develop it and make it attractive to our citizens.” The Kremlin may invoke narratives about the “Russian World” in information operations to justify Russian activity in Ukraine and Belarus.

Russian President Vladimir Putin chaired a Russian Security Council meeting on “protecting Russian citizens’ personal data in the course of introducing digital technologies” on February 2.⁵⁶⁹ The Kremlin readout did not provide any further details.

Kremlin Spokesman Dmitry Peskov said that Russian President Vladimir Putin spoke with “very restrained optimism and hope” about resolving the problem of Russian security guarantees if the US and NATO “want” to solve the problem on February 2.⁵⁷⁰ Peskov reiterated that Russia calls on the US to refrain from “provocative actions and refrain from escalating tension on the European continent.” Peskov stated that the Kremlin has plans to hedge risks and minimize consequences if the United States cuts Russia out of the dollar economy. Peskov said there are no plans for new contacts between Putin and US President Joe Biden at this time.

Russian social media users observed unidentified elements of Chechen leader Razman Kadryov’s Sever Battalion in Prokhladny, Kabardino-Balkarian Republic, deploying towards Krasnodar from Chechnya on February 2.⁵⁷¹

Battalion-sized tank elements (over 500 personnel) of the 1st Tank Army conducted tank battle exercises at the Golovenki Training Ground in Moscow on February 2.⁵⁷²

Battalion-sized elements (over 500 personnel) of an unspecified command and control brigade of the Western Military District conducted signals exercises to deploy field communication centers in the Central Black Earth economic region (southern Russia near Ukraine) on February 2.⁵⁷³

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov published a written response to the US, Canada, and other unspecified European states on the Kremlin's dissatisfaction with the Western response to Russian security demands on February 1.⁵⁷⁴ Lavrov stated that US and NATO's January 26 responses to Russian demands "testify to significant differences in understanding of the principle of equal and indivisible security fundamental to the entire European security architecture." Lavrov claimed that the 1999 Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Istanbul Summit Declaration for European Security stipulates that each signatory state cannot strengthen its security at the expense of the security of other states. Lavrov claimed that European states' decisions to join NATO over the past several years de facto erodes Russian security and therefore undermines the Istanbul Summit Declaration's "principle of the indivisibility of security." Lavrov stated that the Kremlin expects a prompt response and that "it is necessary to immediately clarify this decisive question." Lavrov demanded that individual states – not a bloc – individually respond to the Kremlin's demands because individual states agreed to the OSCE Istanbul Summit Declaration and other similar security documents.

Russian Permanent Representative to the United Nations (UN) Vasily Nebeznya said that the US-convened UN Security Council (UNSC) meeting was a "provocation" and "tantamount to a call for war" in a press conference following the UNSC meeting on February 1.⁵⁷⁵ Nebeznya stated that Russia will respond to Western sanctions and stated that the US should force Kyiv to comply to the Minsk II Accords to solve the crisis.

Over 500 aviation and air defense personnel of the Western Military District conducted air defense exercises in Voronezh to protect the Central Black Earth economic region (southern Russia near Ukraine) on February 1.⁵⁷⁶ Anti-aircraft missile elements deployed to patrol areas, mobilized to the highest combat readiness level, and deployed command posts to detect and defeat enemy air raids against Russian territory. Su-34 fighter-bombers simulated enemy aircraft.

Satellite imagery observed Russian military force buildups, including new field camps, tents for troops, and armored vehicles, in western Belarus, Crimea, and western Russia in late January 2022.⁵⁷⁷

Russian President Vladimir Putin met with Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban about the security situation in Europe on February 1.⁵⁷⁸ Putin stated that he wanted to inform Orban about the status of US and NATO responses to Russian security demands. Orban responded that his visit to Moscow is "partly also a peace mission" aimed to assure Putin that "none of the European Union leaders, member countries, would like war."⁵⁷⁹

Russian President Vladimir Putin accused Ukraine of avoiding its commitments in the Minsk Accords and discussed Russian security demands in a call with Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi on February 1.⁵⁸⁰ Putin deflected Draghi's concern over Russian escalations at the Ukrainian border by claiming that Ukrainian

authorities evade political obligations under the Minsk Accords. The Kremlin readout additionally states that the leaders discussed Russian security demands “in detail.”

Russian State Duma Deputy Representative for the Council on the Commonwealth of Independent States Viktor Volodarsky said that 16,000 residents of the Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics (DNR and LNR) applied to join the Kremlin’s ruling United Russia party on February 1.⁵⁸¹ Volodarsky said he will travel to LNR to deliver 860 party tickets in the coming days.

Russian Ambassador to the United Nations (UN) Vassily Nebenzya denied US allegations that Russia deployed over 100,000 troops to the Ukrainian border during UN Security Council on January 31.⁵⁸² A US representative added that Russia plans to deploy an additional 30,000 troops to Belarus to augment Russia’s exiting deployment of 5,000 servicemen.⁵⁸³ Nebenzya said the West is amplifying alarmist rhetoric to provoke an escalation and saw no reason to discuss Ukraine’s “domestic” security situation. Nebenzya left the UN Security Council meeting before Ukraine’s representative presented Kyiv’s concerns over Russia’s military buildup.⁵⁸⁴

Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu held a meeting with Russian military leadership at the National Defense Management Center to reiterate that Russia does not need to report its deployment to Belarus on February 1.⁵⁸⁵ Shoigu emphasized that Russia’s deployment to Belarus does not meet the reporting requirements in the Vienna Document of 2011. Shoigu also stated that all of Russia’s fleets have been conducting a series of naval exercises throughout January and February 2022 and stated that Russian Aerospace Forces and naval aviation are conducting exercises to protect naval vessels.

The Russian Black Sea Fleet logistic support ship *Vsevolod Bobrov* conducted exercises to land a helicopter and deliver cargo in the Black Sea on February 1.⁵⁸⁶

A Russian Black Sea Fleet Grachonok-class guard boat conducted anti-sabotage exercises in the Black Sea on February 1.⁵⁸⁷

Over 300 reconnaissance personnel from the 34th Motorized Rifle Brigade (Mountain), part of the 49th Combined Arms Army, conducted mountain training exercises in Karachay-Cherkessia on February 1.⁵⁸⁸

Russian President Vladimir Putin and French President Emmanuel Macron discussed Ukraine and the Kremlin’s demanded security guarantees in a phone call on January 31.⁵⁸⁹ The Kremlin readout states that Putin “once again outlined in detail the fundamental [Russian] approaches to these problems” and that the presidents would study the possibility of holding an in-person bilateral meeting.

Russian Communist Party General Secretary Gennady Zyuganov said that all Russian State Duma factions supported a “common position” to protect the Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics (DNR and LNR) on January 31.⁵⁹⁰ Zyuganov said he has long implored the Duma to recognize the proxy republics to stop “endless violence and murders” by Ukraine.

Head of the Russian Presidential Council for Civil Society Development and Human Rights Valery Fadeev said the department has “no possibility, no

institutions, no levers” in its jurisdiction to protect the proxy republics on January 31.⁵⁹¹ Fadeev added that Russia cannot help the 600,000 Russian citizens in the Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics without a formal Kremlin institution in the region. Fadeev’s outcry is likely an attempt to support the DNR and LNR recognition bill.

Kremlin-sponsored media reported on January 31 that the Russian State Duma Committee for Commonwealth of Independent States will deliberate the Donbas recognition bill between February 14-18.⁵⁹² A Committee official said the bill is still “under consideration” until an unannounced date.

Kremlin-affiliated international relations scholar Fyodor Lukyanov published an article claiming that Russian President Vladimir Putin has successfully and deliberately “raised stakes” to tire the West into political concessions on January 31.⁵⁹³ Lukyanov added that Russia’s escalations are “a political and diplomatic battle” and a “demonstration of power” without the need for a “classical war.” Lukyanov added that Russian demands are “not about Ukraine” but about the “geopolitical structure of the region.”

The Russian Investigative Committee launched a criminal investigation into the case of a Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) resident injured by shelling on January 31.⁵⁹⁴ The case claims that the Ukrainian Armed Forces fired at a residential building and wounded a civilian in Oleksandrivka, Donetsk Oblast. The Investigative Committee claims that “Ukrainian servicemen intended to commit murder or cause serious harm” to civilians. The Kremlin may exploit a Russian criminal investigation as legal grounds for a Russian intervention in Donbas affairs.

Air defense elements (800 personnel) of the 6th Air and Air Defense Forces Army conducted anti-UAV exercises in Voronezh Oblast on January 31.⁵⁹⁵

Unspecified motorized rifle elements, likely of the 20th Motorized Rifle Brigade, conducted fire exercises in companies in Volgograd on January 31.⁵⁹⁶

Battalion-sized (over 500 personnel) artillery elements of the Western Military district conducted counter-battery fire exercises in Ryazan on January 31.⁵⁹⁷

Unspecified elements of the 49th Combined Arms Army conducted an “integrated mobilization” exercise emphasizing command and control cohesion with the Ministry of Emergency Situations, Ministry of Internal Affairs, and the Russian National Guard on January 31.⁵⁹⁸

The Russian Ministry of Defense reported on January 31 that Southern Military District elements, including elements of the 49th Combined Arms Army, returned to their permanent garrisons following the completion of exercises on January 31.⁵⁹⁹ This is not a Russian actual force posture change; Russia’s Southern Military District is still postured against Ukraine as of January 31. The Southern Military District similarly announced the redeployment of forces following exercises in December 2021 that Western news mistakenly reported as a Russian force drawdown near Ukraine.⁶⁰⁰

Motorized rifle elements of the 150th Motorized Rifle Division conducted live fire exercises with armored personnel carriers on January 31.⁶⁰¹

Unspecified tank elements of the 49th Combined Arms Army conducted night operational training with T-72 tanks at the Maikopsky training Ground in Adygea on January 30.⁶⁰²

Russian social media users observed Russian elements, likely of the 200th Motorized Rifle Brigade of the Northern Fleet, deploying south towards Ukraine and Belarus on January 30.⁶⁰³

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said North Macedonia and Montenegro's NATO membership did not strengthen the Alliance's security, but strained relations with Russia on January 30.⁶⁰⁴ Lavrov added that NATO wants to drag Ukraine into the alliance despite "everyone knowing that Ukraine is not ready and will not contribute anything to strengthen NATO." Lavrov warned that Ukraine's membership in NATO would "really undermine relations with Russian Federation." Lavrov claimed that the Russian Foreign Ministry is currently sending an official request to NATO and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe demanding an explanation for why the West can undermine Russian security. Lavrov concluded the Russian President Vladimir Putin will determine further Russian proposals.

Russian Security Council Secretary Nikolai Patrushev called reports of a Russian invasion of Ukraine "complete absurdity" on January 30.⁶⁰⁵ Patrushev noted that Ukrainian officials denounced Western reports and "selfish fabrications" aimed at starting a war with Russia. Patrushev added that Russia does not want war with Ukraine.

Russia's Western Military District announced that its troops headed back to their permanent bases after completing training on January 29.⁶⁰⁶ This is not a Russian actual force posture change; Russia's Western Military District is still postured against Ukraine as of January 31. The Southern Military District similarly announced the redeployment of forces following exercises in December 2021 that Western news mistakenly reported as a Russian force drawdown near Ukraine.⁶⁰⁷

Russian State Duma Deputy Representative for the Council on the Commonwealth of Independent States Viktor Volodarsky said Russian citizens in Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics (DNR and LNR) can serve in the Russian Armed Forces on January 29.⁶⁰⁸ Volodatsky framed that DNR and LNR residents could voluntarily enlist but also mentioned mandatory conscription. The Kremlin may conscript Russian passport holders in the DNR and LNR.

Russian Permanent Representative to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Alexander Lukashovich said NATO countries sent "hundreds of American Javelins, thousands of British missile systems, over 400,000 cartridges including large-caliber weapons" to Ukraine on January 29.⁶⁰⁹ Lukashovich added that Western control over Ukraine aims to derail Ukraine from the Minsk Accords and amplified *SkyNews* report about the arrival of Western mercenaries masked as "instructors" to Donbas. Lukashovich said that after eight years of war, the Ukrainian economy is on an "artificial lung ventilator," relying exclusively on Western aid and guidance. Lukashovich stated that even Ukrainian government officials deny the threat of Russian invasion, while building up 150,000 servicemen near the line of contact in Donbas. Lukashovich misconstrued Ukrainian Defense Minister Oleksiy Reznikov's announcement that the Ukrainian Armed Forces will gain 11,000 contract servicemen for service during peacetime,

claiming that additional personnel officially deployed to Donbas. Lukashevich supported Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics claims that Kyiv began assembling nationalist militia units including the "Right Sector." Lukashevich's statements demonstrate the Kremlin's separation of US-Russia-NATO relations and intra-Ukrainian conflict.

Company-sized (150 personnel) elements of the 1st Tank Army conducted live fire exercises with T-72 tanks at the Mulino Training Ground in Nizhny Novgorod on January 29.⁶¹⁰

Unspecified motorized rifle elements of the 34th Separate Motorized Rifle Brigade conducted exercises with army aviation and UAVs at the Zelenchuksky Training Ground in Karachay-Cherkessia on January 29.⁶¹¹ Servicemen conducted fires and interacted with Orlan-10 UAV operators.

The Russian Foreign Ministry issued a retaliatory travel ban against European Union officials on January 28.⁶¹²

Reuters reported on January 28 that Russia moved blood reserves for wounded soldiers closer to Russia's border with Ukraine, citing anonymous US officials.⁶¹³ CNN issued a report supporting the initial *Reuters* report confirming that two "senior US defense officials" stated that Russia moved blood reserves closer to Ukraine's border on January 29.⁶¹⁴

Russian President Vladimir Putin approved a list of instructions on January 27 proposed by the Russian Council of Civil Society and Human Rights on December 9, 2021.⁶¹⁵ Putin tasked the Russian Cabinet of Ministers to consider "providing Russian Federation citizens living in territories of certain Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine with the opportunity to submit applications for social benefits" by July 1. The provision would allow Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics (DNR and LNR) residents to apply for Russian state benefits without specifying their residency. Putin also tasked the Cabinet to simplify the Russian citizenship process for humanitarian reasons. The DNR supported Putin's instructions, claiming that the step "demonstrates Russia's peaceful intentions" while Ukraine is "shelling, installing a blockade, and incites hatred for the Donbas residents."⁶¹⁶ The DNR claimed that the Ukrainian government does not care about Donbas interests as it stripped state social benefits for the DNR and LNR.

Unconfirmed reports claim that over 130 Russian National Guard (Rosgvardia) servicemen flew closer to Ukraine from Tomsk to Kursk on January 26.⁶¹⁷

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said that Russian President Vladimir Putin is ready to discuss normalizing Russo-Ukrainian relations if Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky is ready to talk on January 28.⁶¹⁸ Lavrov said that Kyiv's continued refusal to talk to representatives of the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics is "bad" for the Ukraine crisis. The Kremlin is likely setting conditions for Zelensky and the West to make political concessions. Lavrov additionally agreed with a Russian journalist that Ukraine does not control "a huge number of [Ukrainian] military personnel" and said that "uncontrolled armed people" from Ukrainian paramilitary organizations can attack Donbas, setting conditions for a possible Kremlin information operation to claim rogue Ukrainian forces attacked Donbas. Lavrov also stated that the West shutting Russia out of financial and economic systems would be akin to breaking relations with Russia.

Russian President Vladimir Putin and French President Emmanuel Macron discussed Russia's security guarantees in Europe on January 28.⁶¹⁹ Putin stressed that the US response did not “take into account” Russia’s “fundamental concerns” about NATO’s non-expansion, non-deployment of strike weapons near Russian borders, and retracting NATO back to its 1997 borders. The Kremlin readout states that Putin and Macron discussed the results of the January 26 Normandy Format political advisors meeting and agreed to remain in close contact.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said that the United States’ response to Russia’s security guarantees contains “grains of rationality” and stated that negotiations are not over yet on January 28.⁶²⁰ Lavrov stated, “I cannot say that the negotiations are over,” and stated that though the West rejected core Russian demands, the American and NATO responses favorably consider Russian proposals from recent years. Lavrov specified that US and NATO proposals include provisions on short- and medium-range missiles, conducting exercises further away from NATO-Russia borders, and proposals on parameters for the maximum distance of aircraft flights and ship deployments.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said that the issue of Russia recognizing the Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics should be considered in the context of the Kremlin’s “firm line to force the West to force Kyiv to comply with the Minsk agreements” on January 28.⁶²¹ The Kremlin likely still seeks to integrate the Donetsk and Luhansk Peoples Republics into Ukraine’s central government structures as Kremlin-controlled proxies as of January 28. The Kremlin still maintains flexibility to change its strategy, however.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock discussed implementing the Minsk II Accords in a phone call on January 28.⁶²² The Russian readout states that both ministers expressed support for working within the Normandy Format to promote the full implementation of the Minsk II Accords. Lavrov discussed the Kremlin’s reaction to the US and NATO responses to the Kremlin’s security guarantee demands in Europe.

Russian President Vladimir Putin presided over a Russian Security Council meeting on the Russian Foreign Minister’s draft updated Russian Foreign Policy Concept on January 28.⁶²³ The Kremlin readout provided no additional details.

Battalion-sized tank and motorized rifle elements (over 500 personnel), likely of the 144th Motorized Rifle Division, conducted maneuver exercises at Dorogobuzh Training Ground in Smolensk on January 28.⁶²⁴

Black Sea Fleet frigate *Admiral Essen*, the patrol ship *Ladny*, and unidentified missile boats conducted air defense exercises in the Black Sea on January 28.⁶²⁵ The vessels conducted the exercise as part of a series of exercises being undertaken by 20 vessels of the Black Sea fleet in January and February.

Unspecified artillery elements of the 150th Motorized Rifle Division conducted artillery live fire exercises in Rostov on January 28.⁶²⁶

Platoons of an unspecified tank battalion of the 7th Airborne Division conducted live fire exercises with T-72 tanks at the Raevsky Training Ground in Krasnodar Krai on January 28.⁶²⁷

Unspecified Baltic Fleet signals elements conducted exercises to organize communications between permanent and field command posts amid enemy electronic warfare attacks at an unspecified location on January 28.⁶²⁸

Battalion-sized (300 personnel) air defense elements of the Central Military District conducted anti-missile air defense exercises with S-400 air defense systems in an unspecified location in the Volga region on January 27.⁶²⁹

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov responded to the US written response to Russian security demands on January 27.⁶³⁰ Lavrov said that US gave the Kremlin a “reaction that allows [Russia] to count on the initiation of a serious conversation, but on secondary topics.” Lavrov said that the US did not give “a positive reaction” to Russian demands on halting NATO eastward expansion and the deployment of strike weapons to countries neighboring Russia. Lavrov noted that the US asked to preserve the confidentiality of the written response but said that the document will “leak soon” anyway. Lavrov said that he warned US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken on January 21 that Russia will issue leaders of the Istanbul and Astana Declaration countries an official request to explain why the US could compromise only on one Russian security demand. Lavrov said Russian President Vladimir Putin will determine next steps to address US and NATO responses.

Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said there are “not many reasons for optimism” on the US written response to Russian security demands on January 27.⁶³¹ Peskov said that “it is impossible to say that [Russian] considerations were taken in account” or that the West demonstrated “some willingness” to address Russian demands.⁶³² The US requested its response to remain confidential, but Peskov said it would not matter if the contents were public “because everyone already knows everything.” Peskov refrained from commenting on compromise prospects.

Russian Foreign Ministry (MFA) claimed that the West staged intra-Ukrainian escalations last week “to quarrel [the] historically united people of Russia and Ukraine” and destabilize Russia’s relations with the European Union on January 27.⁶³³ The MFA claimed that there is presently “a relative calmness” at the line of contact and quoted Ukrainian National Security and Defense Council Secretary Oleksiy Danilov and Ukrainian Defense Minister Oleksiy Reznikov’s statements downplaying the immediate threat of Russian invasion. The MFA said that the West seeks to continue its provocations – namely evacuation of diplomatic staff, increasing arms supply, and alarmism – to artificially escalate the situation. The MFA criticized the West for “censoring” officials that believe Ukraine will never reintegrate Crimea or should not receive NATO membership. The MFA blamed the West for another failed Trilateral Contact Group meeting on January 25-26.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov accused Ukraine and the Baltic states of promoting “undisguised neo-Nazi ideas” on January 27.⁶³⁴ Lavrov added that Ukrainian and Baltic local authorities approve “torchlight processions and marches” honoring Nazi collaborators and falsify history. Lavrov noted that the West and Ukraine particularly need to commemorate the Holocaust this year as they began to vigorously rehabilitate activities of various radicals, “propaganda of Russophobia, anti-Semitism,” and xenophobia.⁶³⁵

Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said Russian President Vladimir Putin is “well aware” of the Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics (DNR and LNR) recognition bill but currently “has no reaction to such an initiative” on January 27.⁶³⁶ Peskov added that United Russia Party testimonials showed that “it is necessary to these republics and to give them opportunity to somehow resist Ukraine’s potentially aggressive plans” while the West pumps Ukraine with weapons. Peskov said Russian citizens and parliamentarians “cannot be indifferent to the fate of Donbas residents,” and their concern “highlights the severity of the problem.”⁶³⁷ Peskov clarified that the proposal to provide DNR and LNR with weapons was a new initiative.

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Vershinin said Russia will continue dialogue on Ukraine, “but with the full understanding that [Russia] will firmly defend national interests” on January 27.⁶³⁸

Head of the Russian State Duma Committee on Commonwealth of Independent States Leonid Kalashnikov announced that the Committee will discuss the Donbas recognition bill in early February on January 27.⁶³⁹ Kalashnikov added that weapon supplies to the Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics (DNR and LNR) is a “preventative measure, which will not allow [Ukraine] to start a war” as Ukrainians will know better than to attack armed residents on January 26.⁶⁴⁰ Kalashnikov claimed that “Russia will not be involved in the conflict, but the other side will know that people in DNR and LNR have something to protect themselves with.” Head of the Duma International Committee Leonid Slutsky added, however, that the appeal to Russian President Vladimir Putin will involve expert opinions and will take time.⁶⁴¹

Russian Trilateral Contact Group Plenipotentiary Boris Gryzlov said that Ukraine is executing an “undisguised sabotage of the Minsk negotiation process” by refusing to draft a roadmap for a “comprehensive political settlement” for the Donbas conflict on January 27.⁶⁴²

Russian Human Rights Commissioner Tatyana Moskalkova said she receives “constant appeals from Russian citizens” in Donbas on January 27.⁶⁴³ Moskalkova said mass media is conditioning Donbas residents for a possible offensive and military activity. Moskalkova added that most appeals concern Donbas residents hoping to relocate and receive shelter in Russia.

Head of the Russian Presidential Administration Dmitry Kozak said he “cannot comment” on the proposal to supply Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics with weapons on January 26.⁶⁴⁴ Kozak said Russia offered other initiatives at the Normandy Four advisors meeting on January 26.

Signalmen from the 6th Combined Arms Army of the Western Military District conducted a readiness exercise to establish stable communications for subordinate forces on January 27.⁶⁴⁵

Unspecified motorized rifle elements of the 49th Combined Arms Army deployed to the Nikolo-Aleksandrovsky Training Ground in Stavropol for exercises on January 27.⁶⁴⁶ Mi-28 and Mi-8 helicopters covered the motorized rifle elements movement to the training ground. The Southern Military District stated that the motorized rifle elements

will conduct live fire and maneuver exercises with tanks, armored vehicles, and artillery at an unspecified future date.

Unspecified special forces elements of the 49th Combined Arms Army conducted reconnaissance and sabotage exercises in Kuban on January 27.⁶⁴⁷

Unspecified coastal defense elements of the Black Sea Fleet conducted readiness exercises with electronic fires of Bal and Bastion coastal defense missile systems at the Zhelezny Rog Training Ground in Krasnodar Krai on January 27.⁶⁴⁸

A separate electronic warfare battalion and air defense elements (700 personnel) likely of the 20th Combined Arms Army conducted anti-UAV exercises in Smolensk on January 26.⁶⁴⁹

Over 1,500 signals personnel of the Western Military District (WMD) conducted signals exercises to establish communications between WMD air force and air defense elements, combined arms armies, and the Baltic Fleet on January 26.⁶⁵⁰

Over 100 servicemen from the 432nd Missile Brigade (part of the 1st Guards tank Army) equipped with Iskander missile systems conduct redeployment and firing exercises at an unspecified location on January 27.⁶⁵¹

Unspecified Eastern Military District artillery elements conducted artillery training in Saratov, Russia, on January 26.⁶⁵² Saratov is in the Central Military District. These Eastern Military District elements could deploy closer to Ukraine or to Belarus.

The small anti-submarine ships *Yeisk* and *Suzdalets* of the Black Sea Fleet conducted air defense exercises in the Black Sea on January 26.⁶⁵³ The vessels conducted the exercise as part of a series of exercises being undertaken by 20 vessels of the Black Sea fleet in January and February.

Secretary of the General Council of United Russia Andrey Turchak said Russia should provide the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics (DNR and LNR) with "certain types of weapons to increase their defense capacity and deter military aggression clearly being prepared by Kyiv" on January 26.⁶⁵⁴ Turchak added that Russia's ruling United Russia Party is very concerned over "the pumping of Ukraine with Western lethal weapons" and accused "practically all leading NATO states" of "very large scale" weapon deployments. Turchak pointed out that US and UK completed dozens of flights delivering "missile systems, grenade launchers, small arms, mines, ammunition, and much, much more" to Ukraine in just one month. Turchak claimed that NATO does not even deny its overt operations and deploys large numbers of "so-called instructors" to prepare "various Ukrainian military units for combat operations in urban conditions." Turchak claimed that "Western curators are pushing the Ukrainian junta into a direct invasion of Donbas, arming the nationalist groups – whose heroes are Bandera and Hitler – and the swastika is a respected sign."

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said the West "is in a military frenzy" and pushing alarmist reports so that Ukraine "breaks into a forceful operation in Donbas" and terminates the Minsk Accords in a speech to the Russian State Duma on January 26.⁶⁵⁵ Lavrov said the West "wants [to create] some real provocation" by

evacuating its diplomatic staff from Ukraine and disregarding what Lavrov framed as Kyiv's demands to calm down alarmist reports. Lavrov said that the Kremlin is "ready for any development," implying that the West has always attacked Russia. Lavrov said that Russian President Vladimir Putin will "will take a necessary response" if the West "continues its aggressive course." Lavrov reiterated that "safety of Russia and its citizens is an absolute priority and will be reliably ensured in all circumstances." Lavrov noted that the Kremlin still expects written security assurances from the US and believes that "this time [the US] will not let [Russia] down and keep its word." Lavrov accused NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg of losing "touch with reality." Lavrov also said that most of Russia's neighbors "have American and Pentagonian [sic] biological laboratories" with secretive operations. Lavrov added that the Kremlin is negotiating with neighboring countries to establish a transparency policy to prevent foreign military involvement in such laboratories. Lavrov claimed that Russia is working with partners to reduce dependence on the dollar and stated Russia's Central Bank SWIFT analogue works, despite still being in development.

Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said that Russian President Vladimir Putin "does not have any plans now" to contact the leaders of the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics on January 26.⁶⁵⁶

United Russia faction leader Vladimir Vasilyev appealed to Russian leadership "to assist the Luhansk and Donetsk republics (LNR and DNR) by supplying military equipment necessary to deter aggression" on January 26.⁶⁵⁷ Vasilyev added that Russian leadership should "take all necessary measures to ensure citizen safety." Vasilyev said United Russia "is concerned about protecting the lives of Russian citizens and compatriots living in DNR and LNR" and after consultations determined that Russia "could not leave the people to the arbitrariness of the Kyiv regime."

Russian Federation Council Speaker Valentina Matvienko said "the Kyiv regime is likely nurturing plans to once again try to solve the Donetsk and Luhansk problem by force" on January 26.⁶⁵⁸ Matvienko claimed that Ukraine's "Western owners" developed several plans and provocation recommendations for Kyiv and unleashed a "real information war" on Russia. Matvienko claimed that the West started a "hysteria" in world media to mask "an active Ukrainian military development and [Western] deployments of offensive supplies including lethal weapons instead of fulfilling the Minsk Accords." Matvienko added that the Kremlin has not received "adequate written answers" to "fair demands on Russia's security guarantees" and NATO eastward expansion due to "slow and difficult negotiations."

Russian Federation Council Deputy Speaker Konstantin Kosachev claimed that Ukrainian defeat in a Donbas offensive would allow Kyiv to "get rid of inconvenient regions with relief" under the premise of Russian aggression on January 26.⁶⁵⁹ Kosachev said Ukraine would not benefit from a victory in Donbas because Kyiv would have to "live together with humiliated people who hate Maidan power," which will only intensify with "inevitable repressions" against Donetsk and Luhansk residents. Kosachev said Kyiv is "interested in a direct military confrontation with Russia with any outcome" because Ukraine wants to "sell the victim image to the world." Kosachev added that playing victim allows Kyiv to collect Western sympathy money and mobilize internal Ukrainian support amidst societal failures. Kosachev accused the US of prolonging the "unsolvable" Ukrainian conflict to ruin Russian relations with the European Union and rule the collective West. Kosachev claimed that US alarmism over a Russian invasion of Ukraine distracts other

Western countries from considering Russian security guarantees. Kosachev also claimed that the countries of “old Europe” want to recognize Russia as an antagonist to hide their own involvement in Maidan, which Eastern Europeans need to hide their Russophobic lobbying.

Over 20 Black Sea Fleet vessels - including frigates, landing ships, patrol ships, small missile ships, missile boats, and anti-submarine ships - conducted exercises in the Black Sea on January 26.⁶⁶⁰ The Russian MoD stated the exercises would practice communications, maneuvers “with intensive navigation,” and air defense at sea. The Black Sea Fleet minesweepers *Ivan Golubets*, *Ivan Antonov*, and *Valentin Pikul* conducted anti-mine and escort tasks as part of the exercises.⁶⁶¹

Russia’s Southern Military District (SMD) announced that unspecified units of the 150th Motorized Rifle Division began deploying to unspecified training grounds in Rostov Oblast for live fire exercises on January 26.⁶⁶² This mobilization is likely a component of larger SMD readiness exercises announced on January 25. This mobilization can support a Russian deployment of elements of the 150th Division to Donbas.

Russia’s Southern Military District (SMD) announced that unspecified elements of the 20th Motorized Rifle Division began deploying to the Prudboy Training Ground for live fire exercises on January 26.⁶⁶³ This mobilization is likely a component of larger SMD readiness exercises announced on January 25. This mobilization can support Russian military activity against Ukraine.

Over 20 helicopters of Stavropol army aviation conducted exercise with motorized rifle elements in Stavropol Krai on January 26.⁶⁶⁴ Mi-28N and Mi-8 helicopters provided air support cover to unspecified motorized rifle elements and practiced escort and heliborne deployment tasks. Helicopter crews practiced preparing aviation equipment to operate in new airfields away from their home airfields.

Battalion-sized airborne infantry elements (300 personnel) of the Russian 76th Airborne Division conducted small arms live fire exercises at the Zavelichye Training Ground in Pskov on January 25.⁶⁶⁵

Elements of an unidentified special forces brigade of the Western Military District practiced conducting a raid against an enemy supply column and field camp at the Tregulay Training Ground in Tambov on January 25.⁶⁶⁶ Special forces elements practiced reconnaissance and small arms fire. An unspecified number of Mi-8 helicopters supported the exercise.

Russia’s Southern Military District (SMD) announced the start of large scale combined arms exercises involving over 6,000 personnel on January 25.⁶⁶⁷ The SMD stated that SMD combined arms armies (possibly including the 8th, 58th, and 49th Armies), the 4th Air Force and Air Defense Army, the Black Sea Fleet, and Caspian Flotilla are participating. Independent Russian news outlet *Interfax* reported on January 25 that the SMD stated that over 60 aircraft of both army aviation units and Black Sea Fleet naval aviation, including Su-27SM and Su-30SM2 fighters and Su-34 fighter bombers will conduct missile strikes against targets in training grounds in Crimea, Rostov, and Krasnodar.⁶⁶⁸ The SMD stated that elements of the 58th Combined Arms Army will deploy to unspecified training grounds in the North Caucasus and that exercise includes more than 20 mobile field command and control posts across the SMD.⁶⁶⁹ Elements of the Russian 49th Combined Arms Army in

Stavropol, Krasnodar, Karachay-Cherkessia, and Adygea mobilized and deployed to unspecified training grounds.⁶⁷⁰ Battalion-sized artillery elements (approximately 500 personnel) likely of the 236th Artillery Brigade (20th Combined Arms Army) conducted live fire exercises in Ryazan on January 25.⁶⁷¹

Unspecified Southern Military District T-72B3 tank crews conducted live fire exercises to suppress anti-tank crews in Crimea on January 25.⁶⁷²

Russia's Western Military District (WMD) announced that it began comprehensive combat readiness checks on January 25.⁶⁷³ The WMD stated that these readiness checks will continue until January 29. These WMD readiness checks likely complement the large exercises that Russia's Southern Military District began on January 25. Over 1,000 personnel the 1st Tank Army in Moscow began deploying to unspecified "concentration areas" on January 25, likely as part of this check.⁶⁷⁴

Approximately 1000 personnel of Russia's Strategic Rocket Forces (nuclear weapons) conducted exercises with RS-24 Yars mobile intercontinental ballistic missile systems in Ivanovo on January 25.⁶⁷⁵ Russian servicemen deployed an unspecified number of Rs-24 Yars systems up to 100 kilometers to field positions, changed field positions camouflaged the systems, and conducted force protection exercises to protect to launchers from sabotage groups. This exercise likely ended on January 31.⁶⁷⁶

Russian social media users recorded likely Russian National Guard (Rosgvardia) personnel mobilizing on trains in Makhachkala, Dagestan, on January 25.⁶⁷⁷ It is unclear where the likely Rosgvardia members are deploying to. This is the first observed Rosgvardia mobilization in southern Russia since the current Russian mobilization began in October 2021.

The Russian 3rd Motorized Rifle Division in Valuyki, Belgorod Oblast, received a new separate electronic warfare battalion on January 25.⁶⁷⁸ The new electronic warfare battalion augments the division's combat capabilities and indicates a continued Russian military buildup on Ukraine's borders.

The Russian Duma postponed consideration of a bill calling on Russian President Putin to consider recognizing the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics (DNR and LNR) independence to February 2022 on January 24.⁶⁷⁹ The Head of the Russian State Duma Committee on the Commonwealth of Independent States (and author of the bill) Leonid Kalashnikov stated "we need to make it clear to Western states that there are political forces in Russia that insist on [recognizing the DNR and LNR]" on January 25.⁶⁸⁰ Kalashnikov stated that there is popular support among Russians for recognizing the DNR and LNR and suggested that Duma MPs made "promises" to voters to consider recognizing the DNR and LNR. Kalashnikov also implied that Communist Party leadership could consult with Russian President Vladimir Putin to advance the bill. The decision to suspend the bill's consideration grants Putin flexibility in how to pressure Ukraine for political concessions in late January and early February 2022.

Russian officials denied Latvian Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) inspectors access to Russian military facilities in Bryansk and Smolensk on January 21.⁶⁸¹ Latvian arms control officers planned to visit Bryansk and Smolensk to study Russian military exercises there and establish whether Russia should report its activities according to prior notification procedures of the Vienna Document of 2011. The

Latvian Ministry of Defense stated on January 25 that the Russian Ministry of Defense published a (now-deleted) false readout claiming the Latvian observers conducted their inspections when Russian authorities, in fact, blocked the Latvian observers.⁶⁸² The blocked observer mission was supposed to occur from January 24 to 29.⁶⁸³

Unspecified elements of the Russian 1st Missile Brigade using Iskander-M short-range ballistic missiles deployed to the Kapustin Yar Training Ground in Astrakhan for fire exercises against air defense systems, command posts, and communication centers at ranges up to 300 kilometers on January 24.⁶⁸⁴

Unspecified Western Military District airmobile and army aviation helicopter elements conducted heliborne fire and landing exercises at unspecified locations in the Western Military District on January 24.⁶⁸⁵

Over 200 personnel of the Southern Military District army aviation units in Krasnodar conducted exercises with Su-25 close air support fighters to overcome an air defense system and strike targets at an unspecified training ground in Kuban on January 24.⁶⁸⁶

Unspecified elements of the Russian 6th Air and Air Defense Forces Army conducted electronic fire exercises with S-400 anti-air missile systems to destroy enemy cruise missiles and aircraft in Pskov Oblast on January 23.⁶⁸⁷

Battalion-sized artillery elements (500 personnel) of the 58th Combined Arms Army conducted counter-battery fire with 122-mm self-propelled artillery and Grad multiple launch rocket systems at an unspecified training ground in Chechnya on January 23.⁶⁸⁸

The Normandy Four (Russia, Ukraine, France, and Germany) will likely hold a meeting of political advisers in Paris, France on January 25 or 26.⁶⁸⁹ TASS reported that Kremlin Representative on the War in Donbas Dmitry Kozak will participate in a Normandy Format meeting of political advisers in Paris on January 25. *Reuters* separately reported that an adviser to Ukraine's chief negotiator Andriy Yermak stated that the meeting in Paris is planned for January 26.⁶⁹⁰ French, German, Ukrainian, and Russian officials have not formally confirmed plans to hold a Normandy Four political advisors meeting as of January 24. The Kremlin historically uses such meetings to demand political concessions from Ukraine, France, and Germany.⁶⁹¹

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov met with Swiss President Ignazio Cassis to discuss "dialogue and in creating the right atmosphere for discussing the numerous problems on the agenda of the international community" in Geneva on January 21.⁶⁹² The Kremlin likely seeks to cultivate ties with target states to drive wedges between European states to fragment European solidarity on pushing back against Russian malign activities in Ukraine.

Russian Permanent Representative to the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Alexander Lukashevich gave a speech to the OSCE on January 20 accusing NATO of deliberately supporting Ukrainian "hotheads" that seek a military solution to the conflict in Donbas.⁶⁹³ Lukashevich additionally claimed the UK's shipment of anti-tank weapons to Ukraine and increased US reconnaissance flights

over Ukraine undermine the Minsk II Accords. Lukashевич accused NATO of pushing Kyiv into a “new round of violence” in Donbas.

US Secretary of State Blinken and Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov met in Geneva on January 21.⁶⁹⁴ Both Blinken and Lavrov downplayed the possibility of a breakthrough in negotiations prior to the meeting and framed the negotiations as an opportunity to clarify negotiating positions on Russia’s draft security demands. The Russian MFA’s readout of the meeting threatened “the most serious consequences” if the US does not respond to Russia’s security demands. Following the meeting, Lavrov claimed Blinken attempted to restrict discussions to the issue of Ukraine and refused to engage with Russia’s wider security concerns. Lavrov continued to deny any Russian plans to attack Ukraine. Blinken reiterated US and NATO commitment to find a diplomatic solution to the conflict and reiterated Western resolve to impose consequences following any further Russian escalation. Blinken shared several possible reciprocal steps Russia can take to reduce tensions as part of continued diplomatic negotiations. Blinken concluded that the US and Russia are now on a “clearer path in terms of understanding each other’s concerns.” Blinken and Lavrov both confirmed that the US will respond to Russia’s demands in writing within the coming week, before meeting again at the Secretary of State/Foreign Minister level.

Russian President Putin and Finnish President Niinisto discussed Ukraine and Russian security demands during a phone call on January 21.⁶⁹⁵ Putin discussed Russia’s security demands and the need for a concrete written response from the United States, and emphasized Ukraine’s need to implement the Minsk Agreements as a precondition to any settlement.

Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov called a proposed bill to recognize the Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics’ (DNR and LNR) independence a “sensitive” matter in need of careful consideration “to avoid some steps that can provoke an increase in tensions” on January 21.⁶⁹⁶ Peskov previously refused to provide a detailed comment about the bill on January 20.⁶⁹⁷ Russian State Duma Speaker Vyacheslav Volodin announced the Duma will discuss the bill next week, adding that the Kremlin must “search for solutions to ensure safety of [Russian] citizens and compatriots in DNR and LNR.”⁶⁹⁸ Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said he “will not speculate” on this bill in response to a press question on January 21.⁶⁹⁹

Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov stated on January 21 that Turkey is allegedly ready to invite representatives from the Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics (DNR and LNR) to talks between Ukrainian President Zelensky and Russian President Putin.⁷⁰⁰ Turkish Presidential spokesperson Ibrahim Kalin previously stated on January 19 that Turkish President Erdogan has offered to mediate between Zelensky and Putin, but did not mention talks with the DNR and LNR. The Turkish government did not respond to Peskov’s claim that mediation could involve DNR and LNR representatives. The Kremlin likely seeks to leverage Turkish offers to mediate between Ukraine and Russia as an opportunity to drive a wedge in NATO and secure diplomatic recognition (through involvement in talks) of its proxies in Donbas.

1,500 personnel from the 34th Motorized Rifle Brigade (Mountain), part of the 49th Combined Arms Army, conducted exercises in Karachay-Cherkessia on January 21.⁷⁰¹ The troops leveraged “the experience of modern armed conflicts,” referencing Russian lessons learned in Syria and Ukraine, in an exercise simulating a defensive battle.

Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov claimed on January 20 that US threats to disconnect Russia from the SWIFT interbank payment system are dangerous, as they may inspire “erroneous hopes” in Ukrainian leadership leading them to “renew civil war in their country” on January 20.⁷⁰²

Members of the Russian State Duma Committee on the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) discussed the alleged presence of US biological laboratories near Russian borders with Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) Secretary General Stanislav Zas on January 20.⁷⁰³ The head of the Duma CIS committee added that foreign biological laboratories are a CSTO political concern because Russia’s “opponents” may use them against the CSTO as a whole. The Kremlin continues to imply that the US and Ukraine are preparing a chemical provocation against Russia.

Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov claimed on January 20 that Russian President Vladimir Putin is not yet aware of the bill submitted by Russia’s Communist Party’s bill on January 19 on recognizing the independence of the Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics (DNR and LNR).⁷⁰⁴ Peskov said the Kremlin will not consider the initiative until the Russian State Duma passes the bill.

Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zakharova gave a briefing on Ukraine on January 20, claiming Western warnings of a possible Russian invasion of Ukraine are intended to create an information cover for Western provocations against Russia.⁷⁰⁵ Zakharova decried efforts by Western states to support Ukraine – including the UK’s shipment of anti-tank weapons, Canada’s deployment of 200 Special Forces troops, and continued US aid deliveries to Ukraine – and claimed this assistance provides Kyiv “carte blanche” to conduct a military operation in Donbas. Zakharova further accused the West of not noticing alleged rampant neo-Nazism in Ukraine, such as naming public locations after Nazi collaborators. Zakharova called on Western states to stop their “anti-Russian information campaign,” stop militarizing Ukraine, and instead encourage Kyiv to “comply with the Minsk agreements and other international obligations.”

Southern Military District and Black Sea Fleet Pantsir air defense crews conducted exercises to practice intercepting low-flying targets and changing firing positions in Crimea on January 20.⁷⁰⁶

400 personnel from unspecified 49th Combined Arms Army (CAA) Special Forces units conducted exercises at the Molkino training ground in Krasnodar on January 20.⁷⁰⁷ The forces practiced parachute landings in the rear of enemy forces and conducting reconnaissance operations.

Iskander crews from the Southern Military District conducted a redeployment exercise from their unspecified “place of permanent deployment” to the Kapustin Yar training ground on January 20.⁷⁰⁸

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov said that a moratorium on NATO’s non-expansion is unacceptable to Russia and reiterated the Kremlin’s demand for legally binding guarantees that NATO will not expand on January 19.⁷⁰⁹ Ryabkov also denied Russian plans to attack Ukraine and said that there is no risk of “large-scale war” in Europe.

Russian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova said the Kremlin adopted a new policy approach to demand that the West provide written answers to each of Russia's security demands on January 19.⁷¹⁰ Zakharova also stated that Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov will meet with US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken in Geneva on January 21.

Russia's Communist Party (CPRF) submitted a draft bill to the Russian State Duma to recognize the independence of the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics (DNR and LNR) on January 19.⁷¹¹ CPRF called on Putin to negotiate with DNR and LNR leadership to "create a legal framework for interstate relations that would regulate all aspects of cooperation and mutual assistance, including security issues." This law could provide informational support for increased Russian military assistance for the DNR and LNR by framing Russian deployments as supporting independent states.

Twenty Mi-24 and Mi-8 helicopters (and over 400 personnel) of Southern Military District army aviation conducted transportation and ground attack exercises in the Stavropol region on January 19.⁷¹²

Russian President Vladimir Putin and Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev discussed Ukraine on January 18.⁷¹³ Aliyev briefed Putin on his recent trip to Ukraine. The Kremlin readout states that the presidents discussed how the "intra-Ukrainian settlement" is "stalled due to Kyiv's destructive line."

Russia's Embassy in the United States asked the US to stop supplying weapons to Ukraine on January 18.⁷¹⁴ Russia's embassy to the US stated that the US should abandon plans to send weapons to Ukraine and instead convince Kyiv to "stop sabotaging the Minsk Agreements" to demonstrate US commitment to diplomacy.

Signal elements of the Southern Military District conducted brigade-sized exercises (over 3,000 personnel) to deploy a communication system for command posts and battalion tactical groups on January 18.⁷¹⁵ The exercise occurred across multiple unspecified training grounds in Rostov, Stavropol, Kuban, Volgograd, Dagestan, North Ossetia, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Armenia. This exercise could support preparations for Russian combat operations against Ukraine.

Over 1,000 Russian Western Military District personnel conducted a live fire exercise to prepare for Army Games 2022 in Voronezh Oblast, Russia, on January 18.⁷¹⁶

Russia's 1st Guards Tank Army began conducting command and staff training in five unspecified oblasts on January 17.⁷¹⁷ Over 800 personnel participated in exercises using stationary communication centers and field communication centers deployed at the training ground to execute command and control tasks. This exercise can support Russian combat operations against Ukraine. Part of this exercise likely occurred in Voronezh, given the 1st Tank elements deployed at the Pogonovo Training Ground.

Over 1,500 personnel of Russia's 34th Mountain Motorized Rifle Brigade (49th Combined Arms Army) conducted live fire exercises in platoons at the Kobu-Bashi Training Ground in Karachay-Cherkessia on January 17.⁷¹⁸

Unspecified tank, motorized rifle, and reconnaissance elements, likely of the 6th Combined Arms Army, conducted brigade-sized (over 2,000 personnel) exercises at the at Kirillovsky and Luzhsky training grounds in Leningrad Oblast on January 18.⁷¹⁹ Servicemen practiced driving and firing skills with T-72B3 tanks and light armored vehicles. Servicemen also conducted live fire missions with sniper rifles and other small arms.

Russia's Black Sea Fleet announced command staff exercises in Crimea on January 17.⁷²⁰ The exercises focus on executing tasks in a “unified information space.” Black Sea Fleet commander Igor Osipov is presiding over the exercise with over 200 Black Sea Fleet command staff personnel.

The *New York Times* (NYT) reported on January 17 that that Russia began slowly evacuating its diplomatic staff from the Russian embassy in Kyiv on January 5.⁷²¹ NYT reported that 18 Russian diplomatic personnel, mostly women and children, left the Russian embassy in Kyiv on January 5. NYT reported that the Kremlin plans to evacuate another 30 diplomats from Kyiv and the Russian consulate in Lviv at an unspecified future time. The Russian Foreign Ministry immediately denied the reports and claimed that the Russian embassy in Kyiv is operating normally.⁷²²

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Grushko gave an interview to *Kommersant* on Russia's demanded security guarantees of NATO on January 17.⁷²³ Grushko said that NATO countries were not ready to respond to Russian security demands and that Russia is not using ultimatums and threats against the West. Grushko stated that his earlier comment that Russia will use “military-technical” retaliatory measures if NATO does not meet Russia's demands are not a threat because Russia's “position is absolutely clear and predictable.” He further stated the Kremlin now awaits how the West will react to Moscow's clear position. Grushko claimed that American and EU efforts to put Ukraine in a position of a false dichotomy choice between alignment with either the West or Russia resulted in the current war in Donbas. Grushko said that NATO military deployments to Romania and Bulgaria are “unjustified” from a security point of view because Russia would not attack Romania or Bulgaria.

CNN published an interview with Kremlin Spokesman Dmitry Peskov on January 16. Peskov reiterated claims that the US violated promises from the 1990s to not expand NATO eastward. Peskov said that NATO has conducted a “gradual invasion” of Ukraine with military equipment and instructors since 2014 and that this constitutes a Russian red line.⁷²⁴ Peskov said that NATO has undermined security and stability in Europe and that NATO should downsize to its 1997 borders. Peskov also denied Russian involvement in the January 13-14 cyberattack against Ukrainian government websites.⁷²⁵

Unknown actors – very likely the Kremlin – conducted the largest cyberattack against the Ukrainian government since 2018 on the late night of January 13-14.⁷²⁶ The attack targeted over 70 central and regional government websites and disabled many, including the websites of Ukraine's Cabinet of Ministers, Foreign Ministry, Energy Ministry, Veterans Affairs Ministry, and State Treasury, among others.⁷²⁷ The attackers posted a message on hacked Ukrainian government websites (in Russian, Ukrainian, and Polish) stating that Ukrainian users' personal data was leaked publicly and that all data on users' personal computers was destroyed. Ukrainian authorities stated that Ukrainian users' data was

not leaked. The hackers' message also instructed readers to "be afraid and wait for the worst. For your past, present, and future. For Volhynia, for the [Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists – Ukrainian Insurgent Army], for Galicia, for Polesie and for historical lands." The Ukrainian Insurgent Army was a right-wing insurgency in Western Ukraine that ethnically cleansed Volhynia, Galicia, and Polesie of ethnic Poles in 1943 – 1945.⁷²⁸ The Kremlin accuses contemporary Ukraine of being under the influence of Ukrainian neo-Nazis linked to the Ukrainian Insurgent Army. Ukraine's foreign ministry spokesperson told *Reuters* it was too early to attribute the attack but said that Russia has conducted similar attacks in the past.⁷²⁹

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov reiterated Kremlin demands that the West respond to Russia's security propositions quickly on December 14.⁷³⁰ Lavrov said "[Russia] won't wait forever" and that US efforts to consult all NATO allies and OSCE members before engaging Moscow are "attempts to drag out the process." Lavrov said that the Kremlin's "patience has run out," that it is "time for [Russia] to go." Lavrov reiterated that Russia's security demands are a package deal and characterized NATO's line vetoes of certain non-starter propositions as a "flagrant violation of the other parts of this inseparable package." Lavrov said that NATO's hypothetical construction of military bases in Ukraine, the Sea of Azov, or the deployment of Western military instructors to Donbas would constitute violations of Russia's red lines.⁷³¹ Lavrov accused the UK of constructing bases in Ukraine and a naval base on the Sea of Azov. Lavrov also accused US, Canadian, and British troops of being permanently stationed in the Baltic states and Northern Europe "under the guise of 'rotation.'" Lavrov blamed the West for increasing the likelihood of conflict. Lavrov accused the US of undermining the "architecture of international relations based on the UN Charter" and "replacing international law with their 'rules' on which they want to force everyone to build a new world order." Lavrov characterized Ukraine's government as being run by right-wing extremists, claiming that "nothing [in Ukrainian governance] has changed," and grouped Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky in the same category with former Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko, Ukraine's "Right Sector" party, and the Azov Battalion. The Kremlin had not prominently accused NATO of creating "bases in Ukraine" prior to this speech.

Russian State Duma Speaker Vyacheslav Volodin said the US should "stop now before it is too late" and implement a security agreement with the Kremlin on January 14.⁷³² Volodin also said that the US should stop threatening Russia with sanctions that will "only destroy relations."

Russia's Eastern Military District (EMD) began snap combat readiness inspections involving deployments over long distances on January 14.⁷³³ Russia's Ministry of Defense stated these exercises test EMD units' ability to complete missions after deploying long distances. These exercises are likely cover for the EMD elements that have deployed closer towards Ukraine since early January 2022.

Russian social media users observed likely elements of Russia's 155th Naval Infantry Brigade (of the Russian Pacific Fleet) in Krasnoyarsk deploying westward on January 14.⁷³⁴ Russian social media users posted video of railcars with Nona-S 120mm mortars, T-80BV tanks, MT-LB armored tracked vehicles, and BMP-3 infantry fighting vehicles. The destination of these observed elements is unclear as of January 14. The Russian military is likely deploying elements of the 155th Brigade towards Ukraine.

Russian Southern Military District (SMD) Commander Alexander Dvornikov announced plans to equip unspecified SMD elements with approximately 3,000 pieces of new equipment in 2022.⁷³⁵ The equipment includes unspecified modern hardware, including 27 aircraft, 37 helicopters, an unspecified number of armored vehicles, five warships and boats, anti-aircraft missile systems, and other specialized equipment. These acquisitions will likely support the development of the Russian 19th Motorized Rifle Division of the 58th Combined Arms Army and the 20th Motorized Rifle Division of the 8th Combined Arms Army; Dvornikov previously announced on January 12 that the SMD will finalize the formation of two new divisions – likely the 19th and 20th – by the end of 2022.

Brigade-sized elements of the 150th Motorized Rifle Division (8th Combined Arms Army) performed live fire exercises at the Kuzminsky and Kadamovsky training grounds in Rostov, Russia, on January 14.⁷³⁶ Over 2,500 personnel (approximately 100 tank crews) of the 150th Division participated in these exercises.

Ukraine’s Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) claimed that Russia’s 8th Combined Arms Army launched a large-scale combat and mobilization readiness inspection of the Donetsk and Luhansk proxy militias on January 14.⁷³⁷ The GUR claimed that Russian proxy units deployed to training grounds for tactical, engineering, and live fire exercises with tank, combat vehicle, and indirect fire crews. Proxy administrators inspected military equipment storages intended to support proxy militia’s mobilization reserves.

Battalion-sized elements of the 4th Tank Division (1st Tank Army) participated in training in Moscow Oblast on January 13.⁷³⁸ Approximately 600 tank personnel practiced standard fire and maneuver tactical tasks. This was likely a routine training exercise for new personnel.

Russian Representative to the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Alexander Lukashevich threatened aggressive Russian action if the OSCE does not provide a “constructive response” to Russian security demands “within a reasonable time” following the Russia-OSCE Meeting on January 13.⁷³⁹ Lukashevich threatened that if Russia does not hear a “constructive response to the proposals made within a reasonable time, and the aggressive line of behavior against Russia continues,” then Russia would “draw appropriate conclusions and take all necessary measures to ensure a strategic balance and eliminate unacceptable threats to [Russian] national security.”⁷⁴⁰ The Russian Foreign Ministry published a statement on January 13 claiming that the OSCE faces a dilemma to either accept Russia’s demands “or slide into a confrontation along the lines of the Cold War, a new arms race, a threat-counterthreat competition with obvious risks for all OSCE participating states” that can have “irreversible consequences.”⁷⁴¹ Lukashevich said that the “coordinated position of the so-called collective West pushes us to where [Russia] will not receive a constructive reaction to our proposals.”⁷⁴² Lukashevich said that Russia’s security demands are “not a menu from which you can choose convenient elements” and said they are of a “packaged nature.”⁷⁴³ Lukashevich said that the OSCE is in a “depressing state of affairs” and that US and NATO policy to “contain Russia” is evident in the OSCE’s “systemic degradation.” Lukashevich accused the US of sabotaging the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (ABM), Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF), Open Skies Treaty, and not ratifying the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe, all with the “tacit consent of [NATO].”

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov said Moscow would not schedule a second round of talks on security guarantees in Europe “in the near future” because the US and NATO are not ready to meet Russia’s demands on January 13.⁷⁴⁴ Ryabkov stated that the US and NATO are not ready to meet Russia’s “key demands for non-expansion of NATO, for curtailing the alliances’ infrastructure [in Eastern Europe], and returning to its borders as of 1997.”⁷⁴⁵ Ryabkov accused NATO of being selfish and said that “it doesn’t occur to anyone in the Western camp that anyone [outside the West] has their own security interest.”⁷⁴⁶ Ryabkov accused the US Congress of falling victim to “total anti-Russian hysteria” and said that Russia would find alternatives and not succumb to “blackmail” if the US government issues new sanctions against Russia.⁷⁴⁷ This is a rejection of US and NATO’s January 12 offer to hold more discussions on arms control and transparency parameters on military exercises. US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman previously stated on January 12 that the Russian delegation was not ready to commit to NATO’s proposed discussions but did not reject the possibility of holding those discussions. Ryabkov’s statement indicates the Kremlin rejected the US and NATO offer.

Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov characterized the January 9-13 summits as “unsuccessful negotiations” and said that the Kremlin will perceive US sanctions against Russian President Vladimir Putin as an “outrageous measure that is comparable to a break of relations” on January 13.⁷⁴⁸ Peskov responded to questions about new US Senate bill against Russian high-profile officials.⁷⁴⁹ Peskov said that if the US imposed sanctions against Putin, then it would be equivalent to “an initiative to break the [US-Russia] relationship.”

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said that the US “promised to try to provide an answer” to Russia’s demanded security guarantees “next week” (the week of January 16 – 22) on January 13.⁷⁵⁰ Lavrov described the West’s position at the January 12 Russia-NATO Council meeting as “sufficiently tough, arrogant in some places, uncompromising,” and stated the West stated its positions “calmly” and “in a businesslike manner.”⁷⁵¹ Lavrov also stated that NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg also volunteered to give a response on NATO’s behalf at an unspecified date (implied to likely also be the week of January 16 – 22).

Over 1,000 signalmen of the 49th Combined Arms Army began conducting signals exercises in Stavropol Oblast on January 13.⁷⁵² Signalers deployed 30 kilometers to an unspecified training ground and deployed field command posts and radio and communication stations.

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Grushko threatened a “military-technical” response against further NATO expansion and signaled NATO must make concessions or face military consequences following the Russia-NATO Council meeting on January 12.⁷⁵³ Grushko participated in an extraordinary Russia-NATO Council meeting with US Assistant Secretary of State Wendy Sherman in Brussels on January 12. Grushko said that the Kremlin is not discussing any compromises and said that Moscow is waiting for NATO’s response to Russia’s security demands.⁷⁵⁴ Grushko said that Russia will take “all measures, political and military-technical, ... to prevent any infringement of legitimate Russian security interests.”⁷⁵⁵ Grushko said that NATO’s expansion “seriously worsens [Russian] security and creates unacceptable risks... which we will confront.”⁷⁵⁶ Grushko stated that “further [NATO] expansion is fraught with risks that will outweigh [the benefits] of further expansion.”⁷⁵⁷ Grushko said de-escalation requires NATO to stop all

military assistance to Ukraine, stop supplying weapons to Ukraine, recall all NATO personnel from Ukraine, and for Ukraine to adhere to the Minsk II Accords.⁷⁵⁸ Grushko accused NATO of becoming antagonistic towards Russia and turning to “the old NATO” and “1949 Cold War schemes” aimed at containing Russia; Grushko said that NATO abandoned its previous positive agenda on cooperating with Russia on Afghanistan, counterterrorism, counternarcotics, and anti-piracy issues.⁷⁵⁹ Grushko accused the US of destroying the arms control system in Europe and lowering the threshold for the use of nuclear weapons, and reiterated that Russia’s proposed treaty bans the deployment of “strike systems” to areas where it is possible to strike the territory of other signatories.⁷⁶⁰ Grushko expressed support for restoring Russia’s diplomatic presence in NATO if NATO “turns around” and accepts “collective efforts to build security.”⁷⁶¹ Grushko framed Russia as a “guarantor of peace in the Euro-Atlantic space” and stated that NATO must work with Russia to achieve peace in Europe.⁷⁶²

NATO collectively denounced Russia’s “non-starter” security demands but proposed holding future unspecified discussions on areas of mutual cooperation at the Russia-NATO Council meeting in Brussels on January 12.⁷⁶³ US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman reiterated that NATO will not compromise on Russian demands on restricting eligible states from seek NATO membership, holding negotiations without Ukraine, returning to NATO’s 1997 borders, or ending all NATO expansion. Sherman stated that NATO told the Russian delegation that escalation does not create optimum conditions for diplomacy and reiterated that the US provided Russia with ideas where the two states could take reciprocal actions to improve strategic stability. Sherman and NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg supported holding another NATO-Russia Council meeting “soon” to have deeper discussions on unspecified areas of mutual cooperation (likely arms control and reciprocal exercise transparency) to strengthen security for all states. Sherman added that the Russian delegation was not ready to commit to NATO’s proposed discussions, but did not reject the possibility of holding those discussions. Sherman reiterated that Russia’s Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline will not be allowed to become operational if Russia renews aggression against Ukraine. Sherman also stated that the US coordinated with Group of Seven (G7) members on January 11 to plan economic measures to undermine the Russian economy and financial system if Russia further invades Ukraine. Sherman reiterated that the Kremlin must make a choice between “de-escalation and diplomacy or confrontation and consequences” and that NATO is collectively preparing for every eventuality.

Russian State Duma Speaker Vyacheslav Volodin claimed that “removal of tension in the world right now” depends on the US decision to accept Russian security demands on January 12.⁷⁶⁴ Volodin added Washington will “take the responsibility for the possible consequences” if Washington fails to provide a timely response to Russia’s demanded security guarantees. Volodin made these statements before the Russia-NATO Council meeting concluded.

The Conflict Intelligence Team (CIT) OSINT group observed likely elements of the 5th Separate Tank Brigade of the Russian Eastern Military District deploying in the western direction, possibly towards to Ukraine, in early January.⁷⁶⁵ The 5th brigade elements’ destination is unclear as of January 12. Russian social media users additionally posted videos of unidentified Russian military elements moving on railways in eastern Russia’s Amur, Khabarovsk, and Buryatia regions throughout early January.⁷⁶⁶ These elements could indicate a Russian effort to generate forces to deploy to near Ukraine or Belarus.

Russian Southern Military District (SMD) Commander Alexander Dvornikov announced on January 12 that the SMD will finalize the formation of two new divisions by the end of 2022.⁷⁶⁷ Dvornikov likely referred to finalizing the formation of the 19th Motorized Rifle Division of the 58th Combined Arms Army and the 20th Motorized Rifle Division of the 8th Combined Arms Army. Dvornikov said that both divisions will have at least one motorized rifle regiment and one tank battalion without providing further details. The Kremlin may use elements from the central or eastern military districts to generate forces for these new divisions. The Kremlin will likely downplay the formation of new Russian units near Ukraine by framing the new units as simply being based at their “permanent garrisons” without mentioning that these units previously did not exist near Ukraine.

Russian Baltic Fleet minesweeper *George Kurbatov* permanently transferred from the Russian Baltic Fleet to the Russian Black Sea Fleet on January 12. The *George Kurbatov* arrived at the Black Sea Fleet’s main base in Sevastopol and formally joined the Black Sea Fleet on January 12.⁷⁶⁸

Over 10,000 troops of the Russian Southern Military District (SMD), Black Sea Fleet, and Caspian Flotilla began battalion tactical group exercises on January 12.⁷⁶⁹ Unspecified elements of the SMD, Black Sea Fleet, and Caspian Flotilla are conducting exercises in battalion tactical groups at unspecified training grounds. The battalion tactical groups will practice reconnaissance tasks, fires, counter-battery fire, aviation strikes, and sniper tasks. Pre-exercise training for these exercises occurred in over 20 training grounds across the SMD in Crimea, and Kuban, Rostov, Stavropol, Volgograd, Astrakhan, North Ossetia, Chechenia, Karachay-Cherkessia, Ingushetia, Dagestan, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Armenia.

Naval infantry and sapper elements of the Russian Black Sea Fleet and artillery elements of the 22nd Army Corps began conducting battalion-sized exercises in Crimea on January 11.⁷⁷⁰ Over 500 servicemen deployed to unspecified training grounds in Crimea for the exercises.

The Kremlin demanded the US quickly advance security negotiations on January 11, in a likely attempt to pressure the US into concessions through a sense of urgency. Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said that the Kremlin expects a “prompt, prompt response” from Washington on Russia’s demanded security guarantees and said “the ball in the [US’] court” on January 11.⁷⁷¹ Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said, “we are absolutely not satisfied with the endless delay of this process,” and characterized US-Russia security negotiations as “not a process for the sake of a process” on January 11.⁷⁷² Peskov also accused the United States of using threats of new sanctions as preparing “information artillery” against Russia ahead of negotiations.⁷⁷³ The Kremlin did not immediately state this adversarial position directly following the US-Russia strategic stability dialogue’s conclusion on January 10.

Russia’s Western Military District (WMD) announced elements of the 20th Combined Arms Army (CAA) will conduct brigade-level exercises near the Ukrainian border in Voronezh, Belgorod, Bryansk, and Smolensk oblasts on January 11.⁷⁷⁴ Approximately 3,000 troops of the 3rd and 144th motorized rifle divisions will conduct fire and maneuver exercises with T-72 tanks, BMP-2 infantry fighting vehicles, and

small arms. Unit participants will participate in a simulated battle with tanks and infantry fighting vehicles striking targets at ranges up to 1,200 meters.

Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu temporarily restricted Russian military personnel from taking official business trips and vacations outside of Russian territory on January 11.⁷⁷⁵ Shoigu made the announcement during an MoD conference call. Shoigu did not specify the parameters of restricting travel for military personnel besides stating “there is a need to temporarily reduce business trips and vacations outside the country” to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the Russian military. Shoigu announced the restriction alongside several other measures to combat COVID, including additional staffing at Russian medical universities and increasing testing capacity. This action may truly be intended to limit the spread of COVID-19, which has spiked in Russia with the Omicron variant. However, retaining military personnel within Russia could be an indicator of military mobilization preparations.

Russian President Vladimir Putin chaired a Russian Security Council meeting on “security and infrastructure problems” in Russia’s border regions on January 11.⁷⁷⁶ The Kremlin readout did not provide any additional details.

The *New York Times* (NYT) reported on January 10 that Russia deployed additional attack and transport helicopters and ground attack fighters closer to Ukraine in an unspecified past time frame, citing anonymous US officials.⁷⁷⁷ The NYT reported that Russian ground forces’ movements towards Ukraine have slowed in an unspecified past time frame, likely December 2021. The NYT reported that US intelligence officials assess that Russian President Vladimir Putin has not yet decided whether to conduct offensive operations against Ukraine. The NYT reported that anonymous US officials said that Russia has “just under 60 battalion tactical groups on the ground” and between 85,000 to 100,000 troops near Ukraine.

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov denied Russian plans to attack Ukraine but insisted that the US and NATO make political concessions to avoid “a worsening security situation” during strategic stability talks with US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman in Geneva on January 9-10.⁷⁷⁸ Ryabkov claimed that the US did not need to threaten Russia with potential sanctions because the Kremlin does not plan to invade Ukraine if negotiations fail.⁷⁷⁹ However, Ryabkov also reiterated that Russia’s demands are firm and threatened that, “if [the West] is unable to [be flexible], then [the West] will face a worsening situation in the area of their own security.”⁷⁸⁰ The Kremlin will likely not reach a policy decision until after the last meeting on January 13 concludes. Ryabkov characterized the US-Russia talks as “difficult, long, very professional, deep and specific” and “without attempts to sugarcoat anything,” but stated that Russia will have to determine its next policy steps after further meetings with NATO and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) on January 12 and 13, respectively.⁷⁸¹ Ryabkov called on the US to stop ignoring Russia, stated there are no planned US-Russia presidential meetings, and insinuated that Ukraine or the US could conduct a military provocation against Donbas.⁷⁸² Ryabkov stated that Russia will continue conducting military exercises, said NATO has an “active deployment” to Ukraine, and characterized US media reports of a Russian military buildup near Ukraine as disinformation.⁷⁸³ US Director of Operations of the Joint Staff James Mingus and Russian Deputy Defense Minister Aleksandr Fomin accompanied Sherman and Ryabkov to the bilateral talks.

US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman did not concede the Kremlin's desired security demands but stated openness to negotiating missile placement and reciprocal military exercise parameters.⁷⁸⁴ Sherman stated that the US was “firm” in pushing back on Russian security proposals that are “simply non-starters;” Sherman stated the US will not forego bilateral cooperation with sovereign states and that NATO will not end its policy of allowing eligible states to seek NATO membership. Sherman also stated that both sides are open to discussing ways to set reciprocal limits on the size and scope of military exercises and improve exercise transparency. Sherman stated that she and Ryabkov discussed missile placement in Europe and that the US is open to discussing the future of “certain missile systems in Europe... along the lines of the now-defunct [Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF)] Treaty.” Sherman pushed back on the Kremlin's efforts to hastily negotiate diplomatic deals, stating that though the Kremlin seeks to negotiate “swiftly,” the Kremlin must give the US the time and space that complex arms control issues require. Sherman stated that there will be “significant costs and consequences well beyond what [Russia] faced in 2014” if Russia attacks Ukraine again.

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov emphasized that the US should prepare for compromises and show flexibility in negotiations with Russia in an interview with *Perviy Kanal* on January 9.⁷⁸⁵ Ryabkov reiterated that Russia's position is firm, and that the West should make concessions. Ryabkov said that Russia has been accepting Western impositions for 30 years and that diplomacy now requires Western flexibility.⁷⁸⁶ Ryabkov threatened the West that Western security would deteriorate if the West is unable to make concessions.

Russia's Southern Military District (SMD) announced on January 10 that SMD forces will conduct exercises at 20 training grounds across the SMD at an unspecified time in winter 2022.⁷⁸⁷ Unspecified SMD elements will conduct exercises to test companies' ability to mobilize as a new element in a larger battle formation. The exercises are likely intended to prepare individual Russian companies for rapid mobilization that may crosscut Russian unit boundaries, integrating the additional units that continue to deploy to the Ukrainian border. Army aviation helicopters will also conduct electronic warfare exercises to block enemy UAV signals. These exercises will occur in unspecified training grounds in Crimea, Rostov, Kuban, Stavropol, Adygea, Dagestan, North Ossetia, Chechnya, Astrakhan, Volgograd, and at Russian military bases in Armenia, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia. The SMD has not decreased its force posture near Ukraine as of January 10, 2022.

Russia's Caspian Flotilla announced on January 10 that over 1,000 Flotilla personnel will conduct exercises throughout January 2022.⁷⁸⁸ The Caspian Flotilla also announced that its naval infantry units began preparing for small arms, artillery, and combat vehicle live fire exercises at the Adanak Training Ground which will occur on a future unspecified date, likely in January 2022.

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov said that NATO needs to return to its 1997 borders on January 9.⁷⁸⁹ Ryabkov told *TASS* that the West must abandon NATO expansion and eliminate unspecified existing military infrastructure in Eastern Europe. *Reuters* quoted Ryabkov saying that NATO must eliminate “everything that the alliance has created since 1997.”⁷⁹⁰ Current NATO members Poland, Romania, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Czechia, Hungary, Bulgaria, Slovakia, Slovenia, Albania, and Croatia, Montenegro, and North Macedonia were not NATO members in 1997.

Russia's Black Sea Fleet and elements of the 4th Air Force and Air Defense Army conducted air defense exercises with S-400 and Pantsir-S air defense systems in Crimea on January 9.⁷⁹¹ Air defense units practiced detecting and tracking aircraft at low altitudes.

State Duma Committee Chairman for Commonwealth of Independent States Affairs Leonid Kalashnikov said on January 7 that it is unlikely that the West triggered the protests in Kazakhstan ahead of security talks with Russia in mid-January.⁷⁹² The Kremlin likely has decided to not conduct a full-fledged information operation to frame protests in Kazakhstan as a Western hybrid war as of January 7. Kalashnikov previously said he would support a hypothetical decision for a permanent Russian deployment to Kazakhstan on January 6.⁷⁹³

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov claimed Moscow has not yet seen any US willingness to compromise on US-Russia strategic stability talks over the past six months on December 6.⁷⁹⁴ Ryabkov specified curtailing eastern NATO enlargement, not admitting new NATO members, not deploying certain weapons in unspecified countries, and not conducting proactive exercises as “absolutely necessary inalienable elements” of its demanded security guarantees.

Fifteen surface ships in Russia's Caspian Flotilla conducted snap combat readiness drills at the flotilla's base in Dagestan on January 5.⁷⁹⁵ Approximately 200 servicemen participated in the exercise.

Ukraine's Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) reported on January 4 that Russian forces reinforced the advanced positions of its Donetsk and Luhansk proxy forces in occupied Donbas during the New Year holidays.⁷⁹⁶ GUR reported that Russian forces deployed more reconnaissance systems and sniper pairs to the front lines in Donbas and conducted artillery exercises.

The five nuclear-weapon states of Russia, the United States, the United Kingdom, China, and France issued a joint statement on preventing nuclear war and avoiding an arms race on January 3.⁷⁹⁷ The joint statement reaffirms the five nuclear-weapon states' commitment to avoiding a nuclear war and their commitment to their Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty obligations.

The Russian Ministry of Defense announced on January 3 that Northern Fleet naval aviation pilots will conduct training in Crimea at an unspecified future date.⁷⁹⁸ Su-33 and MiG-29K pilots of the Northern Fleet will deploy to Crimea for these exercises.

TASS reported on January 2 that Russia's nuclear triad will hold strategic command and staff exercises in early 2022.⁷⁹⁹ TASS reported that a “source close to Russia's Defense Ministry” said that the exercises would occur as part of Russia's recurring “Grom” exercises in the beginning of 2022. The Russian military usually does not conduct Grom exercises early in the year; Grom typically occurs in September or October.⁸⁰⁰ Russia holding Grom nuclear readiness exercises in early 2022 could help obfuscate an actual Russian nuclear forces mobilization in the event of a Russian military operation against Ukraine.

Russian gas company Gazprom continued suspending gas transit through the Yamal-Europe gas pipeline for 12 consecutive days as of January 2.⁸⁰¹ The Kremlin likely reduced gas transit to Europe to increase energy pressure against Europe as the Kremlin seeks to complete the certification of the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline and political concessions on security assurances from NATO.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov gave an interview to *Russia Today* on Ukraine and Russia's demanded security guarantees on December 31.⁸⁰² Lavrov said that the draft documents published on December 17 are aimed at creating a new system of legal agreements based on the principles of "indivisibility of security" and the "abandonment of attempts to achieve military superiority," which Lavrov claims Euro-Atlantic states imposed in Europe the 1990s. Lavrov said that Russia may reach "other agreements" on conventional arms control in Europe, but specified these agreements would not resemble the "long-outdated" Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty. Lavrov reiterated Kremlin demands that senior US and NATO military officials participate in negotiations with Russia. Lavrov accused Ukraine of perceiving NATO support for Ukraine as "carte blanche for a military operation" against Donbas and stated that Russia will take "all necessary measures" to protect "Russian citizens" in Donbas.

At least two Caspian Flotilla landing craft deployed to the Black Sea in fall 2021.⁸⁰³ New satellite imagery from November and December 2021 observed two Caspian Flotilla landing craft in the Black Sea near Novorossiysk. Caspian Flotilla landing craft also deployed to the Black Sea in April 2021. These landing craft likely redeployed to the Caspian Sea in summer 2021 and then deployed again to the Black Sea in fall 2021.⁸⁰⁴

Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova discussed upcoming negotiations with the US and responded to Josep Borell's comments on EU involvement in security discussions on December 30.⁸⁰⁵ Zakharova confirmed Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Ryabkov and US First Deputy Secretary of State Sherman will lead the Russian and US delegations in Geneva on January 10. Zakharova reiterated Russia's main demands are "the non-advancement of NATO to the east and the non-deployment of weapons systems that threaten Russia at the borders of our country." Zakharova additionally responded to Josep Borell's comments on December 29 that the EU must have a part in security discussions with Russia. Zakharova decried the "polyphony" among Western states regarding policies towards Russia, and stated Russia will only conduct European security discussions with NATO and the OSCE. Zakharova blamed the EU for Russia's security concerns and claimed the EU is fully subordinate to NATO on security topics.

Russia's ambassador to Germany claimed NATO discussions about providing weapons to Ukraine serve as "proof" of Russia's need for security guarantees on December 29.⁸⁰⁶ Russian Ambassador Sergey Nechaev claimed the "militarization of Ukraine" is counterproductive and demonstrates Russia needs security guarantees from the West enshrined in international law. Nechaev made these claims in response to a statement by future Christian Democratic Union (CDU) Chairman Friedrich Merz that Ukraine's requests for weapons are "without a doubt legitimate in view of the Russian army's massive build-up of troops on its eastern border."

Russian gas giant Gazprom declined to ship gas through the Yamal-Europe pipeline for the ninth day in a row on December 29.⁸⁰⁷ Gazprom claims European customers have not submitted reservations for gas and accused Germany of reselling gas

purchased from Russia under long-term contracts at a higher price. European gas prices reached an all-time high of \$2,000 per thousand cubic meters in mid-December. The Kremlin is likely halting gas sales to Europe to coerce European states, primarily Germany, into concessions at upcoming security talks in January.

Commander of the Russian Airborne Forces (VDV) General Andrey Serdyukov published an essay on the VDV's capabilities and confirmed the establishment of a VDV regiment permanently based in Crimea on December 29.⁸⁰⁸ Serdyukov's essay appeared in Russian military newspaper Red Star. Serdyukov stated the VDV carried out more than 2,500 training events in 2021, primarily during Russia's Zapad-2021 exercise in Belarus. Serdyukov stated the VDV formed an airborne assault regiment in Crimea in 2021, referring to the 56th Air Assault Regiment. The Kremlin redeployed the 56th VDV brigade from its permanent base near Volgograd to Feodosia in Crimea in March 2021, and announced the brigade would transform into a regiment by the end of 2021.⁸⁰⁹

Unspecified signal elements of the 58th Combined Arms Army conducted signals defense exercises at the Tarskoye Training Ground, North Ossetia, on December 28.⁸¹⁰ Signal elements protected communications infrastructure from simulated enemy electromagnetic and chemical weapon attacks.

An unspecified number of Southern Military District Su-25SM fighter-bombers conducted 360 bombing runs and rocket launch exercises in Stavropol on December 28.⁸¹¹

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov demanded on December 28 that high-ranking NATO military officials attend the US-Russia talks on January 10 and Russia-NATO talks on January 12 to add a "professional dimension."⁸¹² Ryabkov added that Russia will "put a barrier" on NATO expansion.⁸¹³

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov confirmed Russia's participation in two separate talks with the United States and NATO in early January on December 27.⁸¹⁴ Lavrov said Russia seeks two agreements: US-Russian agreement on legal security guarantees and a NATO-Russia deal on limiting "risks and threats in the European theater."

Russian Deputy Defense Minister Alexander Fomin said that alleged NATO provocations have a "high risk of escalation into an armed confrontation" on December 27.⁸¹⁵ Fomin alleged that NATO's use of reconnaissance aircraft in the Black Sea increased by more than 60 percent in the last year.

Russian State Duma Deputy Vladimir Zhirinovskiy called for Russian strikes against Ukraine and the West on New Year's Eve in a TV interview on December 27.⁸¹⁶ Zhirinovskiy stated that joint NATO and Ukrainian exercises are evidence of Western preparations for a "real war." Zhirinovskiy is a Kremlin-controlled actor but not an influential Kremlin policymaker. His overt call for military action against Ukraine is significant, however, and could foreshadow a future Russian information operation which would explicitly call for military action against Ukraine.

Over 500 personnel of the Russian Black Sea Fleet, including electronic warfare elements, conducted exercises in Crimea on December 27.⁸¹⁷ Electronic warfare

specialists practiced collecting radio signals intelligence and suppressing targeted radio communication channels of a field communications center.

Approximately 2,000 Caspian Flotilla naval infantry began platoon exercises at the Adanak Training Ground on December 27.⁸¹⁸ Platoon commanders are practicing managing subordinate units and attached reinforcement equipment. The naval infantry are practicing command and control, reconnaissance, engineering, fire, and maneuver combat tasks.

Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov said that Chechnya is ready to deploy infantry forces to prevent the West from building military bases in Ukraine on December 27.⁸¹⁹

Russia's Southern Military District (SMD) announced that it completed exercises with over 10,000 troops on December 25.⁸²⁰ Several Russian state-owned, Russian opposition, and Western media outlets inaccurately framed this announcement as 10,000 Russian personnel near Ukraine withdrawing and redeploying away from Ukraine.⁸²¹ The SMD stated that over 10,000 personnel of unspecified SMD units finished exercises in Rostov, Kuban, Crimea, Astrakhan, Volgograd, Stavropol, "in the Republics of the North Caucasus," and in Armenia, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia, and would redeploy to their permanent garrisons. Russia likely has not decreased its force posture around Ukraine, however. Units permanently stationed in Crimea, Rostov, and Kuban returning to their permanent garrisons are still default postured against Ukraine. This announcement does not address the significant Russian buildup near Ukraine with Central and Western Military District elements in Voronezh and Yelnya. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky told US members of Congress that Russian forces have not withdrawn from near Ukraine on December 24.⁸²²

Russian Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Maria Zakharova gave a briefing on Ukraine on December 24.⁸²³ Zakharova said Kyiv "seems to be preparing for a military solution" for Donbas. She called NATO members' support for Ukraine's "crusade against their own population" deeply regrettable. She condemned a growing foreign military presence in Ukraine and claimed there are approximately 10,000 foreign military instructors in Ukraine, 4,000 of which are Americans. She said Ukraine has joined a "US-inspired information campaign" to accuse Russia of building invasion forces near Ukraine and condemned the US sending weapons to Ukraine.

The Russian Foreign Ministry (MFA) accused an unidentified individual of conducting a terrorist attack against the Russian consulate in Lviv, Ukraine, on December 24.⁸²⁴ The MFA claims an unknown person threw a Molotov cocktail at the entrance of the consulate. The MFA accused Kyiv of failing to fulfill its obligations to provide security to Russian diplomatic facilities.

Russian Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Maria Zakharova accused Western observers of distorting Russia's security guarantee demands on December 25.⁸²⁵ Zakharova accused unspecified actors in the United States and "Western countries" of making statements that NATO will not discuss NATO curtailing eastern expansion in talks with Russia. Zakharova said that NATO's non-expansion and not deploying weapon systems that threaten Russian borders are the main issues in the upcoming negotiations with the United States and NATO.

Approximately 50 personnel of the Baltic Fleet conducted air defense exercises with Pantsir-S air defense systems on December 25.⁸²⁶ Black Sea Fleet naval aviation and UAVs acted as simulated targets.

A Russian soldier posted a video on TikTok with the hashtag “we are being deployed to Ukraine” on December 23.⁸²⁷ It is unclear if the TikTok post is accurate. If accurate, this video is one of the first publicly available Russian soldier-generated social media posts on Russian deployments towards Ukraine since the crisis began in October 2021.

Russian President Vladimir Putin held his annual marathon press conference on December 23.⁸²⁸ Putin typically holds an annual press conference. Most of the 2021 press conference focused on domestic issues, but Putin additionally made several statements on Ukraine. Putin accused Ukraine of “squeezing Russians and the Russian-speaking population out of their historical territory.” Putin accused Ukraine of not implementing the Minsk Accords and forming an “anti-Russia” which receives Western weapons and “brainwashes” the Ukrainian population to hate Russia. Putin said that Ukraine undermined the ceasefire by giving Ukrainian field commanders operational clearance to conduct strikes, as opposed to the decision-making being centrally controlled in Kyiv. Putin said Ukraine has not made constitutional amendments stipulated by the Minsk Accords and refuses to talk to proxy representatives. Putin accused Ukraine of trying to solve the conflict in Donbas with force twice in the past. Putin said that Russian actions depend on the “unconditional provision of Russia’s security today and in the historical perspective.” Putin argued the US would react similarly to Russia if Russia attempted to place missiles in Canada or Mexico as NATO has placed weapons in Romania and Poland. Putin accused the US of “cheating” and “blatantly deceiving” Russia about not expanding NATO further east in the 1990s. Putin reiterated that he requested that the US and NATO negotiate ending NATO’s eastern expansion and stated that NATO and the US “should answer us with something.” Putin said that US officials are giving a “positive reaction” and claimed that US officials said they are ready to start discussions in Geneva “at the beginning of the year.” The US has not officially confirmed any planned talks.

Russia sent a “humanitarian aid” convoy to the Luhansk People’s Republic on December 23.⁸²⁹ The convoy arrived in the LNR on December 23 and is Russia’s 105th so-called humanitarian convoy to Donbas to date.⁸³⁰ Russia’s Emergency Situations Ministry claimed the convoy carried more than 185 tons of medicine and medical equipment.⁸³¹ This convoy likely carried weapons and ammunition given documented past Russian weapon shipments to Donbas under the guise of “humanitarian aid convoys.”

More than 1,000 servicemen – likely of the 439th Artillery Regiment – and a tank battalion of an unspecified motorized rifle unit likely of the 8th Combined Arms Army conducted fires exercises at the Prudboy Training Ground on December 23.⁸³² The exercises practiced command and control cohesion in destroying targets and adjusting fires using unmanned aerial vehicles.

Satellite imagery published on December 23 shows a unit likely to be the 136th Motor Rifle Brigade of the 58th Combined Arms Army at the base of the 133rd Logistics Brigade of the Black Sea Fleet in Bakhchysarai, Crimea, on December 13.⁸³³

The Russian Ministry of Defense announced on December 22 that brigade-sized airborne exercises would occur in Novorossiysk and Crimea from December 21-

24.⁸³⁴ Over 1,200 airborne personnel of the 7th Airborne Division and possibly elements of the 56th Airborne Regiment will participate in battalion tactical exercises at the Raevsky and Opuk training grounds in Novorossiysk and Crimea, respectively, on December 21 to 24. Russia's military will also deploy Mi-35 helicopters for amphibious assault and to provide air cover for attacking troops. This is the first brigade-sized airborne forces exercise that the Kremlin has announced since the crisis began in October 2021.

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov met with the Head of the European Union Delegation to the Russian Federation Markus Ederer to discuss Russia's demanded security guarantees from NATO and the US on December 23.⁸³⁵

Unspecified elements of the 150 Motorized Rifle Division conducted air defense exercises with Igla man-portable air-defense systems (MANPADS) in Rostov on December 23.⁸³⁶

Independent Russian news outlet Meduza reported on December 22 that Russian recruiters are mobilizing mercenaries for operations in Donbas.⁸³⁷ Meduza reported that recruiters associated with the Russian Interior Ministry, Russian National Guard, Ministry of Defense, and Union of Donbas Volunteers have been making offers to both professional mercenaries and generic Donbas war veterans since November 2021. The report states that a former Wagner Group mercenary who fought in Syria received a call from Russian mercenary recruiters in fall 2021 for a "new project" that included a deployment to a training facility in Vesyloly, Rostov-on-Don, as part of this new recruitment drive. The mercenary stated that the Russian military mobilized Russian mercenaries who fought in eastern Ukraine in 2014 at this training ground in Vesyloly. The Meduza report also claims there is a recruitment drive to create two military formations in the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics consisting of former Russian convicts. Meduza's sources did not know whether the newly recruited detachments would be sent on offensive combat missions or simply deploy to Donbas to perform security tasks.

Russia deployed an unknown number of Su-34 bombers from Novosibirsk to Lipetsk on December 22.⁸³⁸ Lipetsk is approximately 300 kilometers from Ukraine's northeastern border with Russia. The quantity of Su-34 bombers in this deployment is unclear. This deployment could support Russian military activity against Ukraine.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said on December 22 that Russia and US will hold their first round of talks on security guarantees in Europe in January 2022.⁸³⁹

Over ten Russian Caspian Flotilla ships and air defense personnel conducted air defense exercises in the Caspian Sea on December 22.⁸⁴⁰ The participating ships included the missile ships *Tartarstan* and *Dagestan* and the small rocket and artillery ships *Grad Sviyazhsk*, *Uglich*, *Volgodonsk*, *Makhachkala*, and *Astrakhan*. The participating ships practiced neutralizing enemy aircraft and cruise missiles. The Russian Navy could potentially transfer ships from the Caspian to the Black Sea to support any operations against Ukraine. However, these exercises are likely routine.

Approximately 200 personnel of the Black Sea Fleet and the 22nd Army Corps conducted exercises to repel enemy reconnaissance and sabotage attacks in Crimea on December 22.⁸⁴¹

Battalion-sized artillery and tank elements of the 49th Combined Arms Army conducted fire and maneuver exercises in Stavropol on December 22.

Approximately 400 personnel used T-72 tanks and 152-mm self-propelled artillery to destroy enemy armor at distances up to 12 kilometers.⁸⁴²

Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu accused the United States of planning of a chemical weapon attack in Donbas at a Ministry of Defense collegium with Russian President Vladimir Putin on December 21.⁸⁴³ Shoigu said Russia has evidence that the US deployed 120 American private military contractors with chemical weapons to Avdeevka and Priazovskoe in Donetsk. Shoigu claimed that cooperation between NATO and Ukraine constitutes a Russian security threat because Kyiv attempts to solve the conflict in Donbas by force. Putin accused NATO of building up NATO forces near Russian borders and conducting unplanned large-scale exercises. Shoigu accused Poland of creating infrastructure to accommodate a US armored brigade and nearing completion of an Aegis Ashore anti-missile system in Poland. Shoigu said the United States and NATO are increasing the scale and intensity of military exercises near Russia and practicing using strategic aviation to conduct simulated nuclear strikes against Russia. Putin said that NATO has adapted Mark 41 vertical launchers located in Romania to use Tomahawk missiles. Putin said that NATO plans to deploy Mark 41 launchers to Poland and that the deployment of such weapons to Ukraine would be a serious Russian security challenge. Putin said that he gave NATO and American leadership proposals on how to start negotiations on security agreements. Putin reiterated that Russia seeks “long-term, legally binding guarantees” because the US withdraws from all international treaties. Putin said Russia will take “adequate retaliatory military-technical measures” if the West continues along its “clearly aggressive line.”

Russian gas company Gazprom suspended gas transit through the Yamal-Europe gas pipeline on December 21 and 22.⁸⁴⁴ The Kremlin likely reduced gas transit to Europe to increase energy pressure against Europe as the Kremlin seeks to complete the certification of the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline and political concessions on security assurances from NATO.

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Vladimir Titov held a meeting to coordinate policy with Russia’s ambassadors to Central and Eastern European states in Budapest on December 21.⁸⁴⁵ Russian ambassadors to Austria, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, Germany, Czech Republic, Switzerland, and Liechtenstein participated in the meeting.

Unspecified artillery elements of the Russian 150th Motorized Rifle Division conducted indirect fire exercises with 122-mm howitzers in Rostov on December 21.⁸⁴⁶

Unconfirmed social media video from December 19 allegedly depicted several hundred Russian reservists moving across an unspecified field on an unknown date.⁸⁴⁷ If accurate, this video is the first open-source evidence of reservist mobilization since the crisis began in October 2021.

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Andrey Rudenko said that Russia would consider Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko offer to host Russian

nuclear missiles in Belarus if NATO places nuclear weapons in Poland on December 21.⁸⁴⁸ Lukashenko said he would not exclude offering to host Russian nuclear weapons in Belarus if NATO deploys nuclear weapons to Eastern Europe on November 30.⁸⁴⁹ Lukashenko implied that Belarus is ready to resume hosting Russian nuclear infrastructure – as it did during the Soviet era – if NATO deploys nuclear missile structures to Eastern Europe.⁸⁵⁰ The Kremlin had not previously engaged with Lukashenko’s statement.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov gave an interview on December 21 in which he reiterated that continued NATO expansion eastward crosses Russia’s “red line.”⁸⁵¹

The Russian Foreign Ministry published a draft of its “security guarantees” demands to the US and NATO on December 17.⁸⁵² The draft document calls on the United States and Russia to not conduct activities which “affect the security” of either party; to not use the territory of other states to prepare an attack against either party or conduct activity that affects the “fundamental security interests” of either party; to rule out any NATO eastward expansion; to refuse to admit former Soviet states into NATO or establish NATO military bases on the territory of former Soviet States; to rule out NATO developing bilateral military cooperation with former Soviet states; to refrain from any military deployments that either party could perceive as a national security threat; to refrain from flying heavy bombers equipped for nuclear or non-nuclear weapons outside of national airspace or locating surface warships outside of national territorial waters; to not deploy ground-based intermediate and shorter-range missiles outside Russian or US national territory, as well as in areas of their national territory from which such weapons are capable of hitting targets on the national territory of the other party; to exclude the deployment of nuclear weapons outside of national territory and return nuclear weapons already deployed outside national territory back to national territory; to eliminate all existing infrastructure for the deployment of nuclear weapons outside national territory; to not train military personnel and civilians from non-nuclear-weapon countries to use nuclear weapons; to not conduct exercises and general purpose trainings with non-nuclear-weapon states that include the development of scenarios with the use of nuclear weapons. This is clearest and most expansive list of Russian demands of the US and NATO that the Kremlin has articulated as of December 22.

Nord Stream AG – the consortium for the Nord Stream 2 pipeline – began filling the Nord Stream 2 pipeline with natural gas despite German and European Union objections on December 17.⁸⁵³ Germany and the EU have not given regulatory approval to Nord Stream 2 yet likely in part due to Russia’s military buildup near Ukraine.

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Grushko on December 21 said that Russia is willing to hold a Russia-NATO Council meeting if NATO will consider the Kremlin’s security guarantees that it articulated on December 17.⁸⁵⁴

Brigade-sized elements of the Southern Military District and likely of the 49th Combined Arms Army conducted combined-arms combat exercises at the Nikolo-Alexandrovksy Training Ground in Stavropol, Russia, on December 16.⁸⁵⁵ Over 3,000 servicemen and 500 armored vehicles participated in the exercise which emphasized tactical coordination between motorized rifle squads. Motorized rifle elements participated in simulated firefights against enemy armored vehicles.

Russian presidential aide Yuri Ushakov explained a draft document on the Kremlin's security demands on "security guarantees" to American National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan on December 16.⁸⁵⁶ Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov stated this action confirms Russia's readiness to begin negotiations with the United States on security guarantees. Peskov also stated that Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov is ready to begin negotiations. This statement follows a phone call between Sullivan and Ushakov on December 15. The Kremlin later publicly released a draft agreement on December 17.

S-400 anti-aircraft missile system crews conducted air defense exercises in Crimea on December 15.⁸⁵⁷ Military personnel practiced measures to launch missiles at simulated enemy targets. Su-24M bombers acted as the simulated enemy.

Elements of the Russian 106th VDV Division conducted training at the Tesnitskoye Training Ground in Tula on December 14.⁸⁵⁸ The servicemen practiced conducting fire missions amidst a hostile air attack. The servicemen used the Strelets intelligence command and control complex to quickly strike a reconned position. The officers of the 106th tested their servicemen's ability to independently prioritize targets according to their importance to the mission. Elements of the 106th Division have continued holding command and control exercises through December 21.⁸⁵⁹

Independent Russian polling agency Levada released the results of a poll of Russian public opinion on the Ukraine crisis on December 14.⁸⁶⁰ The poll asked several questions about "the recent exacerbation of the situation in eastern Ukraine" and the likelihood of war. Only 4% of respondents believed Russia is responsible, while 50% blamed NATO, 16% Ukraine, and 3% the DNR/LNR. 75% do not exclude the possibility of a Russia/Ukraine war. Of those 75%, 3% think war is inevitable, 36% highly likely, 38% the least likely but possible outcome, and 15% think it is impossible.

Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova claimed the G7's joint statement on Russia/Ukraine demonstrated the G7's inability to take responsibility for its own mistakes on December 12.⁸⁶¹ Zakharova blamed the G7 for meddling in Ukraine's internal affairs and causing a split in Ukrainian society. She claimed further negotiations must occur between "Ukraine and Ukraine," not Ukraine and Russia. The Kremlin did not issue any other official response to the joint G7 statement.

Russian military hardware is likely moving in Bryansk and Kursk Oblasts, Russia as of December 12.⁸⁶² OSINT Twitter accounts The Lookout, ELINT News, and Kyle Glen reported the movements of Russian military hardware roughly 100km from the Russo-Ukrainian border. These OSINT accounts assessed that these movements occurred between December 7 and December 14 based on the weather. The Lookout assessed that some of the moving hardware in Kursk are likely components of the Russian 138th Motorized Rifle Brigade or the 6th Combined Arms Army arriving to the Russo-Ukrainian border. The Russian hardware includes tanks and logistics convoys with fuel tankers.

The 1st Tank Army is likely establishing an assembly area in Voronezh, Russia. Russian authorities on December 11 issued a Notice to Airman (NOTAM) covering the Pogonovo Training Ground in Voronezh from December 16-22.⁸⁶³ The Russian Ministry of Defense stated on December 9 that unspecified tank units (approximately 200 personnel) of the Western Military District conducted live fire training with battalion-sized artillery elements

at the Pogonovo and Krintsa training grounds in Voronezh.⁸⁶⁴ Russian social media users observed approximately two battalions of T-80 and T-72 tanks in Maslovka, Voronezh on December 8-11.⁸⁶⁵ Social media users observed Buk air defense systems, likely from the 49th Air Defense Brigade of the 1st Tank Army, at railheads in Voronezh on December 8.⁸⁶⁶ Social media users observed T-80s, likely of the 4th Tank Division and equipment of the 2nd Tank Division, in Maslovka, Voronezh, in mid-November.⁸⁶⁷ The likely deployment of elements of two divisions and air defense units of the 1st Tank Army indicates significant elements of the army deploying to Voronezh. The deployment of the 1st Tank Army to Voronezh, as opposed to Belarus, indicates that the MDCOA of a mechanized drive to Kyiv from Belarus is less likely.

The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) stated on December 11 that over 1,500 Southern Military District (SMD) personnel participated in tank fire and maneuver exercises in unspecified training grounds in Crimea, Volgograd, Rostov, Adygea, Dagestan, Ingushetia, North Ossetia, Karachay-Cherkessia, Armenia, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia.⁸⁶⁸ The MoD claims these exercises occurred over a five-day period. The MoD stated that the SMD will continue combat coordination activity through February 2022.

The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) reiterated its red line demand for legal guarantees that NATO will not expand eastward on December 10.⁸⁶⁹ The MFA stated it seeks “serious long-term legal guarantees” that would “exclude NATO’s further advancement to the east and deployment of weapons on Russia’s western borders which are a threat to Russia.” The MFA demanded NATO “officially disavow” the 2008 NATO Bucharest summit decision on Ukraine and Georgia’s potential membership in NATO. The Russian Foreign Ministry said this explicit restatement and clarification was necessary because “numerous loose interpretations of our position have emerged in recent days.” The MFA accused NATO of pushing Ukraine towards aggression as opposed to “reining in” Kyiv. The MFA urged Washington to return to the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty. The MFA announced that the Kremlin is drafting formal guarantees proposals in preparation for the next round of strategic US-Russia talks.

The Ukrainian Navy reported that Russian forces blocked 70 percent of the Sea of Azov on December 10. The Ukrainian Navy claims that the Kremlin issued navigation warnings to restrict movement in large areas of the Sea of Azov in order to prepare for Russian artillery fire against Ukrainian positions near Mariupol, Berdyansk, and Henichesk.⁸⁷⁰ Russia has not conducted such artillery attacks as of December 11.

Russia staged a provocation against an old Ukrainian naval transport in the Kerch Strait on December 9. Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) coast guard ships staged a provocation in the Kerch Strait against a 1969 Ukrainian navy transport that was training in the Sea of Azov on December 9.⁸⁷¹ The Ukrainian transport departed Ukraine’s naval base in Mariupol and went south for training. Russian FSB ships demanded the Ukrainian transport not cross the Kerch Strait. The Ukrainian vessel stated it never had intention to do so and eventually returned to Mariupol without an interception. The Russian Foreign Ministry cited this incident and accused Ukraine of creating “a new provocation.”⁸⁷²

The Russian Black Sea Fleet conducted artillery firing exercises from the new patrol ship *Sergey Kotov* in the Black Sea and from Novorossiysk naval base on December 8.⁸⁷³ The crew fired AK-176 artillery mount large-caliber naval machine guns and DP-65 anti-sabotage grenade launcher systems.

Company-sized sapper elements (over 200 servicemen) of the Russian Black Sea Fleet conducted engineering support exercises in Crimea on December 8.⁸⁷⁴ Servicemen camouflaged berths, supplied vessels with power, and provided bases with drinking water under simulated enemy reconnaissance.

Russia's Western Military District (WMD) may be building a new base near Ukraine or Belarus. The Russian Ministry of Defense stated that unspecified platoon commanders of the WMD began conducting training exercises at the WMD's 31st Training Ground on December 7.⁸⁷⁵ It is unclear where the 31st Training Ground is located or how long it has existed. The Russian Ministry of Defense publicly mentioned the 31st Training Ground for the first time on November 24, 2021, and announced its intent to build 72 buildings and structures on the grounds.⁸⁷⁶ The 31st Training Ground could be a new Russian base near Ukraine or Belarus to support Russian military activities in either country, though ISW has no evidence for that hypothesis.

Two large landing ships of the Russian Black Sea Fleet loaded naval infantry for amphibious assault exercises at the Opuk Training Ground in Crimea on December 7.⁸⁷⁷ The *Caesar Kunikov* and *Novocherkassk* large landing ships of the Black Sea fleet onboarded an unspecified number of naval infantry at an unspecified location for future exercises at Opuk on an unspecified future date.

Over 300 naval infantry of the Caspian Flotilla conducted exercises with Southern Military District (SMD) air support at the Adanak Training Ground in Dagestan on December 7.⁸⁷⁸ Caspian Flotilla naval infantry defended a beach from simulated amphibious assault with Mi-28 helicopter air support from the SMD's 4th Air and Air Defense Army. This was the first roughly battalion-sized Caspian Flotilla naval infantry exercise since the Russian military buildup near Ukraine resumed in October 2021.

Peskov stated that NATO military deployments to Ukraine would "force" Russia to protect its interests on December 6.⁸⁷⁹ Peskov condemned the US and NATO for not recognizing Russia's "red lines" and suggested Russia will act unless the West respects Kremlin red lines.

Over 300 senior officers of the Southern Military District (SMD), including regimental commanders, began training for multi-domain operations with missile and air strikes on December 6.⁸⁸⁰ SMD Commander Alexander Dvornikov is presiding over videoconference training with SMD commanders down to the regimental level. The training includes conducting complex multi-domain operations to conduct air and missile strikes in multiple operational directions.

Lavrov said Russia "must force" Ukraine to work within the Minsk Agreements framework on December 5.⁸⁸¹ Lavrov stated that Ukraine will not implement any agreements on its own. Lavrov added that Berlin and Paris are slacking on their commitments to hold Ukraine accountable under the Normandy Format.⁸⁸²

The Kremlin granted United Russia Party membership to LNR leader Leonid Pasechnik and DNR leader Denis Pushilin on November 30 and December 4, respectively.⁸⁸³ The Kremlin will likely use Pushilin and Pasechnik's now-official position in

the Kremlin's ruling party to advance Russian information operations about protecting "Russian citizens" in Donbas.

More than 500 marines of the Russian Black Sea Fleet began conducting military exercises in unspecified Crimean training grounds on December 3.⁸⁸⁴ Black Sea Fleet naval infantry practiced defending equipment transports and neutralizing enemy reconnaissance groups while deploying to Crimean training grounds. This mobilization does not constitute mobilization at scale but is significant as the Black Sea Fleet naval infantry's first public battalion-sized mobilization since the crisis began in October 2021.

Over 700 Russian servicemen, likely of the 20th Combined Arms Army, began conducting tactical sniper and reconnaissance exercises in Voronezh, Belgorod, Bryansk, and Smolensk on December 2.⁸⁸⁵ The exercises emphasize reconnaissance, sniper, and counter-sniper tasks. Embedded regular Russian snipers and Russian-trained proxy militia snipers are a leading cause of Ukrainian casualties in Donbas.

The Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) announced on December 2 that it arrested an alleged Ukrainian Military Intelligence (GUR) operative that Ukrainian officials instructed to conduct a "terrorist attack" with improvised explosive devices on Russian soil.⁸⁸⁶ Intensified Russian information operations about alleged Ukrainian attacks against Russian soil would indicate an effort to set information conditions to support Russian military operations against Ukraine. The Kremlin has not pushed this narrative as of December 3.

Ukraine's GUR reported on December 3 that Russia's 8th Combined Arms Army began new operational and combat training exercises and preparations for forward artillery in occupied Donbas on December 1.⁸⁸⁷ The GUR claims these exercises seek to raise the combat readiness of units of the DNR and LNR. The GUR claims that Russian-controlled forces in the DNR and LNR are rotating units to forward positions and preparing indirect fire assets to attack Ukrainian positions. The DNR and LNR have not yet mobilized at scale as of December 3.

Lavrov called on the OSCE Ministerial Council to formulate "long-term, legally binding security guarantees" against NATO expansion on December 2.⁸⁸⁸ Lavrov repeated Putin's "red lines" from December 1 speech.⁸⁸⁹ Lavrov said that Russia will make concrete proposals soon, counting on Western "serious consideration, in essence and without excuses." Lavrov demanded that OSCE participate in regulating conflicts, specifically by sending a harsh signal to Kyiv to implement the Minsk Agreements. Lavrov said the Ukrainian crisis cannot be resolved without direct dialogue between Ukraine and the DNR and LNR, and by granting the proxies special status in Ukraine's constitution. The Kremlin likely seeks to permanently integrate DNR and LNR into Ukraine as Russian-controlled proxies.⁸⁹⁰

Putin clearly articulated his red lines on halting NATO's eastern expansion for the first time on December 1. Putin stated he insists on "legal guarantees" that NATO will not expand further eastward towards Russia at a ceremony to present foreign ambassadors their credentials on December 1.⁸⁹¹ Putin also referenced his previous November 18 session with Lavrov in which Putin claimed the West is not respecting Russian red lines.⁸⁹² Putin's statement was exceptionally clear and unusual; Putin does not normally articulate Russian policy objectives so clearly in open settings. Putin seeks to impose a revisionist world order in which states in Russia's claimed sphere of influence have truncated sovereignty. The Kremlin

may decide to conduct military operations against Ukraine if Western leaders and Zelensky reject these demands.

The Permanent Council of the CSTO expressed “great concern” over NATO’s military activity near Russian borders on December 1.⁸⁹³ The Kremlin-dominated CSTO accused NATO of violating the 1936 Montreux Convention which forbids the transit of non-Black Sea states’ warships with large military equipment. The CSTO is likely establishing information conditions in former Soviet states about NATO’s disregard of Russian borders to support Putin’s stated red lines.

Lavrov said that Russia will “harshly react” to any maneuvers on Russia’s western borders on December 1.⁸⁹⁴ Lavrov encouraged the West to consider Lukashenko’s November 30 statement of his openness to host Russian nuclear missiles as a warning.⁸⁹⁵ Lavrov’s statement indicates an increased likelihood of a permanent Russian military deployment to Belarus. Lavrov said NATO’s effort to add Ukraine to its “anti-Russia” orbit “severely complicates” the situation in Donbas. Lavrov accused NATO of supplying Ukraine with weapons illegal under the Minsk Agreements and of collaborating with the US to incite land, air, and sea-based provocations near Russian borders. Lavrov emphasized Russia’s readiness to suppress diplomatic initiatives in the United Nations that are beneficial to the West.

The Russian Ministry of Defense on December 1 acknowledged large military movements in the Southern Military District (SMD) for the first time since the crisis began. The Russian Ministry of Defense stated that over 10,000 SMD personnel organized in battalion tactical groups (BTG) began deploying to unspecified training grounds in the SMD for exercises.⁸⁹⁶ Multiple BTGs of the Russian 58th CAA and 8th CAA are likely mobilized in Crimea and Rostov, respectively.⁸⁹⁷ This is the first time the Kremlin acknowledged large SMD mobilization since the Russian buildup against Ukraine began in October 2021. This acknowledgement is likely intended as a signal to Ukraine and NATO given Putin’s simultaneous articulation of a red lines for the West on NATO expansion on December 1.⁸⁹⁸

The Critical Intelligence Team (CIT) OSINT group claims it spotted more elements of the Russian 41st CAA deploying from Siberia to western Russia on December 1.⁸⁹⁹ CIT claims it found video depicting trucks of the Tuva-based 55th Motorized Rifle Brigade deploying westward via rail. CIT argues these deployments are likely to Yelnya where other elements of the 41st CAA are deployed near the border with Belarus.⁹⁰⁰

Putin defined NATO deployments of “shock weapon systems” to Ukraine as one Kremlin “red line” on November 30.⁹⁰¹ Putin said if Ukraine receives cruise and hypersonic missiles, Russia will respond in minutes. Putin stated that “there are repeated threats of new [Ukrainian] military formations” near the LNR and DNR and reiterated Russia’s concern over NATO strategic aviation in the Black Sea. Putin had not previously publicly defined any Kremlin red line in Ukraine. Putin may articulate more red lines as Russia increases military pressure against Ukraine over winter 2021-2022.

The Kremlin officially initiated a first batch of 100 Donbas residents into Putin’s ruling United Russia party on November 30.⁹⁰² Putin’s ruling United Russia Party announced on November 2 that Russian passport-holders in the LNR and DNR will be able to

join the party.⁹⁰³ The Kremlin will likely increasingly leverage information operations claiming to defend Russians in Donbas.

Zakharova said Russia will continue its humanitarian assistance for “Russian citizens” in Donbas on November 29.⁹⁰⁴ Zakharova accused the European Union (EU) of considering sending military equipment to Ukraine instead of humanitarian aid to Donbas. The Kremlin will likely intensify military shipments to Donbas falsely presented as “humanitarian aid convoys” in winter 2021-2022.

Peskov stated on November 28 that the Kremlin hopes Putin and Biden will have a video conference before the end of 2021. Peskov stated that there is no exact date for such a call.⁹⁰⁵

Military equipment parked in Crimea since April 2021 is on the move to an unknown location as of November 27. Previously visible Russian military equipment at the Opuk Training Ground in Crimea disappeared from satellite monitoring visibility on November 26-27, indicating redeployment elsewhere.⁹⁰⁶ Motorized rifle and artillery elements, many from the 58th CAA, deployed to Opuk in April 2021.⁹⁰⁷ It is unclear where the equipment is going as of November 29.

The Kremlin’s political objectives for Donbas likely have not changed as of November 26. Zakharova reiterated the Kremlin’s historically consistent political objectives for a settlement in Donbas on November 26.⁹⁰⁸ Zakharova stated, “there is no alternative to an exclusively peaceful settlement, a direct dialogue between Kyiv, Donetsk, and Luhansk as parties to the conflict, and a strict sequence of steps, according to which the restoration of control of the Ukrainian authorities over the border with Russia takes the last place after the granting of a special status to Donbas, the implementation of an amnesty, and the lifting of the economic blockade. And holding local elections.” Zakharova said the “main negotiating format” is the Trilateral Contact Group (Kyiv, OSCE, and LNR/DNR), and that the Normandy Format’s purpose is to monitor the implementation of the Minsk Agreements. She also condemned the foreign ministries of Germany and France for “groundlessly” accusing Russia of refusing to participate in the Normandy Format on November 25.

Russia sent a “humanitarian aid” convoy to the DNR on November 25. The convoy arrived in the DNR on November 25 and is Russia’s 104th so-called humanitarian convoy to Donbas to date.⁹⁰⁹ Russia’s Emergency Situations Ministry claimed the convoy carried more than 92 tons of medicine and medical equipment⁹¹⁰; the convoy likely carried weapons and ammunition given documented past Russian weapon shipments to Donbas under the guise of “humanitarian aid convoys.”

Russian authorities increased border security in Voronezh Oblast on November 22. The FSB announced on November 22 that Russian border guards deployed 24-hour border patrols and stricter checkpoints on a 56-kilometer stretch between Boguchar and Kantemirovka in Voronezh Oblast, Russia, on the Russian border with Ukraine.⁹¹¹ Russia’s 3rd Motorized Rifle Division is based in Boguchar. This increased border security supports Russian efforts to conceal Russian deployments closer to Ukraine in Voronezh.

Russian Proxy Activity

Ukraine's Defense Ministry (MoD) reported that the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics (DNR and LNR) opened artillery fire 34 times at Ukrainian Armed Forces' positions on February 17.⁹¹² MoD reported that proxies fired 32 shells at Stanytsia Luhanska, Luhansk Oblast, resulting in three casualties and damage at a local kindergarten.⁹¹³ The MoD added that proxy militants shelled a school and a gas pipeline in Vrubivka, Luhansk Oblast. MoD identified that proxy forces also fired at Novotoshkivske, Staryi Aidar, Lobacheve, Troitske, Popasna, Donets'kyi, and Novozvanivka in Luhansk Oblast, and Vodyane, Trudivske, Starohnativka, Mar'inka, Pivdenne, Maiorsk, Novoselivka Druha, Luhans'ke, Svitlodars'k, Zaitseve, Avvdiivka, Shumy, Travneve, Nevel's'ke in Donetsk Oblast. The LNR denounced the MoD's report about the shelling of a kindergarten as an "informational fake."⁹¹⁴ The LNR claimed that Ukrainian propagandists staged images of a destroyed kindergarten to cover Ukrainian provocative shelling.

The Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republic (DNR and LNR) accused Ukrainian Armed Forces of shelling nine settlements for the second time in Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts on February 17.⁹¹⁵ The DNR claimed that Ukrainian forces fired about 160 rounds for two hours at Pikuzy, Verkhnoшыrokiyske, Novolaspa, and Pazeno, Donetsk Oblast and Veselenke, Donetskyi, Zolote, Nizhnie Lozove, and Sokilnyky, Luhansk Oblast. The DNR claimed that Ukrainian forces used 67 mortars, various grenade launchers, small arms, and large-caliber weapons. The DNR claimed that Ukrainian forces fired 17 rounds against Zaitseve and Pikuzy, Donetsk Oblast, the night prior on February 16. The LNR claimed that Ukrainian forces continued to shell Luhansk settlements since morning, committing additional ceasefire violations in Sokilnyky and Lozove. The LNR did not provide any evidence of damage to civilian infrastructure to support its claims. The LNR stated that proxy militants began returning targeted fire against Ukrainian positions. The DNR called on the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Special Monitoring Mission (OSCE SMM) to record damage and casualties following the shelling. The LNR claimed that Ukraine opened fire after waiting for a Russian offensive to begin and then began its own mass provocations along the entire line of contact with Donbas after the Russian offensive did not materialize. The LNR added that over 200 Ukrainian troops deployed to Donbas to participate in artillery fires. The DNR accused Ukraine's 53rd Mechanized Brigade of placing two howitzers and one armored combat vehicle in Shevchenko and Novotroitske, Donetsk Oblast. The DNR added that Ukrainian electronic warfare units interfere OSCE SMM unmanned aerial vehicles.

The Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) accused Ukrainian security forces of using anti-tank missile systems against villages near the Haharin and Izotov mines in Donetsk Oblast on February 17.⁹¹⁶ The DNR claimed that Ukrainian forces opened artillery fire with mortars, grenade launchers, and large-caliber machine guns from the Horlivka, Mariupol, and Donetskiy directions at the Haharin and Izotov mining villages, Olenivka, Syhnalne, Mandrykyne, Pikuzy, Verkhnoшыrokiyske, Petrovskyi, and Novolaspa in Donetsk Oblast. The DNR claimed it opened return fire "in order to protect the civilian population."

Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) intelligence claimed on February 17 that Ukraine is preparing to evacuate the Office of the President, the Ukrainian Parliament, Ukraine's National Security and Defense Council, and Ukraine's Defense Ministry from Kyiv to Lviv ahead of a Ukrainian offensive.⁹¹⁷ The DNR claimed that the Ukrainian government would evacuate in case a Ukrainian offensive against Donbas fails and proxy republics launch a counteroffensive to "liberate Ukraine from the Nazis." The DNR claimed that Ukrainian leadership is fighting with oligarchs and that

Ukraine's parliament and government ministries no longer can perform their functions due to personnel leaving their posts. The LNR claimed that local government entities in Ukraine stopped conducting routine daily work to prioritize destroying archival documents because Ukraine's local government bodies are restricted from fleeing abroad or interacting with foreign banks for unspecified reasons.

The Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) claimed that Ukrainian 19th Missile Brigade stationed in Khmelnytsky are preparing Tochka-U tactical ballistic missile systems for combat on February 17.⁹¹⁸ The DNR added that Ukrainian Armed Forces are planning to deploy the 19th Missile Brigade to Donbas soon. The DNR added that Ukrainian naval forces will conduct amphibious assault landing to capture the bridgehead on the Azov coast. The DNR added that company-sized reconnaissance and fire elements of the Ukrainian 36th Separate Marine Brigade and platoons of Ukraine's 107th Territorial Defense Battalion will deploy to Mariupol soon. The DNR claimed that the US would provide Ukraine ships to conduct the naval offensive.

The Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) called on White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki to witness mass graves of civilians in Donbas herself on February 17.⁹¹⁹ The DNR added that it "invites everyone who denied genocide in Donbas to join search activities in the republics" and see "mutilated remains of women and children." The DNR claimed it found 130 mass graves, which it claims are only 40 percent of the total graves in the region. The DNR claimed that the international community is largely ignoring Kyiv's hostilities in Donbas.

The Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) stated that the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA) will continue to operate in Donetsk on February 17.⁹²⁰

The Luhansk People's Republic (LNR) claimed on February 17 that Ukrainian Armed Forces seek to deploy sabotage groups to Pervomaisk, Luhansk Oblast.⁹²¹ The LNR added that a mobile group of Ukrainian special forces operators in Zolote, Luhansk Oblast, is preparing to launch a drone strikes on Luhansk suburbs by releasing explosives disguised as various household items and children's toys. The LNR accused Ukraine of publishing fake information about the LNR destroying civilian infrastructure in Ukrainian government-controlled Luhansk Oblast.

Luhansk People's Republic (LNR) Head Leonid Pasechnik accused Ukrainian Armed Forces of launching mass mortar and artillery strikes on civilians in Luhansk on February 17.⁹²² Pasechnik's accusation coincided with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's work trip to Donbas.

The Luhansk People's Republic accused Ukrainian forces of firing 15 artillery shells on Mykolaivka, Luhansk Oblast, and damaging a gas pipeline on February 17.⁹²³

The Luhansk People's Republic claimed it shot down a Ukrainian quadcopter drone used for adjusting artillery fire in Donetskyi, Luhansk Oblast, on February 17.⁹²⁴

The Luhansk People's Republic (LNR) accused Ukrainian Armed Forces of deploying troops near Russian and Belarusian borders on February 16.⁹²⁵ The LNR claimed that Ukraine deployed additional State Border Service and National Police units from

Lviv and Ivano-Frankivsk to Rivne Oblast near the Belarusian-Ukrainian border. The LNR added that additional units of the Ukrainian 1st Operational Brigade of the National Guard arrived in Pripjat near the border with Belarus. The LNR claimed that Ukraine deployed separate radar companies of the 1st Radio Engineering Brigade to Lysychansk and Lyman, Luhansk Oblast. The LNR claimed that Ukraine opened aviation guidance checkpoints of the 204th and 831st Tactical Aviation Brigades in Lysychansk and Lyman, Luhansk Oblast. The LNR claimed that Ukrainian Commander-in-Chief Valery Zaluzhny ordered the deployment of operational personnel and instructed medical units of Ukraine's 24th Mechanized Brigade to prepare to undertake medical missions focusing on evacuating wounded soldiers using Mi-8 helicopters of Ukraine's 16th Army Aviation Brigade. The LNR claimed that several servicemen of Ukraine's 24th Mechanized Brigade deployed in Donbas received UK LNAW anti-tank guided missiles and US M141 rocket launchers.

The Luhansk People's Republic (LNR) accused Ukrainian Armed Forces of deploying 22 T-72 tanks near the frontline in Pidlisne, Luhansk Oblast, on February 16.⁹²⁶ The LNR stated that Ukraine's 20th Electronic Warfare Battalion continues to disrupt Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Special Monitoring Mission's reconnaissance drones in Zolote and Mykhailivka, Luhansk Oblast.

The Luhansk People's Republic (LNR) claimed that it defensively returned fire at the Ukrainian 57th Brigade in Orikhove, Luhansk Oblast, on February 15.⁹²⁷ The LNR claimed that the 57th Brigade first started firing at LNR positions in Holubivske. The LNR added that return fire was necessary to defend civilian populations from Ukrainian aggression.

The Luhansk People's Republic (LNR) accused Ukraine of a "significant degradation" of the Minsk II Accords on February 15.⁹²⁸ The DNR claimed that Kyiv did not take "a single step towards the implementation of the Minsk agreements" in the past year. The DNR accused representatives of the Ukrainian Presidential Office, Ukrainian Foreign Ministry, and Ukrainian National Security and Defense Council of blocking peace settlement negotiations while systematically conducting armed provocations at the frontline. The LNR claimed that "the fate of [Donbas'] civilian population is of little concern to the Kyiv regime" and that Ukrainian side has not fulfilled its promises to grant amnesty to exchanged prisoners. The LNR concluded that "Ukraine will be forced to implement the Minsk agreements" unless it decides to abandon them entirely.

The Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) accused Ukrainian Armed Forces of firing three grenades from an anti-tank grenade launcher at Zaichenko, Donetsk Oblast, on February 15.⁹²⁹

Donetsk People's Republic Head Denis Pushilin, Luhansk People's Republic Head Leonid Pasechnik, and Crimean Governor Sergei Aksyonov supported the decision of the Russian State Duma to send an appeal to Russian President Vladimir Putin to recognize of the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics on February 15.⁹³⁰ Pasechnik stated that while Luhansk residents welcome the position of Russian State Duma deputies, they will respect the decision of top Kremlin leadership. Aksyonov stated that the decision to recognize the republics will "stop the bloodshed."

The Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) claimed that Ukraine is conducting covert mobilization on February 15.⁹³¹ The DNR claimed that two company-sized Ukrainian territorial defense units will deploy to Novoluhanske and Svitlodarsk, Donetsk Oblast, after

completing short-term military training in the upcoming days. The DNR added that units will deploy to Donbas under the pretext of military exercises. The DNR claimed that the Ukrainian Armed Forces has many deserters that do not want to participate in hostilities against the proxy republics.

YouTube blocked the Donetsk People’s Republic’s First Republican TV Channel on February 15.⁹³² The channel’s director claimed that *YouTube* likely deliberately blocked the channel on the same day that the Russian State Duma voted on sending the bill on recognizing the Donbas proxy republics to Russian President Vladimir Putin. The channel’s director specified that the channel anticipated the ban and opened pages on Russian social media platforms *Vkontakte*, *Rutube*, and *Telegram*.

The Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) claimed on February 15 that Ukrainian Armed Forces will conduct an artillery strike on medical and educational facilities in the republic.⁹³³ The DNR claimed that Ukraine 56th Motorized Infantry Brigade created a target list of several educational and medical institutions to strike in case of a Ukrainian offensive ^(OBJ). The DNR claimed that Ukraine would then accuse the DNR of “disrupting the ceasefire.” The DNR also claimed that Ukrainian 36th Marine Brigade received Ukrainian mortars, NATO-style mortars, and mines in preparation for an offensive operation in Pervomaisk and Topolyne, Donetsk Oblast. The DNR claimed it located US artillery reconnaissance instruments in Nevelske and Halytsynivka, Donetsk Oblast.

The Luhansk People’s Republic (LNR) claimed that it prevented a terrorist act in Luhansk on February 15.⁹³⁴ The LNR claimed that unknown actors planted an improvised explosive device consisting of a cell phone, an electric detonator, two TNT blocks, and strikers in a public trash bin. The LNR added that unknown actors likely sought to carry out the operation during a rally dedicated to the Day of Remembrance (a Russian holiday to remember servicemen who served abroad) scheduled for February 15.

The Luhansk People’s Republic (LNR) accused Ukraine’s 20th Electronic Warfare Battalion of suppressing Organization for Security and Cooperation Special Monitoring Mission surveillance drones in Svitlodarsk and Zolote, Luhansk Oblast, on February 15.⁹³⁵

The Luhansk People’s Republic (LNR) claimed that Ukrainian Armed Forces snipers killed a proxy militant in Holubivske, Luhansk Oblast, on February 15.⁹³⁶

The Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) accused the Ukrainian General Staff of preparing a plan to invade Donbas on February 14.⁹³⁷ The DNR claimed the Ukrainian National Security and Defense Council will approve the invasion plan soon. The DNR claimed that Ukraine is deploying additional units, militants, and urban sabotage groups to the frontline.

Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) Head Denis Pushilin claimed that the Ukrainian Armed Forces are “very quickly” deploying Western weapons to the line of contact in Donbas on February 14.⁹³⁸ Pushilin claimed that the situation in Donbas remains “unstable” despite a significant decrease in shelling and ceasefire violations. Pushilin claimed that Ukrainian forces continue to amass personnel and equipment at the line of contact. Pushilin added that Ukrainian forces “advertise” the presence of hundreds of foreign “professional saboteurs, professional instructors” that trained more than 20,000

people to conduct combat raids. Pushilin claimed that possible Ukrainian use of artillery, heavy weapons, and aviation will lead to mass civilian casualties and deaths. Pushilin concluded that the DNR will likely need military and technical assistance from Russia in an event of Ukrainian attack. Pushilin said the DNR “counts on the correct and timely decision” from the Russian State Duma on recognizing the Donbas proxy republics.⁹³⁹ Pushilin’s recent statements demonstrate a stronger interest in Russian military support rather than full recognition.

The Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) claimed that reports about Organization for Security and Cooperation Special Monitoring Mission (OSCE SMM) staff departing Ukraine were an “artificial provocation” on February 14.⁹⁴⁰ The DNR claimed that the OSCE SMM is undergoing a rotation process but noted that the UK and US withdrew its staff to incite a provocation. The DNR added that such provocations will lead to Kyiv murdering Donbas residents. The DNR also claimed that Ukraine welcomed 50 flights full of foreign weapons and military supplies in February.

The Luhansk People’s Republic (LNR) accused Ukraine’s 1129th Anti-Aircraft Missile Regiment of “hastily forming an air defense unit with Stinger MANPADS” in Bila Tserkva, Kyiv Oblast, on February 14.⁹⁴¹ The LNR added that Canadian instructors will further train the new units. The LNR also claimed that Western-trained radical combat groups constantly arrive at the Joint Forces Operation zone in Donbas to prepare to conduct hostilities. The LNR claimed that approximately 100 members of the “Right Sector” displaced locals from their homes in Schastia and Stanytsia Luhanska, Luhansk Oblast. The LNR claimed that the Ukrainian nationalist organizations “Right Sector”, “Svoboda,” “Dignity of the Nation,” and “National Corps” begun establishing a “closed sabotage network” in Kharkiv, which will conduct undercover operations with the Ukrainian Security Service (SBU). The LNR claimed that the Polish “European Security Academy” PMC has trained over 1,000 Ukrainian nationalists in subversive and sabotage operations across 13 regions.

Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) Head Denis Pushilin claimed that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky’s government could commit genocide against the proxy republics on February 13.⁹⁴² Pushilin added that forceful reintegration into Ukraine would be “terribly bad” as Kyiv would destroy the proxy republics. Pushilin added that despite DNR military preparations, the proxy republic is not likely to withstand Ukraine’s “foreign weaponry and mercenaries.” Pushilin said the DNR “does not rule out turning to the Russian Federation for help.” Pushilin also claimed that *YouTube*’s ban of proxy channels is “one of the indirect signs of preparations for hostilities” and accused Ukraine of hiding its offensive from the world.

The Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) accused the Ukrainian Armed Forces of using drones for reconnaissance and electronic warfare to interfere with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Special Monitoring Mission (OSCE SMM) on February 13.⁹⁴³ The DNR accused Ukrainian forces of firing at an OSCE unmanned aerial vehicle. The DNR added that Kyiv deployed two armored personnel carriers near residential buildings at the Joint Forces Operation zone.

The Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) stated that Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Special Monitoring Mission (OSCE SMM) continues to operate normally despite US, UK, and other Western states withdrawing their staff from Donbas on February 13.⁹⁴⁴ The DNR claimed that only six cars with a trailer left the territory of the proxy republic for a planned rotation. The DNR added that some of the

vehicles transported recalled staff out of the republic. The DNR claimed that in return, three cars with one trailer returned to the proxy republic. The DNR accused Western countries of recalling their representatives from Donbas to create speculation about the validity of information in the conflict zone, necessary to cover a provocation. The DNR denied any claims about OSCE SMM evacuation in response to the Russian invasion threat.⁹⁴⁵

The Luhansk People's Republic (LNR) claimed that the Ukrainian 79th Separate Air Assault Brigade is preparing to conduct airborne drops into the LNR's rear areas on February 13.⁹⁴⁶ The LNR claimed that Ukrainian Joint Forces Operation Commander Oleksandr Pavlyuk arrived in Voytove, Luhansk Oblast, to oversee Mi-8 helicopter landing exercises. The LNR also claimed to have conducted air defense exercises with electronic warfare, artillery, and reconnaissance units to suppress enemy fire activity.

The Luhansk People's Republic (LNR) accused Ukraine's 79th Brigade of using drones to reconnoiter LNR's defensive positions at the line of contact in Size and Bolotene, Luhansk Oblast, on February 13.⁹⁴⁷ The LNR added that Ukrainian drones did not cross the line of contact.

The Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) called on the Ukrainian Pension Fund to visit the republic and issue documentation for pensioners to receive Ukrainian pensions on February 13.⁹⁴⁸ The DNR accused Ukraine of avoiding pension payments to Donbas residents for seven years. The DNR is likely advancing the narrative that the Ukrainian government financially oppresses its citizens.

The Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) stated that Ukraine must embrace direct dialogue with the proxy republics to resume peace talks on February 12.⁹⁴⁹ The DNR claimed that the failed Normandy Four meetings of political advisers in early 2022 overwhelmingly highlight the need for direct dialogue between Kyiv and the proxy republics.

The Luhansk People's Republic (LNR) claimed on February 12 that three Ukrainian servicemen died during military exercises and activity in Luhansk Oblast on February 10-11.⁹⁵⁰ The LNR claimed that a serviceman conducted drone ammunition dropping exercises aimed at destroying urban infrastructure, resulting in a fatal involuntary explosive detonation in Zolote, Luhansk Oblast. The LNR also claimed that two servicemen died while violating safety regulations while disposing of an unexploded device in Schastia, Luhansk Oblast.

Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) Head Denis Pushilin claimed that journalists could have staged an alleged explosion in Donetsk Oblast for information operations on February 12.⁹⁵¹ Pushilin claimed that the explosion occurred a kilometer away from the contact line in Ukrainian government-controlled village of Opytne, Donetsk Oblast. Pushilin added that Western alarmism over a Russian invasion further shows that Ukraine is preparing for provocations against Russia. The DNR denied any information about a Donetsk-based explosion earlier in the day.

The Luhansk People's Republic (LNR) claimed to spot three Ukrainian armored reconnaissance and patrol BRDM-2 vehicles in Stanytsia Luhanska and Makarov, Luhansk Oblast, on February 12.⁹⁵² The LNR accused Ukraine's 20th Electronic Warfare

Battalion of interfering with Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Special Monitoring Mission unmanned aerial vehicles in Smolyanynove and Schastia, Luhansk Oblast.

Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) Head Denis Pushilin claimed that the DNR found 130 mass graves for civilians killed by Ukrainian Armed Forces on February 11, further amplifying the Kremlin’s narrative of imminent genocide in Donbas.⁹⁵³ Pushilin claimed Ukrainian forces killed and buried “old people, women, and children” in civilian clothing. Pushilin claimed that most civilians died from gunshots, mine, fragmentation, and cranial brain injuries from blunt objects.” Pushilin did not specify the locations of the mass graves. Pushilin added that the situation at the line of contact is “heated to the limit” and that the DNR is anticipating a Ukrainian offensive supported by foreign weapons.⁹⁵⁴ Pushilin also denounced Ukraine as a “terrorist state.” Pushilin claimed that Russia might take unspecified steps to address the conflict if Ukraine uses weapons against civilian population in Donbas. Pushilin added that although he is not sure of Russia’s responses against a Ukrainian offensive, he stated that it is “quite obvious” that the Kremlin could help 700,000 “Russian citizens” in Donbas. Pushilin also claimed that 400,000 DNR residents received Russian passports and that “tens of thousands of people” are already ready to join the Kremlin’s ruling United Russia Party.⁹⁵⁵

Pushilin claimed that the West is pushing Ukraine into conflict to make profits from arms sales. Pushilin also claimed that a Ukrainian attack “may happen soon” based on US President Joe Biden’s advice that US citizens leave Ukraine on February 10. Pushilin also suggested that Ukraine might use Western arms to conduct terrorist attacks in other European countries.⁹⁵⁶ Pushilin said it is too early to speculate whether the DNR would begin mobilization in case of a large-scale attack and stated that “it is not clear whether [DNR] forces will be enough” to defend the proxy republic. Pushilin added that South Ossetia (a Kremlin proxy republic in Georgia) announced that it will assist the DNR in combat against Ukrainian forces.⁹⁵⁷

Pushilin stated that he fears that the Normandy Four format will collapse if Russia recognizes the DNR’s independence from Ukraine. Pushilin accused the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine (OSCE SMM) of failing to report on Ukrainian ceasefire violations.⁹⁵⁸ Pushilin said that DNR hopes to see Ukraine “within the framework of the Union State with Russia and Belarus.”⁹⁵⁹ Pushilin added that Ukrainians will develop a different mentality after Kyiv’s offensive operation – likely implying that Ukraine’s post-war society will seek to unite with the Union State.

The Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) accused Ukrainian Armed Forces of deploying S-300 air defense systems from Ukraine’s 160th Anti-aircraft Missile Brigade to Donbas on February 11.⁹⁶⁰ The DNR claimed that Ukrainian forces deployed the 92nd Separate Mechanized Brigade from Kharkiv to the area of responsibility of Ukraine’s 30th Separate Mechanized Brigade in Debaltsevo, Donetsk Oblast.⁹⁶¹ The DNR claimed that Ukrainian Command Center “Vostok” conducted exercises with Ukraine’s 53rd and 54th mechanized brigades. The DNR claimed it observed movement of several multiple rocket launchers in Konstantynivka, Zhelanne, Illinka, Khlivodarivka, and Topolone in Donetsk. The DNR claimed that Ukrainian forces are planning to conduct “massive fire attacks” on front positions and critical civilian infrastructure. The DNR also claimed spotting English and Polish mercenaries in Popasna and Shyrokyne, Donetsk Oblast.⁹⁶² The DNR claimed that Ukraine’s State Security Service (SBU) blackmails and exerts direct pressure on the relatives of DNR servicemen.

The Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) issued an ultimatum stating that Ukraine must chose to fully coordinate with proxy republics or officially abandon the Minsk II Accords on February 11.⁹⁶³ The DNR added that Ukraine will face international sanctions if it dismisses the Minsk II Accords. The DNR claimed that Ukraine delays implementing any agreements by refusing to negotiate directly with the proxy republics, while demanding that Russia participate in the talks as a belligerent in the conflict.

The Luhansk People’s Republic (LNR) accused Ukrainian Armed Forces of deploying three armored personnel carriers and an armored reconnaissance and patrol vehicle to Donbas on February 11.⁹⁶⁴ The LNR claimed that Ukrainian forces transferred two BTR-4 armored personnel carriers to Teple, Luhansk Oblast, a BTR-80 armored personnel carrier near Schastia, Luhansk Oblast, and a BRDM-2 armored reconnaissance and patrol vehicle from Ukraine’s 24th Mechanized Brigade to Popasna, Luhansk Oblast. The LNR claimed that Ukraine’s 20th Electronic Warfare Battalion suppressed drones of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Special Monitoring Mission (OSCE SMM) in Schastia and Smolyany nove, Luhansk Oblast.

The Luhansk People’s Republic (LNR) on February 11 accused Ukraine of failing to create any written agreements during the nine-hour Normandy Four political advisers meeting on February 10.⁹⁶⁵ The LNR claimed that Ukraine purposely delays negotiations while NATO pumps Ukraine with weapons and NATO forces. The LNR claimed that failed negotiations show that foreign powers controlling Ukraine “make a choice towards a military decision, and they only need time to strengthen the military component as much as possible,” which will “turn deadly for the current Ukrainian regime.”

The Luhansk People’s Republic (LNR) claimed that Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Chairman and Polish Foreign Minister Zbigniew Rau refused to visit the proxy republics on February 10.⁹⁶⁶ The LNR accused the OSCE of only siding with Kyiv on European security.

The Luhansk People’s Republic (LNR) claimed that Kyiv transferred special forces from Ukraine’s separate special purpose center “West” to Stanytsia Luhanska, Schastia, Krymske, and Severodonetsk, Luhansk Oblast, on February 10.⁹⁶⁷ The LNR claimed that Ukrainian volunteers provided Ukraine’s 30th Mechanized Brigade with small arms suppressors, enabling the brigade to conduct “provocative fire on [LNR] positions in a number of areas” in a suppressed manner such that the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine cannot observe it. The LNR added that Ukraine continues to prepare for an offensive by conducting Mi-8 helicopter landing exercises at a training ground near Novoaidar, Luhansk Oblast. The LNR claimed that Ukraine’s State Security Service (SBU) confiscated phones from servicemen of an unspecified Ukrainian brigade to prevent leaks of a Ukrainian offensive plan.

The Luhansk People’s Republic (LNR) stated that Ukrainian nationalists do not believe that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky will be successful in using force to resolve the war in Donbas on February 10.⁹⁶⁸ The LNR claimed that Zelensky’s “liberation military campaign” caused a significant decrease in Kharkiv nationalist organizations’ membership over the past ten days. The LNR speculated that Ukrainian nationalists fear that Donbas residents will want revenge and will take over nationalists’ homes, forcing many nationalists to relocate to Ukraine’s Transcarpathian region, likely referencing Western Ukraine’s historical association with Ukrainian nationalism. The LNR

claimed that the Ukrainian State Security Service and specialized “psychological” elements of the Ukrainian Armed Forces are conducting counterintelligence witch-hunts to find “unreliable” servicemen who are “not ready to fight for the Kyiv regime.” The LNR stated that the proxy militia is “ready to give a worthy rebuff to the aggressor.”

The Luhansk People’s Republic (LNR) claimed that the Ukrainian Armed Forces transferred two units of Grad multiple rocket launcher systems from the 24th Mechanized Brigade to a forest in Bilohorlivka, Luhansk Oblast, on February 10.⁹⁶⁹ The LNR accused the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine (OSCE SMM) of systematically failing to record Ukrainian ceasefire violations. The LNR stated that individual OSCE SMM observers’ actions are criminally detrimental to the peace settlement in Donbas.

The Luhansk People’s Republic (LNR) claimed that US TV channels ABC and NBC are participating in a claimed Ukrainian information campaign called “Crushing Sword” on February 10.⁹⁷⁰ The LNR claimed that journalists from US outlets deployed to Stanytsia Luhanska and Schastia, Luhansk Oblast, to conduct Ukrainian informational-psychological operations. The LNR added that Romanian and Bosnian TV crews arrived in Krymske and Severodonetsk, respectively. The LNR claimed that Western outlets arrived in areas where Ukrainian special forces may conduct provocations.

The Luhansk People’s Republic (LNR) claimed that a captured Ukrainian drone reconnoitered “civil infrastructure, residential areas, crowded places, churches, and industrial facilities” in Pervomaisk, Luhansk Oblast, on February 9.⁹⁷¹ The LNR claimed that Ukrainian forces could have launched an airstrike that would lead to “numerous casualties among the civilian population and undermine the economic security of the [the LNR].” The LNR previously claimed it intercepted a Ukrainian drone on February 8.

The Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) accused Ukraine of losing its “subjectivity” due to a Western push for escalation against Donbas and “increasing anti-Russian hysteria” on February 9.⁹⁷² The DNR warned that Ukraine may sabotage the Normandy Four leaders’ political advisors meeting on February 10 to avoid fulfilling its obligations under the Minsk II Accords. The DNR claimed that the West can still pressure Ukraine into abiding to the Minsk II Accords in the name of collective European security.

A Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) representative to the Trilateral Contact Group claimed that the Ukrainian delegation manipulates official information to disrupt the peace process in Donbas on February 9.⁹⁷³ The DNR representative claimed that the Ukrainian side manipulated Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Special Monitoring Mission (OSCE SMM) reports to imply that only proxy republics violate the ceasefire. The representative added that the Ukrainian delegation created “a virtual reality” which DNR attempted to correct by presenting statistics about Ukrainian ceasefire violations.

The Luhansk People’s Republic (LNR) claimed that unspecified actors conducted a second distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) cyber-attack against the Luhansk Information Agency on February 9.⁹⁷⁴ The LNR reported it restored the website following the attack.

Luhansk People’s Republic (LNR) Head Leonid Pasechnik claimed that the LNR militia prevented a Ukrainian Armed Forces mass shelling attack on February 9.⁹⁷⁵ Pasechnik claimed LNR forces shot down a Ukrainian reconnaissance drone used to reconnoiter targets for an attack. Pasechnik blamed the Organization for Security and Cooperation for ignoring Ukrainian offensive activity.

The Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) claimed that Ukrainian tanks advanced 15 kilometers closer to the line of contact on February 9.⁹⁷⁶ The DNR claimed that a company of the Ukrainian 53rd Mechanized Brigade deployed to Novotroitske, Donetsk Oblast. The DNR claimed it observed movements of two Ukrainian tank platoons to Avdiivka and a tank company of the 95th Air Assault Brigade arriving in Niu-York, Donetsk Oblast. The DNR blamed the Organization for Security and Cooperation Special Monitoring Mission for failing to record Ukraine’s use of electronic warfare equipment. The DNR added that Ukraine’s 54th Mechanized Brigade underwent a readiness inspection necessary to support an offensive. The DNR added that Ukraine is preparing to send specialists and repair equipment from Kharkiv, Zhytomyr, Lviv, and Mykolaiv factories to Donbas. The DNR reported receiving many volunteer applicants to join the DNR militia to “defend the independence of Donbas from the Kyiv Nazi regime.”

A Luhansk People’s Republic (LNR) Representative to the Trilateral Contact Group claimed that the Ukrainian delegation did not submit roadmaps for the implementation of the Minsk II Accords on February 9.⁹⁷⁷ The representative claimed that the Ukrainian delegation blocked “constructive dialogue” and lacked any “real intentions” to implement the Minsk II Accords.

The Luhansk People’s Republic (LNR) claimed that the LNR militia forcibly grounded a Ukrainian security forces’ drone near Kalynove-Borshchuvate, Luhansk Oblast, on February 8.⁹⁷⁸ The LNR claimed that Ukrainian forces launched the drone to conduct reconnaissance to adjust Ukrainian 24th Separate Mechanized Brigade’s artillery fire. The LNR also claimed it observed forward movement of the 24th Brigade and a Ukrainian mortar platoon near Novooleksandrivka, Luhansk Oblast. The LNR added that Ukrainian forces covered the intercepted drone with Nazi symbols.

A Luhansk People’s Republic (LNR) representative to the Trilateral Contact Group stated that restoration of socio-economic ties with Ukraine is “on pause” on February 8.⁹⁷⁹ The representative claimed that Ukraine showed interest in restoring socio-economic relations but failed to look for “mutual understanding” on solutions to the war in Donbas.

The Luhansk People’s Republic (LNR) claimed that unspecified actors conducted a distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) cyber-attack against the Luhansk Information Agency on February 8.⁹⁸⁰ The LNR claimed that the website’s security measures failed to prevent large-scale cyber-attacks. The LNR claims that *YouTube*’s recent ban of proxy channels and the DDoS attack are examples of informational sabotage intended to propagate disinformation about the situation in Donbas.

Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) Head Denis Pushilin told *Reuters* that war could “start at any moment, regardless of weather conditions” on February 7.⁹⁸¹ Pushilin added that the DNR is under “constant threat of military actions” and suggested that “sometimes unfavorable weather conditions are a good cover for launching an attack.” Pushilin

claimed that there is a possibility of a “big war” that can be the last in human history. Pushilin did not provide a clear answer on the status of the Russian bill to recognize the proxy republics, however he implied that it would be “selfish” to not consider all other ethnic Russians living in Ukraine. Pushilin denied having any contact with Russia on weapon supplies but welcomed recent proposals in the Russian State Duma to send weapons to Donbas. Ukrainian Culture and Information Minister Oleksiy Tkachenko accused *Reuters* of legitimizing terrorist groups (the LNR and DNR) in Donbas by interviewing “so-called leaders.”⁹⁸²

The Luhansk People’s Republic (LNR) claimed that the Ukrainian side blocked all topics regarding humanitarian assistance to Donbas on February 8.⁹⁸³ The LNR claimed that Ukrainian representatives again made demands to open a new checkpoint in Zolote, Luhansk Oblast, instead of discussing technical issues raised by LNR. The LNR added that the Ukrainian side did not advance any discussions on issuing mutual security assurances nor provide prosecutorial immunity to prisoners exchanged in 2019 and 2020.

The Luhansk People’s Republic (LNR) claimed on February 8 that Ukrainian special services are planning “resonant terrorist acts with numerous civilian casualties” to destroy infrastructure in Kharkiv, Luhansk, and Donetsk oblasts.⁹⁸⁴ The LNR claimed that Ukraine will accuse the proxy republics of initiating the terrorist act to gain international sympathy and justify hostilities against Donbas. The LNR also claimed that Ukraine continues to reenforce its positions in Donbas with new deployments of elements of the 79th Separate Guards Air Assault Brigade and 57th Separate Motorized Infantry Brigade. The LNR reported that Ukrainian government continues to film staged videos about “unbearable living conditions” in frontline areas.

The Luhansk People’s Republic (LNR) claimed on February 8 that 100 servicemen of the UK Special Operations Forces will arrive in Donbas soon.⁹⁸⁵ The LNR added that special forces will arrive under the premise of “instructors,” but will conduct reconnaissance and sabotage operations. The LNR claimed that Ukrainian Commander-in-Chief Valery Zaluzhny noted “extremely low staffing of military units with medical personnel and the unpreparedness of medical institutions to receive a large number of wounded.” The LNR added that Zaluzhny tasked staff to complete medical units “as soon as possible” to begin an offensive operation.

Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) Head Denis Pushilin claimed seeing Ukrainian troops amassing in Donbas after visiting the line of contact on February 7.⁹⁸⁶

The Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) claimed that Polish mercenaries and Ukrainian nationalist militant groups arrived in Donbas on February 7.⁹⁸⁷ The DNR claimed that Polish mercenaries will support other foreign military personnel disguised as instructors to cause “significant damage on civilian infrastructure facilities.” The DNR added that Polish mercenaries seek to “provoke an escalation of the situation and encourage Kyiv to start genocide” in Donbas. The DNR claimed that two Right Sector units of approximated 70-80 militants each arrived at the location of Ukrainian 54th Separate Mechanized Brigade and 56th Separate Motorized Infantry Brigade. The DNR claims that nationalist militants serve as first echelon forces on the northern and western approaches to Donetsk.

The Luhansk People’s Republic (LNR) claimed that the Ukrainian Armed Forces placed two BTR-60 armored personnel carriers in the area of responsibility of the 24th Separate Mechanized Brigade in Zolote, Luhansk Oblast, on February 7.⁹⁸⁸

The Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics (DNR and LNR) claimed that Ukraine began sending conscripts and reservists to Donbas on February 6.⁹⁸⁹ The DNR specified that Ukraine deployed 40 conscripted soldiers to the area of responsibility of the 25th Airborne Brigade to defend warehouses, command posts, and areas with military equipment. The LNR claimed that Ukraine is preparing its reserve personnel to augment the “extremely low staffing of the 30th Brigade.”

The Luhansk People’s Republic (LNR) claimed that Ukrainian Armed Forces transferred two BDRM-2 combat reconnaissance vehicles to residential areas of Muratove, Luhansk Oblast on February 6.⁹⁹⁰

The Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) claimed that a Ukrainian sniper from the 25th Separate Airborne Brigade killed a DNR militant in Verhnetoretsky, Donetsk Oblast, on February 6.⁹⁹¹

A Luhansk People’s Republic (LNR) Trilateral Group Representative claimed that upcoming Russian contacts with Germany and France “can be considered as Moscow’s last attempts” to return Germany and France to their roles in the Minsk Accords on February 5.⁹⁹² The representative added that Kyiv manipulated France and Germany into disregarding the principle of equal treatment, while intensifying rhetoric to abandon the Minsk Accords.

The Luhansk People’s Republic (LNR) claimed that Ukrainian security forces placed two unspecified armored vehicles in Klynove, Luhansk Oblast, on February 5.⁹⁹³

The Luhansk People’s Republic (LNR) claimed it recorded Ukrainian Armed Forces preparing to execute an “outbreak of hostilities” against Donbas on February 5.⁹⁹⁴ The LNR added that it recorded two Ukrainian reconnaissance drones at the positions of the 34th Battalion of the Ukrainian 57th Brigade. The LNR claimed that Ukrainian 79th Brigade also conducted reconnaissance in the area. The LNR also claimed Ukrainian security forces replenished the 30th Brigade with small arms and mortars. The LNR added that Ukrainian commanders confiscated servicemen’s cell phones at the 24th Brigade’s positions.

The Luhansk People’s Republic (LNR) claimed that Ukrainian Armed Forces under “Western curators” reached the final stage of preparations for an offensive against Donbas on February 4.⁹⁹⁵ The LNR claimed that Ukrainian Commander in Chief Valery Zaluzhny and Ukraine’s General Staff commission will soon arrive in Donbas to assess the “North” command’s operational-tactical group offensive readiness. The LNR claimed that Ukrainian forces deployed most of their Javelin, TOW, and NLAW anti-tank missiles to “positions in the immediate vicinity of the line of contact.”

The Luhansk People’s Republic (LNR) claimed that US, UK, and Estonian journalists arrived in the Ukrainian 95th Separate Air Assault Brigade’s area of responsibility to shoot propaganda videos on February 4.⁹⁹⁶ The LNR claimed that Ukrainian Airborne Assault Forces Commander Maxym Mirgorodsky tasked the 95th Brigade

with protecting Western journalists while they created reports about Russian and proxy republic military aggression against Ukraine. The LNR added that the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine (OSCE SMM) confirmed the presence of two Ukrainian T-72 tanks in Putylyne, Luhansk Oblast, on January 24, but did not publish the discovery in the daily report. LNR insinuated that the OSCE MM deliberately misreports on Ukrainian army movements.

YouTube banned the Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics’ (DNR and LNR) YouTube channels on February 4.⁹⁹⁷ YouTube also removed pro-Kremlin Ukrainian TV channels *Pervyi Nezavisimy* and *UkrLive* for violating YouTube community guidelines. The banned channels claimed that YouTube did not issue a warning or a concrete reason for the ban.⁹⁹⁸ A DNR police official claimed that the ban is a component of the Ukrainian “Crushing Sword” information campaign, which seeks to mask Ukrainian hostilities in Donbas.⁹⁹⁹ The DNR claimed that the Ukrainian government deleted a DNR channel with an audience of two million by collaborating with “Western sponsors.” A DNR deputy accused Ukraine’s National Security Council of issuing the ban request in preparation for an offensive against Donbas.¹⁰⁰⁰ The LNR claimed that the ban was a Western and Ukrainian provocation aimed to silence Donbas before Ukrainian Armed Forces, the National Guard, and foreign mercenaries attack the proxy republics.¹⁰⁰¹ The DNR said it will relaunch its channels on Russian platforms such as Rutube, VK, Odnoklassniki, and Telegram.¹⁰⁰² A former producer of another banned pro-Kremlin TV channel claimed that the Ukrainian government ordered YouTube to remove the channels to deprive Ukrainians of the “truth about the situation in the country and worldwide.” *Pervyi Nezavisimy* accused Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and YouTube of censorship.

The Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) accused Ukraine of expressing new interest in Turkish drone sales to maintain “armed aggression against civilians in Donbas” on February 4.¹⁰⁰³ The DNR added that Ukraine’s purchase of Turkish drones demonstrates “the deplorable state of the Ukrainian military-industrial complex.”

The Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) claimed on February 4 that DNR emergency services received 490 mine threats in educational institutions since February 2.¹⁰⁰⁴

The Luhansk People’s Republic (LNR) reported that Facebook blocked the LNR Militia’s Facebook page on February 4.¹⁰⁰⁵

The Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) claimed Ukraine shows significant signs of mobilization and combat readiness on February 3. The DNR claimed that Ukraine’s State Border Service Head, Serhiy Deineko, signed a regulation on February 2 to restrict military-aged Ukrainian men aged 18 to 45 from leaving Ukraine starting on February 20.¹⁰⁰⁶ The DNR claimed that this is an indicator of Ukraine preparing to attack Donbas. The DNR also claimed that Ukraine is finalizing lists to select Ukrainian citizens for mobilization. The DNR framed Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky’s decree to increase the size of the Ukrainian Armed Force Army by 100,000 by 2025 as an immediate act of mobilization. The DNR said that Ukrainian forces would suffer “large casualties” if they attack Donbas.¹⁰⁰⁷ The DNR also claimed that the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry (MFA) secretly contacted embassies worldwide to request they return military-aged Ukrainian citizens back to Ukraine. The DNR also claimed that the MFA secretly urged foreigners to leave the Joint Forces Operation (JFO) zone in Donbas, implying that the MFA is aware that a Ukrainian offensive is imminent. The

DNR claimed that Ukraine amassed 120,000 soldiers near the line of contact and will deploy an additional 20,000-25,000 servicemen to Donbas, not including Ukrainian “nationalist” forces. The DNR claimed that Ukraine’s 55th Artillery Brigade began offensive exercises in the Donetsk direction. The DNR also noted that Ukrainian forces checked medical units in JFO, instructed them to reequip 30 ambulances, and supply 40 more medical vehicles. The DNR accused the US, Baltic States, Poland, the Czech Republic, and Middle Eastern countries of supplying weapons to Ukraine daily.¹⁰⁰⁸

The Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) officially accused Ukraine of mine threats and firing Western weapons against the DNR on February 3.¹⁰⁰⁹ The DNR claimed that Ukrainian sabotage groups coordinated with “tens of thousands of people, including the youngest residents of the republic” to plan a mass terrorist act. The DNR also claimed that proxy security services disarmed another mine threat in Dokuchaievsk region. The DNR accused Ukrainian Armed Forces of firing at an electric substation in Olenivka, Donetsk Oblast, with NATO standard 60mm ammunition for the first time.¹⁰¹⁰ The DNR added that supply of any “weapons to the Ukrainian authorities leads to new shelling in Donbas.”¹⁰¹¹ The DNR also accused France and Germany of ignoring Ukrainian provocations with “silent assistance to Kyiv.”¹⁰¹² The DNR also commented on Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba’s speech in which he reaffirmed that Ukraine will not provide a special status to Donbas. The DNR claimed that Kuleba is out of touch with reality and that Ukraine is “lawless.”¹⁰¹³

Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) Head Denis Pushilin accused Kyiv of committing an “unprecedented number of provocations” against the DNR on February 3.¹⁰¹⁴ Pushilin accused Ukraine of mining 17 buildings in Donetsk, Horlivka, and Makiyivka on January 28, and threatening 400 building in 16 settlements on February 2. Pushilin claimed that mining threats are a “direct evidence of [Ukrainian] readiness for offensive actions.” Pushilin added that Crimean residents endured similar mining threats in 2014, suggesting that Ukrainian government historically maintains violent policies against “all Russian people.”

Ukraine’s State Security Service (SBU) detained a Donbas militant who fired a grenade launcher at Ukrainian positions in Stanitsia Luhanska, Luhansk Oblast, on February 3.¹⁰¹⁵ The SBU claimed that the militant underwent Russian-instructed combat training near Lutuhyne, Luhansk Oblast, after which his unit fired against Ukrainian Armed Forces. The SBU stated that the militant joined proxy forces in 2015 but recently fled his unit after having a conflict with his commanders.

Luhansk People’s Republic (LNR) Head Leonid Pasechnik claimed that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky’s decree on army expansion and Western military support show that “Ukraine is not interested in peace” on February 2.¹⁰¹⁶ Pasechnik accused Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba of failing to listen to Zelensky’s “policies and speeches” on granting a special status to Donbas. Pasechnik framed the Minsk II Accords as a binding contract, which would grant Donbas a special administrative status within Ukraine and claimed that Kuleba did not read the accords. Pasechnik also claimed that Zelensky “only needs money tranches and weapons for security forces” because the Ukrainian state is unable to independently financially support its security forces. Pasechnik expressed hope that Zelensky will negotiate with the proxy republics and “end the conflict without major losses” for Ukraine. Pasechnik reiterated that the LNR is ready for “any scenario.”

Ukraine’s State Security Service (SBU) and Ukrainian Armed Forces detained a Luhansk People’s Republic (LNR) militant in Katerynivka, Luhansk Oblast, on February 2.¹⁰¹⁷ The SBU claimed that the militant – a sniper and grenadier since 2016 – attempted to return to Ukraine after becoming disheartened by the “Russian world.” The SBU claimed the militant aimed grenade launchers at the Ukrainian armored vehicles in the Novooleksandrivka district and Troitzkyi Popasnyanskyi district, Luhansk Oblast, in the past. The LNR claimed on February 3 that the SBU detained the militant when he attempted to cross the line of contact to see his daughter in Kharkiv.¹⁰¹⁸ The LNR claimed that the militant received several calls from the SBU promising to drop his 2012 criminal conviction if he returns to Ukraine. The LNR accused the SBU of failing to uphold the offer and forcing the serviceman into providing a false concession for a Ukrainian information campaign called “Crushing Sword.”

The Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) claimed it evacuated 75,000 people from 400 buildings due to mine threats to civilians on February 2.¹⁰¹⁹ The DNR has intensified its claims of mine threats to DNR residents since January 28 and will likely accuse Ukraine’s State Security Service (SBU) of committing terrorist attacks against the DNR in the near future.¹⁰²⁰

Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) Head Denis Pushilin said that the proxy republics are ready to face Ukrainian aggression on February 2.¹⁰²¹ Pushilin said that the DNR and Luhansk People’s Republic (LNR) have full-fledged armies that conducted training and drills among specialized military units, departments, and ministries. Pushilin added that the DNR and LNR are ready to defend their homes as they “have nowhere to retreat.”

The Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) claimed that Ukrainian Armed Forces fired 82mm mortars from Pyshevyk Village against Verkhnohyrokiyske and Pikuzy villages in Donetsk Oblast on February 2.¹⁰²² The DNR did not report any casualties.

The Luhansk People’s Republic (LNR) claimed that the Ukrainian 79th Separate Air Assault Brigade will participate in the early stages of an offensive against Donbas on February 2.¹⁰²³ The LNR claimed that the 79th Brigade will deploy to the line of contact via Mi-8 helicopters that are currently deployed to Novoaidar, Luhansk Oblast. The LNR stated that servicemen of the 79th Brigade are conducting heliborne landing exercises at the Novoaidar Training Ground. The LNR added that battalions of the 79th Brigade are preparing assault groups focused on offensive operations in urban conditions. The LNR claimed that the Ukrainian government is not confident that the offensive will be successful and alleged that Ukraine’s State Security Service (SBU) ordered local agents to transfer all local Luhansk administration files to Kyiv. The LNR said that the Ukrainian National Guard will follow behind advancing units to detain Ukrainian deserters. The LNR claimed that the Ukrainian National Guard’s 15th Regiment already assembled at the 57th Brigade’s area of responsibility. The LNR claimed that the Ukrainian parliament passed a bill on January 27 allowing Ukrainian territorial defense units to use man-portable anti-tank and anti-aircraft missile systems against urban settlements in Donbas. The LNR claimed that Ukraine’s preparation of territorial defense troops is “nothing more than veiled mobilization.”

The Luhansk People’s Republic (LNR) claimed that Ukrainian Armed Forces are intensifying combat training sessions near Kramatorsk, Donetsk Oblast, on February 1.¹⁰²⁴ The LNR claimed that Ukrainian Airborne Assault Forces Commander

Maxym Mirgorodsky oversaw exercises with thermobaric rocket launchers. The LNR claimed that 37 servicemen of the Ukrainian 30th Mechanized Brigade refused to extend their contracts because they did not want to “risk their lives for the criminal oligarchic regime in the event of [armed conflict].” The LNR claimed a serviceman from Ukraine’s 24th Brigade shot himself after Ukrainian forces refused to dismiss him after his contract expired.

Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) Head Denis Pushilin accused Ukrainian Armed Forces of killing a DNR serviceman with a drone-delivered explosive device on February 1.¹⁰²⁵

The Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) accused Ukraine’s General Staff of completing an offensive plan against Donbas on February 1.¹⁰²⁶ The DNR claimed that Ukrainian Chief of General Staff Serhiy Shaptala, Joint Forces Operation Commander Oleksandr Pavlyuk, and “North” and “East” operational commanders will present the attack plan for approval at Ukraine’s National Security and Defense Council’s on the week of February 1-6. The DNR claimed that 14 Ukrainian mechanized brigades with additional personnel, fuel, lubricants, weapons, and ammunition will deploy from Volodymyr, Volyn Oblast, to Donbas at an unspecified near time. The DNR claimed that four Ukrainian reconnaissance and sabotage groups previously trained by British instructors deployed to near Donbas to reinforce a Ukrainian airborne assault brigade in Horlivka region. The DNR claimed that Ukraine increased reconnaissance drone flights against DNR defensive positions. The DNR reported that the US deployed an additional 200 tons of weapons, including 300 Javelin anti-tank systems to ignite a provocation in Donbas. The DNR said if the West continues to provide weapons to Ukraine, the DNR will “reserve the right to apply to the Russian Federation and other countries for military and military-technical assistance.”¹⁰²⁷

The Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) accused Ukraine of attempting to detonate an explosive device in a Donetsk administrative building on February 1.¹⁰²⁸ The DNR claimed that Ukrainian Special Services mined the building as a part of a terrorist attack. The DNR previously reported receiving 17 mine threats in administrative and business buildings in Donetsk, Horlivka, and Makiivka, Donetsk Oblast, on January 28.

The Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) accused Ukrainian militant units of firing a grenade launcher at a car dealership in Donetsk on February 1.¹⁰²⁹

Luhansk People’s Republic (LNR) Head Leonid Pasechnik declared a curfew in the LNR on February 1.¹⁰³⁰ Pasechnik previously suspended a curfew in the LNR on October 1, 2021. The LNR is likely advancing a narrative that Ukrainian provocations continuously impact LNR residents’ daily lives to set conditions for a Russian intervention or recognition of the LNR.

The Luhansk People’s Republic (LNR) claimed on February 1 that Ukrainian Armed Forces shelled the proxy republic five times more in January 2022 than in December 2021.¹⁰³¹ The LNR claimed it recorded 21 instances of shelling largely in Zolote and Molodizhne villages, Luhansk Oblast. The proxy republics claimed that Ukraine intensified activity at the line of contact in January 2022 likely to implying that Ukraine created provocations ahead of US-Russia summits in mid-January 2022.

The Luhansk People’s Republic (LNR) claimed that Ukraine’s 24th Separate Mechanized Brigade deployed an “Osa” anti-aircraft missile system near Popasna, Luhansk Oblast, on February 1.¹⁰³²

The Luhansk People’s Republic (LNR) Head Leonid Pasechnik accused the West of providing Ukrainian Armed Forces with offensive weapons on January 31.¹⁰³³

The Luhansk People’s Republic (LNR) claimed that the Ukrainian 57th Motorized Brigade placed four armored vehicles near residential buildings in the Joint Forces Operation zone on January 31.¹⁰³⁴ The LNR specified that the brigade placed three armored vehicles and one MT-LB armored personnel carrier in Novotoshkivske, Luhansk Oblast.

Luhansk People’s Republic (LNR) Head Leonid Pasechnik claimed that Western “mercenaries arrive in Ukraine under the guise of [NATO] instructors” on January 31.¹⁰³⁵ Pasechnik claimed that mercenaries are likely pursuing their own tasks in Ukraine and might disregard orders from Ukrainian commanders.

Luhansk People’s Republic (LNR) Head Leonid Pasechnik said the LNR would welcome Russian weapon supplies on January 31.¹⁰³⁶ Pasechnik also claimed the LNR wants a peaceful settlement for the conflict.

The Luhansk People’s Republic (LNR) accused the Ukrainian Security Service (SBU) of developing a Western-supported special information campaign called “Crushing Sword” on January 31.¹⁰³⁷ The LNR claimed that Crushing Sword aims to accuse the LNR, Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR), and Russia of aggression against Ukraine. The LNR claimed that the SBU will first release staged videos about the outbreak of hostilities against Ukraine on TV. The LNR claimed that Ukrainian forces will film testimonials from civilians freed “from Russian oppression” to convince the world community of the legality of their actions. The LNR stated that Ukrainian propaganda will demonstrate the successful repulsion of proxy and Russian aggression, while conducting an offensive against Donbas “terrorists.”

The Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) claimed that Ukrainian Armed Forces fire wounded a civilian in Oleksandrivka, Donetsk Oblast, on January 29.¹⁰³⁸

The Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) claimed on January 28 that the Ukrainian Armed Forces and the US are finalizing an offensive plan to forcefully resolve the Donbas conflict.¹⁰³⁹ The DNR said that Ukraine and US advisors to the Ukrainian Defense Ministry will initiate aggression in Donbas after approving their plan with Ukrainian National Security and Defense Council and creating offensive groups. The DNR claimed that Ukrainian forces plan to transfer their three most combat-ready brigades – the 72nd separate mechanized, 10th separate mountain assault, and 80th air assault brigades – to Donbas by rail from February 3-10. The DNR claimed that the 80th air assault brigade completed exercises at a training ground masked as the International Center for Peacekeeping and Security in Starychy, Lviv Oblast. The DNR claimed that UK Orbital training mission personnel trained Ukrainian paratroopers to act in highly urban areas, possibly for an assault group operation on Horlivka or Donetsk. The DNR reported that Sumy-based “National Corps” radical organization conducted military training with mercenaries experienced in “punitive operations” in Kyiv and

Donbas in 2014. The DNR added that the US private military companies “Forward Observations Group” and “Academi” participated in the training.

The Luhansk People’s Republic (LNR) claimed that Western countries deployed additional personnel and equipment to Donbas on January 28.¹⁰⁴⁰ The LNR claimed Ukrainian Armed Forces have UK NLAW anti-tank missile system, Barrett-class large caliber sniper rifles, Saxon-like armored combat vehicles, and French APILAS grenade launchers within the Joint Forces Operation (JFO) zone. The LNR claimed that although there has not been a “critical increase” in Ukrainian units at the JFO zone, Ukrainian forces are deploying personnel and equipment to units stationed at the line of contact in Donbas.¹⁰⁴¹ The LNR added that Ukrainian forces are deploying from central Ukraine to the Transdnistriean (Moldovan), Russian, and Belarusian borders. The LNR accused Ukrainian forces of openly transferring military equipment to residential areas to fire at LNR positions and shell civilian settlements. The LNR claimed that Ukrainian forces moved 15 self-propelled howitzers and two artillery batteries – previously seen by Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) – to an unspecified location. The LNR said Ukrainian forces actively use mortars and artillery systems of more than 100mm caliber close to the line of contact, while suppressing the OSCE monitoring mission. The LNR claimed that US and UK reconnaissance aircraft regularly fly over Ukraine.¹⁰⁴² The LNR added that Ukrainian drone activity declined over the proxy republics, likely due to Ukraine trying to save its drones from being shot down and bad weather conditions. The LNR accused Ukrainian propaganda over a Russian invasion of reaching peak “hysteria” and self-induced panic, forcing the Ukrainian government to back down from its own alarmism.¹⁰⁴³

The Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) claimed that the Ukrainian Armed Forces opened large-caliber machine gun fire on Yasne village, Donetsk Oblast on January 28.¹⁰⁴⁴ The DNR claimed Ukrainian forces damaged two apartments. The DNR also reported that unspecified forces mined five buildings in Donetsk including the DNR Information Ministry, Children and Youth Creativity Palace, a library, and a business center.¹⁰⁴⁵

The Luhansk People’s Republic (LNR) claimed that unspecified private military companies arrived at the Ukrainian government-controlled frontline in Donbas on January 28.¹⁰⁴⁶ LNR did not specify the origin of the mercenary units.

The Luhansk People’s Republic (LNR) claimed to record the movements of five Ukrainian servicemen from the 24th separate mechanized brigade on armored vehicles in the Donbas disengagement zone on January 28.¹⁰⁴⁷

The Luhansk People’s Republic (LNR) claimed Ukrainian shelling from the Ukrainian 30th Separate Mechanized Brigade killed an LNR serviceman near Troitskoye on January 27.¹⁰⁴⁸ The LNR claimed the Ukrainian Armed Forces have increased their shelling since January 9 and are creating favorable conditions for an offensive.

The Luhansk People’s Republic (LNR) claimed on January 27 that the Commander in Chief of the Ukrainian Armed Forces Valery Zaluzhny will conduct reconnaissance in person to set conditions for a Ukrainian offensive in the coming days.¹⁰⁴⁹ The DNR claimed its “undercover intelligence” reported Zaluzhny would visit the 30th Separate Mechanized Brigade, and claimed the Ukrainian 30th and 24th brigades are preparing to conduct an offensive.

The Luhansk People's Republic (LNR) claimed that American mercenaries from the PMC Academi are present in Donbas on January 27.¹⁰⁵⁰

The head of the Russian-backed Crimean Republic, Sergei Aksyonov, stated he supports providing weapons to the DNR and LNR “to protect the people of Donbas and stop the aggression of the Kyiv regime” on January 27.¹⁰⁵¹

Head of the Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) Denis Pushilin urged Russia to supply the DNR and LNR with modern weapons, primarily to counter Ukrainian-operated Turkish-supplied drones, on January 27.¹⁰⁵² The LNR claimed Academi personnel are training Ukrainian forces at the Yavorovsky training ground in the Lviv region; at the 235th training center in the Nikolaev region; at the 241st training ground in the Kherson region; and at airfields in the Odessa, Nikolaev, and Zhytomyr regions.

The leaders of the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics (DNR and LNR), Denis Pushilin and Leonid Pasechnik, supported Secretary of United Russia General Council Andrey Turchak's proposal to supply Donbas with military equipment on January 26.¹⁰⁵³ Pushilin said Russian weapons would allow the DNR to “resist impending aggression on the part of Ukraine” and strengthen “defensive capabilities” against implied Western military equipment. Pasechnik said that if Ukraine does not come to its senses, Luhansk will be “very grateful” for Russian military support. Pasechnik urged to not forget that Ukraine's “overseas partners” continue to supply Kyiv with large volumes of weapons.

The Luhansk People's Republic (LNR) claimed that the Ukrainian Armed Forces will conduct targeted strikes on frontline settlements because they “are not ready for a full-scale offensive along the entire line of contact” on January 26.¹⁰⁵⁴ LNR specified that Ukrainian Armed Forces will first target Pervomaisk, Zolote, Holubivka, Frunze, Donetsk, and Slov'yanoserbs'k, Luhansk Oblast. The LNR claimed that Ukrainian forces will aim to cut off main clusters of LNR forces and trap them in settlements to start a siege. The LNR claimed Ukrainian forces will attempt to surround Luhansk in the case of a full-scale conflict to cut off communication routes between proxy republics in the Debaltseve region. The LNR called on Ukraine to “abandon deliberately unsuccessful aggressive intentions” against Donbas servicemen and civilians.

The Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) claimed that the Ukrainian Armed Forces are actively preparing armed group for an offensive in Donbas on January 26.¹⁰⁵⁵ The DNR claimed that Ukraine deployed fuel, lubricants, and ammunition to the Pokrovsk, Druzhkivka, and Zachativka railways stations in Donetsk Oblast to supply forces near the line of contact. The DNR added that Ukrainian brigade commanders are preparing to receive ammunition 15-20 kilometers from the line of contact by setting up field warehouses. The DNR also claimed that Ukraine began preparing military hospitals by deploying additional beds, training medical personnel for wound treatment, and storing donor blood. The DNR claimed that Kyiv ordered civilians to evacuate from government-controlled frontline settlements and began recruiting members of radical organizations with experience in combat in Donbas at recruitment points in Kharkiv, Bila Tserkva, Kherson, and Dnipro.¹⁰⁵⁶ The DNR reported that Ukraine set up training camps for new recruits and launched fundraising campaigns “to buy transport and equipment for nationalist assault groups.” The DNR also claimed that Ukraine will negotiate with NATO countries like the Czech Republic to receive their old Soviet equipment, such as 152mm artillery shells, to address ammunition shortages.

The Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) accused Ukraine’s Security Services (SBU) of planning a series of sabotage and terrorist acts to destabilize the proxy republic on January 26.¹⁰⁵⁷ The DNR claimed that SBU agents amassed 1.6 kilograms of TNT, 20 hand grenades, and 15 shots for grenade launchers in abandoned houses in Dokuchajevs’k, Donetsk Oblast.

The Luhansk People’s Republic (LNR) accused the Ukrainian government of demonstrating “a complete lack of interest in real de-escalation on the line of demarcation” during a Trilateral Contact Group security subgroup meeting on January 25.¹⁰⁵⁸

The Luhansk People’s Republic (LNR) claimed that the current situation in Donbas “is more like a pre-war situation” on January 25.¹⁰⁵⁹ The LNR claimed that the “Ukrainian army is preparing for the transition to active hostilities” and that they recorded “active [Ukrainian] military activities... not only in in Donbas... but also in general throughout the entire territory of Ukraine.” The LNR claimed that Ukraine’s 35th Separate Marine Brigade assembled in Odesa to “destabilize the situation on the Ukrainian-Transnistria border.” The LNR claimed that the Ukrainian 121st Separate Signal Brigade deployed equipment from Dnipropetrovsk to Donbas. The LNR also claimed that Ukraine’s 55th Separate Artillery Brigade is conducting military exercises near Orlivka Village, Odesa Oblast, after which the 55th will head to Donbas. The LNR stated that elements of the Ukrainian 93rd Separate Mechanized Brigade are in “constant combat readiness” in Kharkiv Oblast, preparing for deployment to Donbas. The LNR claimed Ukrainian 156th Anti-Aircraft Missile Regiment deployed to the Ukrainian-Belarusian border from Chernihiv Oblast. The LNR also claimed recording signals activity intensification in Ukrainian forces’ radio networks and at reserve command posts. The LNR stated that hospitals in Severodonetsk, Luhansk Oblast, and Chasiv Yar, Donetsk Oblast and mobile crematoriums in Kramatorsk, Donetsk Oblast, are preparing for an offensive. The LNR claimed that five unspecified British-trained Ukrainian special operations forces groups arrived in Lysychans’k, Luhansk Oblast, to conduct sabotage on civil infrastructure facilities, including water filtration stations. The LNR stated that the Ukrainian Armed Forces are “carefully” hiding their deployments from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Special Monitoring Mission (OSCE SMM) and suppressed OSCE SMM drones with electronic warfare systems 57 times in an unspecified recording period.

The Luhansk People’s Republic (LNR) claimed that Ukraine deployed two infantry armored vehicles to Schastia, Luhansk Oblast on January 25.¹⁰⁶⁰ LNR claimed that proxy forces are ready to “promptly respond to changes in the situation.” Ukraine’s 79th Air Assault Brigade operates in the vicinity of Schastia.

The Luhansk People’s Republic (LNR) accused Ukraine’s 79th Air Assault Brigade of expelling civilians from their homes in Lopaskyne Village, Luhansk Oblast, to quarter Ukrainian military personnel on January 25.¹⁰⁶¹

The Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) claimed that Ukrainian Armed Forces deployed multiple launch rocket systems (MLRS) and tanks to unspecified locations in Donbas to form assault groups on January 25.¹⁰⁶² The DNR reported spotting “the arrival of multiple rocket launchers, armored units, and equipment for destroying mine barriers.”

The Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) Intelligence claimed that Ukrainian “Right Sector” militants arrived in Donbas on January 25.¹⁰⁶³ The DNR stated that Ukrainian nationalist battalions could act as military detachments or as ethnic cleansing groups.

The Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) accused the Ukrainian government of preparing to send mechanized units to Donbas on January 24.¹⁰⁶⁴ The DNR additionally accused Ukraine of deploying 40 special forces soldiers to Avdiivka, Donetsk, and claimed it confirmed the presence of Javelin anti-tank weapons near Donbas. The DNR accused Ukraine of preparing to use force to resolve the conflict in Donbas.

The Luhansk People’s Republic (LNR) accused Ukrainian forces on January 23 of detaining one of their personnel near Svitlodarsk, Luhansk, on January 22.¹⁰⁶⁵ The LNR claims that Ukrainian forces detained the LNR personnel while he was conducting a patrol near Svitlodarsk on January 22.

The Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) accused Ukrainian forces of increasing drone reconnaissance and sniper deployments to prepare for an “active phase of hostilities” against Donbas on January 22.¹⁰⁶⁶ The DNR continued to propagate claims from January 21 about Ukrainian forces deploying multiple launch rocket launchers and snipers to Donbas.

The Luhansk People’s Republic (LNR) accused Ukrainian forces of deploying one “Osa” anti-aircraft missile system in Dimitrova, Luhansk, on January 22.¹⁰⁶⁷

Kremlin-sponsored TV and online outlets amplified the Donetsk People’s Republic’s (DNR) claim that the Ukrainian Armed Forces deployed two “Uragan” and six “Smerch” multiple rocket launchers (MLRS) and sniper units to Pokrovsky, in government-controlled Donetsk Oblast, on January 21.¹⁰⁶⁸ The DNR claimed that Ukraine’s Security Service deployed snipers from its “Alpha” special unit to “unleash active hostilities in Donetsk.”¹⁰⁶⁹ The DNR also claimed that the Ukrainian 25th and 95th Airborne Brigades will use anti-tank weapons provided by the United Kingdom “to seize settlements of the [DNR] and Luhansk People’s Republic.”¹⁰⁷⁰

Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) leader Denis Pushilin said that the DNR is ready for a Ukrainian chemical weapons provocation on January 18.¹⁰⁷¹ Pushilin alleged that Ukraine may accuse Russia or the DNR of a chemical attack in Donbas or on other Ukrainian territory.

The Luhansk People’s Republic accused Ukraine’s 79th Air Assault Brigade of deploying two BTR-60 armored personnel carriers near the village of Shchastye, Luhansk, on January 16.¹⁰⁷²

The Luhansk People’s Republic accused Kyiv of deploying three pairs of Lithuanian-trained Ukrainian snipers to Svetlodarsk to “commit provocations” in Donbas on January 16.¹⁰⁷³

The Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) claimed that Ukrainian forces deployed six heavy weapon systems near three villages in Ukrainian government-controlled Donetsk on January 13.¹⁰⁷⁴ The DNR claimed that Ukrainian forces deployed a 9K33 “Osa” air defense system to Andriyvka, Donetsk, a BM-21 “Grad” multiple launch rocket system and

three 152mm self-propelled howitzers to Mangush, Donetsk, and a S-300 air defense system to Volodarske, Donetsk.

The Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) accused Ukrainian forces of shooting an Organization for Security and Cooperation Special Monitoring Mission (OSCE SMM) observation drone with small arms near Ukrainian government-controlled Chermalyk Village, Donetsk Oblast, on January 13.¹⁰⁷⁵

The Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) accused Ukrainian forces of firing 82mm mortars at Horlivka, Donetsk, on January 10.¹⁰⁷⁶

The Luhansk People’s Republic (LNR) accused Ukrainian forces of deploying armored vehicles near the villages of Popasnaya, Zolote and Vrubovka on January 7.¹⁰⁷⁷ The LNR accused Ukrainian forces of deploying four MT-LB armored personnel carriers and four armored combat vehicles near Popasna, Luhansk, three MT-LB armored personnel carriers near Vrubovka, and two BMP-2 infantry fighting vehicles near Zolote.¹⁰⁷⁸ Ukraine’s 24th Mechanized Brigade operates in this vicinity.

The Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) accused Ukraine’s 36th Naval Infantry Brigade of conducting aerial reconnaissance near Shirokino and Pavlopol, Donetsk, on January 3.¹⁰⁷⁹ The DNR said Ukraine’s reconnaissance of these areas could be a Ukrainian armed provocation to accuse the DNR of violating the ceasefire.

Luhansk Peoples Republic (LNR) police accused the Ukrainian Armed Forces of firing over 4,300 rounds of ammunition against Luhansk and violating the ceasefire 534 times in 2021 during a briefing on December 31.¹⁰⁸⁰ LNR police claimed that the Ukrainian military fired 155 artillery shells and planted 635 mines in Luhansk. LNR police reported that ceasefire violations intensified after the Ukrainian Security Service (SBU) detained LNR Joint Center for Control and Coordination of the Ceasefire Regime representative Andrei Kosyak on October 13. The LNR previously claimed that the SBU detained Kosyak to destabilize the situation in Donbas in October 2021 after the SBU reported that Kosyak, a Russian citizen, conducted a reconnaissance operation on Ukrainian Armed Forces positions.¹⁰⁸¹ LNR and Kremlin-sponsored media may resurface old news about Kosyak’s detention to establish an alleged starting point for Ukrainian offensive activity against Donbas.

Luhansk Peoples Republic (LNR) police on January 2 accused “Ukrainian nationalist militants” of setting up a headquarters in a seized school in Valuyvsk village, Luhansk, on December 27.¹⁰⁸² LNR police claimed that Ukrainian militants use the school to host a “tactical combat unit of nationalists” and establish firing positions. LNR police said they observed Ukrainian vehicles with armed personnel, artillery reconnaissance, target designators, and radio stations near the school. The report reiterated that Ukrainian attacks intensified after Ukrainian Security Service detained Russian reconnaissance officer Andrei Kosyak in October 2021.¹⁰⁸³

The Luhansk People’s Republic Militia accused the Ukrainian Armed Forces of kidnapping an LNR security officer near the contact line in Donbas on December 29.¹⁰⁸⁴ LNR representative Ivan Filiponenko claimed traces of struggle and blood were found at the site of the officer’s disappearance and accused the Ukrainian military of torturing the captured officer to “justify the criminal actions of Ukrainian militants.”

The Donetsk People Republic militia claimed on December 22 that the US shipped botulinum toxin to Mariupol and then Kharkiv in November 2021.¹⁰⁸⁵ The Donetsk People Republic militia also accused the US private military contractors of preparing firing points near the front line in Donbas. These claims support Russian Defense Minister Shoigu's claim on December 21 that the US private military contractors brought chemical warfare agents to Ukraine.

Ukraine's Main Intelligence Directorate (GUR) stated on December 21 that the Russian proxy forces in Donbas intensified engineering work to improve the fortification of equipment in advanced positions by mining frontline positions and masking false forward positions.¹⁰⁸⁶

Ukraine's Main Intelligence Directorate (GUR) stated on December 20 that approximately 600-800 Russian military officers are permanently embedded in the Donetsk and Luhansk Peoples Republic militias.¹⁰⁸⁷ The GUR stated that the Kremlin conducted an officer rotation in October and November 2021 resulting with a new Russian proxy army corps commander and new brigade-level commanders.

The People's Militia of the Luhansk Republic (LNR) reported that Ukrainian Armed Forces deployed additional armor and artillery to the front line in Donbas on December 16.¹⁰⁸⁸ The LNR said that Ukrainian Armed Forces deployed a Strela-10 anti-aircraft missile system, four T-72 tanks to the Novookhtyrka, Luhansk, and three T-72 tanks to the Severodonetsk, Luhansk. Ukraine's 57th Motorized Rifle Brigade operates in the vicinity of these locations.

The Ukrainian Ministry of Defense Main Intelligence Directorate reported on December 14 that Russia's 1st and 2nd Corps in Donetsk and Luhansk began new training exercises on December 13.¹⁰⁸⁹ The GUR stated Russian Armed Forces commanders oversaw a combat readiness check of motorized, artillery, and tank units from December 6-10. The report stated the 1st and 2nd Corps began high intensity readiness exercises, particularly practicing meetings with unit commanders and specialized training for snipers.

Representatives from the DNR, LNR, South Ossetia, and the Russian government met in Donetsk to discuss prospects for deepened economic integration on December 14.¹⁰⁹⁰ Representatives from the Russian regions of occupied Crimea, Karelia, Volgograd, Penza, and North Ossetia attended the meeting. The DNR, LNR, and Russian Federation signed several cooperation agreements to promote agricultural, industrial, and infrastructure cooperation. The Kremlin seeks to increase economic ties between its proxies and neighboring Russian regions.

DNR leader Pushilin said during a December 5 interview that the DNR may unify with the LNR in the future.¹⁰⁹¹ Pushilin said the DNR and LNR cannot unify at this time because the unification would allow Ukraine to undermine the Minsk Agreements. Pushilin stated that Ukrainian government-controlled Donetsk and Luhansk are awaiting the "arrival of the Russian world" and implied that DNR seeks to occupy the entire Donetsk Oblast.¹⁰⁹² Pushilin also reiterated Kremlin statements about Ukrainian militarization and deployments to Donbas.¹⁰⁹³ Pushilin announced that over 350,000 DNR residents received Russian passports.¹⁰⁹⁴

DNR leader Pushilin said on November 30 that he wants to hold a referendum in the DNR, but did not specify on what issues.¹⁰⁹⁵ Pushilin said the DNR proposed a referendum to the members of the United Nations Security Council—likely Russia—in a November 30 interview. Pushilin likely seeks to hold a referendum to unify the DNR with Russia. The DNR has long sought full integration with Russia—an objective the Kremlin historically has not supported. The Kremlin likely seeks to reintegrate the DNR and LNR into Ukraine as Russian-controlled proxies.¹⁰⁹⁶ The Kremlin could leverage Pushilin’s statements about a referendum to advance Russia’s own information operations to support a Russian military operation in Donbas, however.

United Kingdom Activity

UK Foreign Secretary Liz Truss and Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba announced that they agreed to develop a new UK-Ukraine-Poland “trilateral memorandum of cooperation” in Kyiv on February 17.¹⁰⁹⁷ A joint trilateral statement states that the three states will work together to “ensure Ukraine’s stability and resilience, strengthening democracy on the border in Eastern Europe.” The document also states that the three states prioritize further strengthening strategic cooperation and engagement. Truss stated there is a continued need for diplomatic solutions and Russian de-escalation, stated that the United Kingdom will increase defense funding for Ukraine to £100 million, and stressed that Russia is perpetrating a “false-flag operation.” She additionally stated that if Russia fails to take the diplomatic route, the UK is prepared to levy severe economic consequences against Russia.

The UK Foreign Office announced it is opening a new consular services office in Lviv, Ukraine, on February 15.¹⁰⁹⁸ The UK Foreign Office stated that Russian aggression against Ukraine will severely inhibit UK consular services in Lviv and its embassy in Kyiv. The UK advised all UK citizens to leave Ukraine due to Russian military threats on February 11. The United States and Canada moved their embassies to Lviv on February 12 and 13, respectively.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson stated that there is still time for Russian President Vladimir Putin to step back from the situation in Ukraine on February 14.¹⁰⁹⁹ Johnson stated the situation is “very, very dangerous and difficult” and that, “we are on the edge of a precipice.” Johnson emphasized the need for continued dialogue from all sides.

An anonymous spokesperson for the UK Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office told CNN that the UK is withdrawing UK staff from the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine on February 13.¹¹⁰⁰

UK Defense Minister Ben Wallace stated that a Russian invasion of Ukraine is “highly likely” in an interview with *The Times* on February 12.¹¹⁰¹ Wallace warned that the Russian military presence on Ukraine’s border has now reached such a size that they could “launch an offensive at any time.”

The United Kingdom delivered a security assistance payload to Kyiv, Ukraine, on February 8 and 9.¹¹⁰² Ukraine’s defense minister stated the delivery contained “military goods” and equipment, including bulletproof vests and helmets, for Ukraine’s Territorial Defense Forces and Armed Forces.

British tabloid *The Mirror* reported that the UK deployed over 100 special forces personnel of the Special Air Service and Special Boat Service to Ukraine to advise the Ukrainian military on February 5.¹¹⁰³ Reliable sources have not confirmed *The Mirror's* reporting as of February 7.

UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced that the UK will allocate 88 million pounds to help reduce Ukraine's dependence on Russian energy during a visit to Kyiv on February 1.¹¹⁰⁴ Johnson reassured Zelensky that Western countries are developing sanctions against Russia and expressed interest in continuing to provide military support and intensify economic cooperation with Ukraine. Johnson said that a Russian escalation will result in political, humanitarian, and military catastrophe for Russia and the world. Zelensky reported that Ukraine and the UK agreed on joint efforts to ensure security in the Black Sea and cybersecurity.¹¹⁰⁵ Zelensky and Johnson agreed to begin discussions to expand trade.¹¹⁰⁶ Johnson reportedly rescheduled his call with Russian President Vladimir Putin to meet with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky.¹¹⁰⁷

UK Defense Secretary Ben Wallace met with Hungarian Defense Minister Tibor Benko in Budapest on January 31.¹¹⁰⁸ Wallace and Benko discussed UK-Hungary defense cooperation and joint efforts to deter Russian actions. Benko said that there is no need for a NATO deployment in Hungary at this time. Benko said the Hungarian government was not against NATO deploying troops to Central and Eastern Europe closer to Ukraine, but that Hungary is able "to perform this task on its own" on Hungarian territory. Wallace spoke favorably about Hungarian President Viktor Orbán's planned February 1 visit with Russian president Vladimir Putin in Moscow, saying "we need to de-escalate this and stand up for the right for sovereignty for Ukraine."¹¹⁰⁹ The Kremlin likely seeks to exacerbate and exploit fissures among European Union and NATO members.

A UK Royal Airforce military transport aircraft likely carrying more weapon deliveries to Ukraine landed in Kyiv on January 30.¹¹¹⁰ Official sources have not confirmed the plane's cargo as of January 31.

The *BBC* reported on January 30 that UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson said that the UK is considering doubling its number of troops deployed to Eastern Europe.¹¹¹¹ The UK currently has over 900 personnel based in Estonia, a light cavalry squadron of approximately 150 personnel in Poland, and more than 100 personnel in western Ukraine as part of a training mission.

UK Foreign Secretary Liz Truss stated the UK is "ruling absolutely nothing out" regarding support for Ukraine and said Russian oligarchs will have "nowhere to hide" from toughened UK sanctions on January 30.¹¹¹² Truss stated the UK's number one priority is to deter Putin from invading Ukraine. Truss stated the UK is offering to deploy extra troops to Estonia, increasing air support over the Black Sea, and supplying defensive weapons to Ukraine. Truss stated she will announce improved sanctions legislation "later this week" to target "more Russian interests that are of direct relevance to the Kremlin."

UK news outlet *Sky News* reported on January 27 that the UK is considering deploying hundreds of troops to bolster NATO's eastern flank.¹¹¹³ Two sources in the

UK government said no decision has been reached yet, but that a new deployment to an eastern NATO state is possible.

The United Kingdom began withdrawing personnel from the British embassy in Ukraine on January 24.¹¹¹⁴ The *BBC* and *The Guardian* reported that about half of the staff working in the United Kingdom's embassy in Kyiv will return to the UK by an unspecified future date.

The United Kingdom Foreign Office stated that it has information that the Kremlin is looking to install a pro-Russian leader “as it considers whether to invade and occupy Ukraine” and stated Russia is considering former Ukrainian MP Yevhen Murayev as a candidate on January 22.¹¹¹⁵ The UK government framed this announcement as a deterrence statement against Russian subversion and false flag operations. Murayev has not occupied office in Ukraine since before the 2019 parliamentary elections and is a rival to the Kremlin's main pro-Russian opposition party in Ukraine.¹¹¹⁶

Kremlin media reported on January 22 that United Kingdom Foreign Minister Liz Truss will meet Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov in Moscow on an unspecified date in February 2022.¹¹¹⁷

UK media outlet *Sky News* reported on January 20 that the UK deployed 30 Special Forces troops alongside the delivery of 2,000 light antitank weapons to Ukraine since January 17.¹¹¹⁸ The UK government previously confirmed on January 17 it would ship an unspecified number of antitank weapons to Ukraine but has not confirmed the deployment of personnel.

The United Kingdom (UK) began supplying Ukraine with an unspecified quantity of new Next Generation Light Anti-Tank Weapons (NLAW) on January 17.¹¹¹⁹ The UK Ministry of Defense announced the decision to send light anti-tank weapons to Ukraine in response to “the increasingly threatening behavior from Russia” on January 17.¹¹²⁰ The UK has sent at least seven flights of C-17 transport aircraft likely carrying anti-tank weapons to Ukraine as of January 18.¹¹²¹

British Foreign Secretary Liz Truss said that any further Russian military incursion into Ukraine would bring “massive consequences” and coordinated sanctions to impose a “severe cost on Russia's interests and economy” on January 6.¹¹²²

British Foreign Secretary Liz Truss spoke with Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba on January 4.¹¹²³ The ministers coordinated their respective states' positions ahead of planned NATO, European Union (EU), and Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) talks with Russia on January 9-13. Truss reiterated the UK's support for Ukraine and briefed Kuleba on UK consultations with the EU on new sanctions to deter Russia from further aggression.

Chief of the Russian General Staff Valery Gerasimov and UK Chief of the Defense Staff Tony Radakin had a phone call on December 23. The Russian Ministry of Defense stated they discussed issues of global and regional security, likely focused on Ukraine.¹¹²⁴

Russian President Vladimir Putin and UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson held a phone call on December 13.¹¹²⁵ The Kremlin readout stated Putin “outlined in detail” his assessments of the current situation around Ukraine in response to Johnson’s concern about the “alleged large-scale movement of Russian troops.” Putin presented “specific examples” of Kyiv’s violation of the Minsk agreements, exacerbation of the situation on the line of contact, and discrimination against the Russian-speaking population of Ukraine. Putin announced “the need to immediately begin negotiations in order to develop clear international legal agreements that would exclude any further NATO advance to the east and the deployment of weapons threatening Russia in neighboring states, primarily in Ukraine” and stated the Russian side will present draft relevant documents. London’s readout expressed Johnson’s “deep concern” over the Russian buildup, reiterated the importance of working through diplomatic channels, and emphasized the UK’s commitment to Ukraine’s territorial integrity and sovereignty. However Johnson also “recognized the importance of dialogue on international and regional security” – a possible concession to the Kremlin’s desire for a new European security agreement – and agreed it is imperative “all sides respect the terms of the Minsk protocol.”

The Group of Seven (G7) foreign ministers met in Liverpool to discuss measures against Russian aggression in Ukraine on December 11.¹¹²⁶ The Ministers discussed Russian aggression against Ukraine and global efforts to “present a united front against malign behavior” by Russia and other actors. The Ministers discussed several non-Ukraine related items including global development, JCPOA negotiations, and ongoing crises in Myanmar in Ethiopia.

The G7 ministers released a joint statement on Russian aggression towards Ukraine on December 12, the day after the meeting.¹¹²⁷ The statement stated:

1. The G7 states are “united in our condemnation of Russia’s military build-up and aggressive rhetoric towards Ukraine.”
2. Called on Russia to de-escalate, pursue diplomatic channels, and maintain transparency of military activities – framing this request as a repeat of those articulated by President Biden during his December 7 call with Putin. The G7 additionally reconfirmed its support for France and Germany in the Normandy Four and called for full implementation of the Minsk agreements.
3. Stated “Russia should be in no doubt that further military aggression against Ukraine would have massive consequences and severe cost in response.”
4. Reaffirmed the G7’s commitment to Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity while additionally stating “we commend Ukraine’s posture of restraint.”
5. Stated the G7 will “intensify our cooperation on our common and comprehensive response.”

British Foreign Secretary Liz Truss met with Lavrov on the sidelines of the OSCE ministerial in Stockholm, Sweden, on December 2.¹¹²⁸ Truss restated the UK’s support for Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity and urged the Kremlin to deescalate.¹¹²⁹ Lavrov emphasized that the UK’s provocative rhetoric undermines efforts to restore constructive dialogue on Ukraine.¹¹³⁰

Truss met with Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba on the sidelines of the OSCE ministerial in Stockholm, Sweden, on December 2.¹¹³¹ The ministers exchanged views on cooperation between Ukraine and the United Kingdom (UK) to strengthen security in

the Black Sea region. They agreed on the need to unite European states to prevent the launch of Nord Stream 2.

The UK announced it established a security force assistance brigade and a NATO holding area in Germany on November 25. The brigade has tanks and drone elements.¹¹³² UK Lieutenant General Ralph Wooddisse stated, “we are putting a substantial number of armored vehicles forward in order to be able to move more quickly should they be required anywhere on the continental [European] landmass.”¹¹³³ This is a reversal of the UK’s permanent force presence withdrawal from Germany in late 2020.¹¹³⁴

The UK and Ukraine signed a 1.7-billion pound loan agreement for the development of the Ukrainian navy on November 12. The deal stipulates that the UK will transfer two decommissioned UK Royal Navy minehunters to Ukraine, jointly produce eight missile ships, deliver and retrofit weapons systems to existing Ukrainian vessels, produce a Ukrainian frigate, and provide technical support for building Ukrainian naval infrastructure.¹¹³⁵

United States Activity

US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin reiterated that NATO allies remain united in opposing Russia’s military buildup near Ukraine during a NATO defense ministers’ meeting in Brussels on February 17.¹¹³⁶ Austin announced that a US Army Stryker company based in Germany will deploy to Bulgaria “in the coming days” to conduct joint trainings with NATO troops. Austin reiterated that the United States will defend NATO territory and said that Russia is adding, not removing, troops to its border with Ukraine. Austin also reiterated that the United States and NATO would welcome meaningful diplomatic dialogue with Russia to de-escalate the situation around Ukraine.

United States Secretary of State Antony Blinken spoke about a Russian military escalation at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) on February 17.¹¹³⁷ Blinken stressed that the United States still believes that Russia may manufacture a pretext for an attack against Ukraine and proceed with an invasion that will directly target Kyiv and the Ukrainian government. Blinken called on the UNSC to directly address Russia’s aggressive actions and for Russia to commit to de-escalation with an explicit statement of intent to withdraw, followed by withdrawing troops from the border with Ukraine as Russia previously promised.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Canadian Foreign Minister Melanie Joy discussed joint efforts to prevent further Russian aggression in Ukraine on February 16.¹¹³⁸ Blinken and Joy emphasized the importance of transatlantic alliances to deescalate the situation and to coordinate harsh consequences should Russia invade Ukraine.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken stated that Russia has shown no evidence of de-escalation and troop withdrawals despite its recent claims of redeploying on February 16.¹¹³⁹ Blinken also discussed NATO unity against Russian aggression and emphasized NATO’s extensive support to Ukraine in diverse forms. Blinken noted NATO will never permanently block Ukraine’s ambition to join the Alliance no matter Russia’s actions.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Estonian Foreign Minister Eva-Maria Liimets discussed US-Estonian cooperation against Russian aggression in

Ukraine on February 16.¹¹⁴⁰ Blinken discussed recent changes in US force posture to support NATO's eastern flank and committed to continue support for Estonia's defense forces. Blinken and Liimets urged Russia to continue diplomatic talks and called on Belarus to follow international obligations in the Vienna Document of 2011 to report on exercise details given the large Russian deployments to Belarus for the Union Resolve 2022 exercises.

White House Press Secretary Jenn Psaki held a press conference to discuss developments in Ukraine and the potential repercussions of Russia's proposed recognition of the self-declared republics of Donetsk and Luhansk on February 16.¹¹⁴¹ Psaki reaffirmed US Secretary of State Antony Blinken's message of "a swift and severe response, in coordination with allies" if the Russian Federation goes forward with formally recognizing the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics. Psaki later stated that Russian proxy claims of discovering mass graves in the occupied territories are false and were a part of a larger Kremlin-led disinformation effort to justify an invasion.

US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan spoke with Secretary-General of Japan's National Security Secretariat Akiba Takeo on February 16.¹¹⁴² Sullivan and Takeo discussed recent security developments in Ukraine and the progress of diplomatic efforts. Sullivan praised Japan's decision to divert natural gas to Europe and stressed the importance of a robust response to any Russian escalation. The two leaders concluded their meeting by reaffirming their commitment to working with G7 partners and close coordination.

US President Joe Biden and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz discussed their respective conversations with Russian President Vladimir Putin and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky on February 16.¹¹⁴³ Biden and Scholz noted Russia's continued military build-up on Ukraine's borders and reaffirmed commitment to Ukrainian sovereignty if Russian further invades Ukraine.

US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken stated that the Kremlin's recognition of the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics (DNR and LNR) will result in Russia's "wholesale rejection of its commitments under the Minsk agreements," on February 16.¹¹⁴⁴ Blinken added that the Kremlin's recognition of the DNR and LNR will further undermine Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, violate international law, and will prompt and "a swift and firm response from the US" and its allies.

US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman stated that if Russian President Vladimir Putin recognizes the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics (DNR and LNR), then the Kremlin will officially reject the Minsk II Accords on February 16.¹¹⁴⁵ Sherman said the recognition of the DNR and LNR is "another attempt to undermine Ukraine's sovereignty and integrity." Sherman said that it is unknown whether Putin will decide to invade Ukraine but reaffirmed that US officials "saw with their own eyes" over 100,000 Russian troops amassing on the Ukrainian border. Sherman said that the US temporarily moved the US embassy to Lviv and will impose additional sanctions upon Russian invasion.

The New York Times reported on February 16 that the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) moved its Ukraine station from Kyiv to Lviv, near Ukraine's western border with Poland.¹¹⁴⁶ The US Embassy in Ukraine previously relocated to Lviv on February 14, and the US State Department suspended consular services and ordered all non-essential staff to leave Ukraine on February 12 due to the threat of Russian aggression.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken stated the US has not seen a definitive Russian decision on invading Ukraine or any indication that Russian troops are withdrawing from Ukraine's borders on February 15.¹¹⁴⁷ Blinken reiterated that the Russian military can invade Ukraine on “very, very short notice” and that Russian actions are more important than Russian statements. Blinken also stressed the importance of sharing intelligence with Western partners and the public to “put Russia on notice” and deter aggression.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, UK Foreign Minister Liz Truss, French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian, and German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock discussed coordinating deterrents and costs to impose against Russia on February 15.¹¹⁴⁸ All parties reaffirmed their support for Ukrainian sovereignty and deterring Russian military aggression.

***Politico* reported on February 15 that the United States and its allies have not developed a unified sanctions plan to deter Russian aggression against Ukraine, quoting several US and European Union (EU) officials.**¹¹⁴⁹ *Politico* reported that US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan told US lawmakers on February 14 that Germany and Poland still “need constant coaxing” into implementing a firm sanctions package. *Politico* added that sanctions would negatively impact European business with Russia and that US senators crafting sanctions bills “are poised to abandon” a sanctions package due to internal disagreements. Several US and EU officials additionally informed *Politico* they expect EU sanctions to lag US sanctions by several days, as European Union sanctions require a unanimous vote from all 27 member states.

US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman held a call with her French, German, UK, and Italian counterparts to evaluate their current diplomatic efforts with Russia on February 15.¹¹⁵⁰ The participants confirmed their commitment to diplomacy but warned Russia of harsh consequences should it escalate military activities near Ukraine. Sherman restated American support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman and Canadian Deputy Foreign Minister Marta Morgan discussed Russia's intensified military activity near Ukraine on February 15.¹¹⁵¹ Sherman and Morgan stated that Canada and the US will coordinate a “massive” response to any further Russian aggression but reiterated their commitment to finding a diplomatic solution with Russia.

***The Associated Press* reported that a US intelligence official accused American libertarian financial blog *Zero Hedge* of amplifying Kremlin propaganda on February 15.**¹¹⁵² The official reportedly said that *Zero Hedge* published articles created by Kremlin-sponsored media. *Zero Hedge* denied allegations of collaborating with the Kremlin, claiming that *Zero Hedge* seeks to present a variety of perspectives and opinions. *Zero Hedge* previously accused the US of creating panic surrounding Ukraine, claimed that NATO wants war against Russia in Ukraine, and denounced US intelligence reports on Russia's military buildup near Ukraine as a conspiracy. US officials found that some authors on *Zero Hedge* were affiliated with an organization that the US sanctioned for interference in the 2020 US presidential election.

US President Joe Biden gave remarks on the situation in Ukraine on February 15.¹¹⁵³ Biden stated that the US is prepared to act “decisively” and that the strategic costs for Russia would be “immense” if Russia attacks Ukraine. Biden stated that unprecedented economic sanctions against Russian entities are “ready to go” as soon as Russia may attack Ukraine. Biden stated that the US will prevent the completion of Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline if Russia invades Ukraine. Biden reiterated that US military personnel will not fight in Ukraine but will defend “every inch” of NATO territory “with the full force of American power.” Biden stated the US is prepared to respond if Russia attacks US companies or critical infrastructure with cyber-attacks or other “asymmetric means.” Biden said he told Russian President Vladimir Putin that the US is ready to continue high-level diplomacy to reach “written understandings” between the US and European states and Russia to address “legitimate security concerns” of both Russia and the West. Biden stated that he and Putin agreed that their teams should continue diplomacy. Biden reiterated that new arms control measures, transparency measures, and strategic stability measures that apply to both NATO and Russia can help advance common security interests. Biden stated that the US will not “sacrifice basic principles” and reiterated that all states have a right to sovereignty, territorial integrity, and agency in choosing their alliances. Biden stated that the US has not verified that Russian units are returning to home bases as the Russian Ministry of Defense earlier claimed on February 15. Biden said that 150,000 Russian troops surround Ukraine and that an invasion “remains distinctly possible.” Biden reiterated that US citizens leave Ukraine immediately.

The US Department of state offered Ukraine a \$1 billion sovereign loan guarantee to facilitate Ukrainian economic reforms on February 14.¹¹⁵⁴ The US joined the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the G7, and other allies in an international effort to counter Russia’s destabilizing activities and repair economic damage from Russia’s intervention in Ukraine since 2014. The US Export-Import Bank will also invest up to \$3 billion in Ukrainian infrastructure. The United States previously issued Ukraine \$3 billion in sovereign loan guarantees from 2014-2016 to counter Russian aggression against Crimea.

The Financial Times (FT) reported on February 14 that Five Eyes Western intelligence agencies assessed that former Ukrainian MP Oleg Tsaryov could be a possible leader of a Russian puppet regime in a post-coup Ukraine.¹¹⁵⁵ Tsaryov told *FT* that the claims are “funny” and that he is “not important enough” to speak on Russian state television. Western intelligence previously named pro-Russian Ukrainian politician Viktor Medvedchuk’s exiled allies and former Ukrainian politician Yevhen Murayev as possible puppet regime leaders in January 2022. *FT* reported that Ukrainian political circles believe these intelligence claims are farfetched.

The US Department of State urged US citizens to leave Belarus, Moldova, and Transnistria (Russian-occupied Moldova) due to the ongoing threat of a Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 14.¹¹⁵⁶ The Department of State additionally designated Belarus, Moldova, and Transnistria as “Level 4: Do Not Travel” regions on February 14. The Department of State ordered the dependents of all US government employees in Belarus to leave Belarus on January 31.

US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken announced that the US Embassy in Kyiv is temporarily relocating its operations to Lviv due to a "dramatic acceleration in the buildup of Russian forces" on February 14.¹¹⁵⁷ Blinken reiterated that US citizens remaining in Ukraine should “leave the country immediately.” Blinken added that the State

Department continues to engage with the Kremlin following US President Joe Biden's call with Russian President Vladimir Putin on February 12.

The United States delivered its twelfth and thirteenth security assistance payloads to Kyiv, Ukraine, on February 13.¹¹⁵⁸ Ukraine's defense minister stated the deliveries collectively contained 180 tons of unspecified ammunition.

The US began withdrawing American staff from the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine due to risks of a Russian invasion on February 13.¹¹⁵⁹

The US Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) warned on February 12 of an increased risk of Russian cyberattacks against US public and private sector entities in the coming weeks.¹¹⁶⁰ CISA stated that while there are currently no "specific credible threats against the US homeland, we are mindful of the potential for the Russian government to consider escalating its destabilizing actions in ways that may impact others outside of Ukraine."

The US Department of State released a new Travel 4 advisory to not travel to Ukraine due to "increased threats of Russian military action" on February 12.¹¹⁶¹

The US Department of State ordered the departure of most US direct hire employees from the US Embassy in Kyiv due to the continued threat of Russian military action on February 12.¹¹⁶² The Department of State previously authorized the voluntary departure of US direct hire employees and ordered the departure of eligible family members on January 23, 2022.

The US withdrew 160 military trainers from Ukraine on February 12.¹¹⁶³ US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin ordered 160 personnel of the Florida National Guard assigned to the 53rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team to leave Ukraine. The US trainers were participating in a US training mission for the Ukrainian military in Yavoriv, Lviv, western Ukraine.

US President Joe Biden had a phone call with his British, Romanian, Polish, Italian German, French, and Canadian counterparts; NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg; European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen; and European Council President Charles Michel on February 11.¹¹⁶⁴ The leaders discussed Russia's continued military buildup around Ukraine and reaffirmed their support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. The White House readout states that the leaders discussed "their readiness to impose massive consequences and severe economic costs on Russia should it choose military escalation." French President Emmanuel Macron briefed his counterparts on his recent meetings with Russian President Vladimir Putin and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky.¹¹⁶⁵

US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken had a phone call with Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba and reiterated US support for Ukraine in the case of a Russian invasion on February 11.¹¹⁶⁶ Blinken underscored that the US will meet "any and all [Russian] aggression against Ukraine" with "swift, severe, and united consequences."

US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin discussed a Russian escalation against Ukraine with his Polish, German, Canadian, French, Romanian, and Italian counterparts on February 11.¹¹⁶⁷ Austin stated that the US observes signs of Russian escalation, including new forces arriving at the Ukrainian border. Austin reiterated that a Russian invasion could begin at any time. Austin reiterated the US' "ironclad commitment" to NATO's Article 5.

PBS Newshour journalist Nick Schifrin reported on February 11 that three anonymous Western defense officials told him that US officials believe that Russian President Vladimir Putin decided to "invade Ukraine" and communicated that decision to the Russian military.¹¹⁶⁸ Schifrin stated that "six US and Western officials" told him that the US expects the invasion to begin next week (February 13 – 20). Schifrin stated that "US officials anticipate a horrific, bloody campaign that begins with two days or aerial bombardment and electronic warfare, followed by an invasion, with the possible goal of regime change."

US National Security Jake Sullivan denied Nick Schifrin's report that Russian President Vladimir Putin made a decision to invade Ukraine on February 11.¹¹⁶⁹ Sullivan stated that Schifrin's report "does not accurately capture what the US government's view is today. Our view is that we do not believe he has made any final decision, or we don't know that he has made any final decision and we have not communicated that to anybody." Sullivan stated that "we have not seen anything come to us that says a final decision has been taken, the go order has been given." Sullivan reiterated that "we are in the window when an invasion could begin at any time should Vladimir Putin decided to order." Sullivan stated, "We are not saying that a final decision has been taken by President Putin – what we are saying is that we have a sufficient level of concern based on what we are seeing on the ground and what our intelligence analysts have picked up... Russia could choose in very short order to commence a major military action against Ukraine." Sullivan supported a reporter's assertion that Putin has not yet made a decision to invade Ukraine and stated that the US cannot "point the "day or the hour" when Putin will invade. Sullivan reiterated that Russia may use a false flag operation to justify an offensive against Ukraine and encouraged all American citizens who remain in Ukraine to depart "immediately... in the next 24 to 48 hours." Sullivan stated that "the risk is now high enough and the threat is now immediate enough that this is what prudence demands. If you stay, you are assuming risk with no guarantee that there will be any other opportunity to leave and no prospect of a US military evacuation in the event of a Russian invasion. If a Russian attack on Ukraine proceeds, it is likely to begin with aerial bombing and missile attacks that could obviously kill civilians without regard to their nationality. A subsequent ground invasion could involve the onslaught of a massive force." Sullivan stressed that this is not prediction of what will happen, but that "prudence demands" that US citizens leave Ukraine immediately. Sullivan reiterated that US troops in eastern Europe are strictly defensive and will not fight against Russian forces in Ukraine: "The President will not be putting the lives of our men and women in uniform at risk by sending them into a war zone to rescue who could have left now but chose not to." Sullivan stated that a Russian invasion of Ukraine could occur during the 2022 Winter Olympics.

The United States delivered an eleventh security assistance payload to Kyiv, Ukraine, on February 11.¹¹⁷⁰ Ukraine's defense minister stated the delivery contained 90 tons of unspecified ammunition.

Reuters reported that the Biden Administration decided to deploy an additional 3,000 troops of the 82nd Airborne Division from Fort Bragg, North Carolina, to Poland “in the coming days” on February 11.

US President Joe Biden told *NBC News* that “American citizens should leave [Ukraine] now” on February 10.¹¹⁷¹

US Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Mark Milley and Belarusian Chief of the General Staff Viktor Gulevich discussed regional security concerns on February 10.¹¹⁷² Milley and Gulevich discussed “regional security related issues of concern” and “facilitated communication... to reduce chances of miscalculation and gain perspectives on current European security.”

Four US B-52 Stratofortress strategic bombers of the US 5th Bomb Wing (based at Minot Air Force Base, North Dakota) deployed to Royal Air Force Station Fairford in Gloucestershire, United Kingdom, on February 10.¹¹⁷³ The US Air Force stated that the bombers are in the UK to execute a “long-planned Bomber Task Force mission.”¹¹⁷⁴ The US Air Force stated this mission is part of a regularly scheduled US European Command and US Strategic Command joint mission series.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken spoke with NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg to discuss US commitments to NATO and coordinating a transatlantic response to Russian military aggression on February 10.¹¹⁷⁵ Blinken stated that the US will respond with immediate strength to any Russian invasion of Ukraine. Stoltenberg and Blinken reiterated NATO’s commitment to diplomacy with Russia and emphasized the importance of securing NATO’s eastern flank.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian discussed joint efforts to combat the Russian military buildup on Ukraine’s border on February 10.¹¹⁷⁶ The leaders emphasized the importance of supporting Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity. They also stressed making sure Russia understands the potential repercussions for further invading Ukraine.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu discussed Turkey’s continued commitment to a unified NATO and ensuring a sovereign Ukraine in Washington DC on February 8.¹¹⁷⁷ Blinken praised Turkey’s dedication to NATO and to finding a diplomatic solution to Russian aggression in Ukraine. The two officials also discussed possible US actions to reduce tensions between Turkey and Armenia. Blinken and Cavusoglu then emphasized the value of the US-Turkish relationship and reviewed opportunities to further develop relations.

***The Wall Street Journal* reported on February 9 that the White House approved a plan for US troops to support an evacuation of American citizens from Ukraine if Russia invades.**¹¹⁷⁸ The Pentagon plan specifies that the US 82nd Airborne Division will set up checkpoints, tent camps, and other temporary facilities on the Polish side of the Poland-Ukraine border. Ukraine has not authorized US troops to enter Ukrainian territory and US troops would not evacuate civilians or fly aircraft missions from inside Ukraine. US President Joe Biden ordered 3,000 US troops, including 1,700 US 82nd Airborne personnel, to deploy to Poland amid concerns of a Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 2. Around 30,000 American civilians reside in Ukraine.

The United States delivered a ninth and a tenth security assistance payload to Kyiv, Ukraine, on February 9.¹¹⁷⁹ Ukraine's defense minister stated that the 9th and 10th deliveries each contained over 80 tons of unspecified ammunition.

US State Department Spokesperson Ned Price declined to provide additional information to back up US claims of a Russian false flag operation against Ukraine during a press briefing on February 8 to protect US sources.¹¹⁸⁰ Price clarified that the State Department declassified intelligence to deter a Russian false flag operation and that disclosing additional information would place US intelligence collection capabilities at risk. Pentagon Spokesperson John Kirby alleged on February 3 that Russia is preparing to fabricate a pretext for invasion through a propaganda video depicting a fake Ukrainian attack against Russia. Price also reiterated that the United States continues to prioritize dialogue and diplomacy to deter Russian aggression against Ukraine.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken spoke with European Union High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell about the importance of protecting European energy supplies in the face of Russian aggression in Ukraine on February 7.¹¹⁸¹ Blinken and Borrell both emphasized the need for US-EU cooperation in the event that Russia leverages its control over energy supply by disrupting the flow of gas through Ukraine. Borrell noted the exigence of diversifying European energy sources in order to reduce EU reliance on Russian supplies. Both officials stressed the value of Ukraine as a strategic partner for the US and the EU and voiced continued material support for the Ukrainian economy and military in the face of continued Russian military escalation.

The ninth United States-European Union Energy Council met in Washington DC on February 7 and produced a joint statement emphasizing ensuring gas supplies to Ukraine.¹¹⁸² The council affirmed Ukraine's status as key partner to the European Union and United States and pledged to research new gas supply transit routes from the EU to Ukraine. The council also emphasized the need for strong institutions in Ukraine's energy sector.

US Deputy Secretary Wendy Sherman and UK Minister of State for the Middle East, North Africa and North America James Cleverly met in Washington, DC on February 7 to discuss future diplomatic relations to deter Russian aggression against Ukraine.¹¹⁸³ This conversation included possible sanctions and security assistance to allies in the region. They also discussed several other global issues, including ongoing UK-EU relations.

United States President Joe Biden and German Chancellor Olaf Scholtz met in Washington to emphasize strength of US-German relations and the necessity of a united NATO to counter Russian aggression in Ukraine on February 7.¹¹⁸⁴ Biden and Scholtz announced the creation of a harsh sanction package in case of a Russian invasion while continuing to emphasize their hopes for a diplomatic solution. Biden stated that Germany has committed to rejecting the Nord Stream 2 pipeline should Russia invade Ukraine. Both leaders stressed the importance of not letting Russia use energy supplies as leverage against the European community. The leaders then committed to bilateral cooperation to lower German dependence on the Russian gas market and transition to a clean energy system. Biden and Scholtz talked about galvanizing Germany's G7 presidency to pursue

diplomatic solutions against Russian aggression and affirmed their support for Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity. Scholtz stated that France, Germany, Ukraine, and Russia have not been able to use the Normandy Format “in a productive way over the last few years” and that “we have come back to that format.”

Unspecified US intelligence officials told CNN on February 6 that the United States intercepted SIGINT (signals intelligence) revealing that unspecified Russian officials believe an invasion of Ukraine would be costlier than Russian President Vladimir Putin and other Kremlin officials realize.¹¹⁸⁵ US intelligence assessed that these communications do not impact the Russian military’s willingness to effectively carry out orders related to an invasion. US intelligence also assessed that Kyiv could fall within 48 hours of a full-scale Russian land and sea invasion.

US President Joe Biden and French President Emmanuel Macron discussed diplomatic efforts to deter Russian aggression in Ukraine on February 6.¹¹⁸⁶ Both parties affirmed their support for Ukraine’s territorial integrity and pledged future consultation with allies.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken spoke with French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian about the continued Russian military build-up near Ukraine on February 6.¹¹⁸⁷ Blinken and Le Drian discussed international commitments to Ukrainian sovereignty and affirmed the importance of joint efforts to strengthen NATO’s eastern flank to ensure an effective response in the case of Russian invasion.

US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan warned that Russia could invade Ukraine “any day” in several appearances on Sunday US news shows on February 6.¹¹⁸⁸ The Biden administration announced on February 5 that Russia has now assembled at least 70% of the necessary military troops, equipment, and supplies necessary to invade Ukraine. Sullivan also said that Russian military deployments around Ukraine would allow Russia to invade “as soon as tomorrow” or in a few weeks. Russia and Belarus’ joint Union Resolve 2022 military exercises are additionally scheduled to conclude on February 20.

The United States delivered an eighth security assistance payload to Kyiv, Ukraine, on February 5.¹¹⁸⁹ Ukraine’s defense minister stated that the delivery contained 86 tons of unspecified ammunition.

Elements of the US 82nd Airborne Division began arriving at the Rzeszow-Jasionka Airport in southeastern Poland on February 5.¹¹⁹⁰

Polish Foreign Minister Zbigniew Rau and US Secretary of State Antony Blinken held a US-Poland strategic dialogue on February 4.¹¹⁹¹ Polish Deputy Foreign Minister Marcin Przydacz and Counselor of the Department of State Derek Chollet opened the dialogue and emphasized a historic foundation to the relationship as well as a hope for future cooperation. Representatives from the US State Department, Department of Defense, and other economic departments met with their Polish counterparts in several working groups. They discussed regional security and highlighted Poland’s central role in the OSCE when it comes to using diplomacy to settle regional conflict. Both sides expressed a desire to deepen bilateral relations, pledged their dedication to the territorial integrity of Ukraine, and plan to hold the next annual meeting in Warsaw in 2023.

US Undersecretary of State Victoria Nuland stated that the US believes the Kremlin leaked the US's written response to Russian security demands to the press in an interview with TASS on February 4.¹¹⁹² Nuland noted that the leaked document had the same marks directly given to Russian officials, while Allies received documents with different markings. Nuland implied that the US will not send another written response to Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov. Nuland stated that the US response called for talks and de-escalation. Nuland explained that Russian families of 100,000 servicemen at Ukrainian border and 30,000 in Belarus do not need war. Nuland said that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky is ready to commit to the Minsk II Accords, but Moscow and its proxy republics must fulfil their respective obligations. Nuland stated that the US is interested in supporting a “serious return to talks” within the Minsk Accords framework.

The United States delivered a seventh security assistance payload to Kyiv, Ukraine, on February 3.¹¹⁹³ Ukraine's defense minister stated that the delivery contained 85 tons of grenade launcher ammunition.

The *New York Times* (NYT) reported on February 3 that US intelligence uncovered Russian plans to use a fake video depicting a Ukrainian attack against Russian territory or Russian speakers in eastern Ukraine to justify a Russian attack against Ukraine.¹¹⁹⁴ The *NYT* reported that anonymous US officials leaked details about the video to deter Russia from using it. The *NYT* reported that US officials said the video would be sophisticated and extremely graphic – depicting casualties, actors, faked Ukrainian military equipment, and Turkish-made drones – to both support recent Russian disinformation campaigns and accuse Ukraine of genocide against Russian-speaking people. The Kremlin would then use the outrage over the video to justify an attack or have proxy leaders in Donbas invite a Russian intervention. The *NYT* reported that a senior official of Russia's Military Intelligence Directorate (GRU) “was deeply involved” in this effort. State Department Spokesman Ned Price said that this video is one of many options that the Kremlin is developing as a fake pretext to justify military aggression against Ukraine.

US President Joe Biden approved a deployment of 3,000 US troops to Poland, Germany, and Romania to reinforce NATO's eastern posture on February 2.¹¹⁹⁵ Pentagon Press Secretary John Kirby said that approximately 2,000 US troops would deploy from the US to Poland and Germany at an unspecified future date and that approximately 1,000 troops currently based in Germany would deploy to Romania. Kirby stated that the deployment is not permanent and that the troops would not fight in Ukraine.

US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, OSCE Chair-in-Office and Polish Foreign Minister Rau, and European Union Foreign Policy Chief Josep Borrell discussed Ukrainian security on February 1.¹¹⁹⁶ Blinken reaffirmed US support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity and discussed recent diplomatic engagements with Russia. The participants agreed to continue to coordinate closely and remain committed to seek a diplomatic solution to prevent further Russian aggression against Ukraine.

US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan and Turkish Chief Presidential Advisor on Ukraine Ibrahim Kalin discussed Ukrainian security on February 1.¹¹⁹⁷ The officials underscored their shared commitment to ongoing diplomacy and joint efforts to deter further Russian aggression against Ukraine.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov discussed the US written response to Russia's security demands on February 1.¹¹⁹⁸ Blinken emphasized US willingness to continue a “substantive exchange with Russia on mutual security concerns” both bilaterally and with Allies and partners. Blinken reiterated the US commitment to Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity, as well as the right of all countries to determine their own foreign policy and alliances. Blinken stated that further invasion of Ukraine would result in “swift and severe consequences.” Lavrov called on the US to use “its influence on Ukrainian authorities to force them to fully implement the Minsk Agreements” as opposed to “whipping up aggressive rhetoric and pumping Ukraine’s Armed Forces up with various weapons.” The Russian readout stated that Lavrov and Blinken agreed to intensify contacts to search for solutions.

The United States delivered a sixth security assistance payload to Kyiv, Ukraine, on February 1.¹¹⁹⁹ Ukraine’s defense minister stated that the delivery contained 84 tons of ammunition.

Anonymous US officials reportedly said that Russian officials gave the United States a written follow-up to Washington’s written responses to Russia’s security guarantee demands following the United Nations Security Council meeting on January 31.¹²⁰⁰ Official sources have not confirmed whether Russian officials gave the US a response as of February 1.

Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman spoke with Romanian Foreign Minister Bogdan Aurescu and Bulgarian Prime Minister Kiril Petkov in separate calls on January 31.¹²⁰¹ Sherman reaffirmed the importance of the US-Romania Strategic Partnership and the strategic partnership between the United States and Bulgaria. Sherman thanked Aurescu and Petkov for Romania’s and Bulgaria’s individual roles as a “stalwart NATO Ally.” Sherman and her counterparts discussed their shared commitment to Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity.

The US Department of State ordered the families of US diplomats in Belarus to evacuate Belarus due to “an increase in unusual and concerning Russian military activity near the border with Ukraine” on January 31.¹²⁰²

The *Financial Times* reported on January 31 that the US prepared targeted sanctions against Russian President Vladimir Putin’s inner circle to deter aggression against Ukraine.¹²⁰³ *Financial Times* reported that the US developed a list of Russian individuals and their family members for sanctions in coordination with US allies as part of joint effort to punish the Kremlin in the event of an attack against Ukraine.

The US shipped 84 tons of various small arms ammunition to Kyiv, Ukraine, on January 31.¹²⁰⁴

US Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs Victoria Nuland said that Russia "is moving up to 30,000" troops to Belarus on January 30.¹²⁰⁵ Russia’s deployment to Belarus for Union Resolve 2022 exercises is likely larger than Russia’s deployment to Belarus for Zapad-2021 exercises.

US Deputy Secretary Wendy Sherman had a call with her French, German, Italian, and UK counterparts about US and NATO written responses to the

Kremlin on January 28.¹²⁰⁶ Sherman discussed the January 26 Normandy format meeting with French, German, and Italian Foreign Ministry Secretary Generals Francois Delattre, Andreas Michaelis, and Ettore Sequi, and UK Minister for Middle East, North Africa, and North America James Cleverly. Officials reaffirmed “swift, severe, and coordinated consequences” for any further Russian military escalation in Ukraine.

US and Ukrainian officials separately denied reports of disagreements between US President Biden and Ukrainian President Zelensky during their January 27 call. *CNN* reporter Matthew Chance quoted an anonymous Ukrainian official’s statement that Biden told Zelensky a Russian invasion of Ukraine is virtually certain once the ground freezes and that Kyiv could be “sacked” and for Ukraine to “prepare for impact.”¹²⁰⁷ *BuzzFeed News* reporter Christopher Miller stated that sources in Zelensky’s administration confirmed Biden told Zelensky an invasion is nearly certain in late February, but could not confirm the quote of Kyiv being “sacked.”¹²⁰⁸ US and Ukrainian officials both denied the reported tension on January 28. US National Security Council spokesperson Emily Horne stated denied *CNN*’s report and stated “Biden said that there is a distinct possibility that the Russians could invade Ukraine in February. He has previously said this publicly & we have been warning about this for months. Reports of anything more or different than that are completely false.”¹²⁰⁹ Zelensky’s spokesperson Sergii Nykyforov directly stated quotes from a “senior Ukrainian official” are completely false and stated the only correct information can be found in the US and Kyiv’s official readouts of the call.¹²¹⁰

US President Biden and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen issued a joint statement on US/EU cooperation on energy security on January 28.¹²¹¹ Biden and von der Leyen reemphasized the US and EU’s close cooperation on energy supplies. They stated the US and EU are collaborating to ensure “continued, sufficient, and timely” supplies of natural gas to the EU from diverse sources “to avoid supply shocks, including those that could result from a further Russian invasion of Ukraine.” Biden stated the US is collaborating with different governments and market operators to supply additional gas. They stated this coordination work will continue during a February 7 meeting of the US-EU energy council.

US Secretary of State Blinken held an interview with Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty on January 27.¹²¹² Blinken sought to clarify disagreements between the White House’s recent statements a Russian invasion is “imminent” and Ukrainian President Zelensky’s claims the US is exaggerating the threat. Blinken said Zelensky is correct that no one should panic, but reemphasized the White House’s assessment of growing Russian force concentrations on the Ukrainian border. RFE/RL reporter Mike Eckel challenge Blinken on his statement that only Putin knows what decision Russia will take, arguing this “rings a little bit hollow” and the US must have an assessment of the Kremlin’s endgame. Blinken doubled down and stated the US cannot predict what Putin will do. Blinken additionally stated that the US supports the implementation of the Minsk Agreements, and reiterated Russia must also fulfil its obligations under the agreements as well.

US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman held a call with NATO, EU, and OSCE officials to discuss the US’s responses to Russian security demands and coordinated responses to Russian aggression on January 27.¹²¹³ Sherman spoke with NATO Deputy Secretary General Mircea Geoana, OSCE Secretary General Helga Schmid, European External Action Service (EEAS, the diplomatic service of the European Union) Secretary General Stefano Sannino and Polish Deputy Foreign Minister Paweł Jabłoński.

US President Biden spoke with Ukrainian President Zelensky on January 27.¹²¹⁴

Biden reaffirmed US readiness to respond decisively to a further Russian invasion of Ukraine, alongside US allies and partners. Biden noted the US has provided Ukraine over half a billion dollars in development assistance in the past year and is exploring additional economic support to help Ukraine's economy. Biden and Zelensky discussed coordinated diplomatic efforts and resolution efforts through the Normandy Format. Several US reporters stated Biden told Zelensky a Russian invasion is almost certain, but Zelensky disagreed with his assessment, according to sources in both the White House and Zelensky's office.¹²¹⁵

The White House announced on January 27 that Germany Chancellor Olaf Scholz will visit the White House on February 7 to discuss joint efforts to deterring further Russian aggression against Ukraine.¹²¹⁶

US President Biden met with Norwegian Prime Minister Store on January 27.¹²¹⁷

Biden and Store discussed joint efforts through NATO and the OSCE to address Russia's buildup on Ukraine's borders. Matnal Security Advisor Jake Sullivan additionally met separately with PM Store.

US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman spoke at the Yalta European Strategy Event on January 26, reaffirming Washington's support for Ukraine.¹²¹⁸

Sherman stated that any Russian incursion into Ukraine would be a "very serious matter" and have tremendous consequences. Sherman stated the US is at the forefront of defending Ukraine, citing a recent \$200 million lethal aid package and the activation of 8,500 US troops for possible deployment to NATO's eastern flank. Sherman additionally stated the Western response to Russia remains united.

US Ambassador to Russia John Sullivan formally submitted the US's written responses to Russia's security demands to Russian Deputy FM Alexander Grushko on January 26.¹²¹⁹

The Kremlin has demanded a formal response to its demands since the meeting between Wendy Sherman and Sergei Ryabkov in Geneva on January 10. Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov stated Russia would not publish the text of the US response but would convey "the essence and content" to the public. The US has previously clearly stated it will not agree to Russia's demands that the US agree to never expand NATO eastwards, guarantee Ukraine will never join NATO, and limit the deployment of offensive weapons in eastern NATO states. US Secretary of State Blinken and NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg held separate press conferences following the submission of the response in which they reiterated NATO's core principle of open-door membership and their joint pursuit of a diplomatic path with Russia.¹²²⁰ The Kremlin will likely leverage the justification of the US formally rejecting Russia's security demands to claim the US and NATO have ignored Russian security concerns – possibly rhetorically justifying further Russian actions.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken spoke with UK Foreign Secretary Liz Truss on January 25 to discuss coordinated efforts to deter Russia.¹²²¹

Blinken emphasized the US and the UK are coordinating with each other, NATO, and other allies and partners to encourage Russia to de-escalate tensions.

US President Biden answered several questions from reporters on Ukraine following a meeting with his national security team on January 25.¹²²²

Biden reiterated the US has made clear to Putin that any Russian move into Ukraine will be met with

economic sanctions and an increase to NATO's presence on its eastern flank. Biden stated that the current crisis "is all Putin... I don't think even [Putin's] people know for certain what he's going to do." Biden stated the 8,500 US troops currently on high alert would deploy to NATO allies if Russia "continued the buildup and/or was to move [into Ukraine]." Biden reiterated no US or NATO forces will deploy to Ukraine. Biden stated he believes predicting Putin's behavior is like "reading tea leaves" due to what he framed as Putin's unpredictable past decisions.

US State Department Press Secretary Ned Price sought to dispel concern over fissures in a joint response to Russian aggression during a press conference on January 25.¹²²³ Price reiterated that the US is coordinating closely with NATO, the EU, and Ukraine and there will be "no surprises" in the US's responses to Russian actions. Price maintained that all NATO members are "contributing in a different way [and] mutually reinforcing ways" after a reporter pressed on Berlin's decision to block an Estonian shipment of artillery to Kyiv and French President Macron's plans to hold bilateral talks with Putin on January 28 without consulting Washington. Price reaffirmed that NATO membership remained an "open door" to Ukraine.

The third shipment of U.S. military assistance to Ukraine arrived in Kyiv on January 25.¹²²⁴ Open-source flight trackers reported the third flight of aid to Ukraine landed at Kyiv's Boryspil airport. Official sources have not confirmed the shipment or its contents.

US President Joe Biden held a video call with several European leaders to discuss joint efforts to deter Russian aggression against Ukraine on January 25.¹²²⁵ Biden spoke with European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, European Council President Charles Michel, French President Emmanuel Macron, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, Polish President Andrzej Duda, and UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson. The leaders discussed joint efforts to deter further Russian aggression against Ukraine, preparations to impose sanctions in the event of further Russian action, and preparations to reinforce security on NATO's eastern flank.

Pentagon Press Secretary John Kirby announced the US put 8,500 troops on heightened alert on January 24.¹²²⁶ Kirby stated the troops are on alert for possible deployment to NATO allies in Eastern Europe (likely Poland) to deter Russian aggression. Kirby further stated the US has not yet decided what states the troops could deploy to. The troops would join the multinational NATO Response Force if activated.

US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman held a call with OSCE Secretary General Helga Schmid on January 24.¹²²⁷ They discussed ongoing efforts to urge Russia to deescalate against Ukraine. Sherman reiterated strong U.S. support for Poland's proposal for a revitalized security dialogue through the OSCE.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken participated virtually in an EU Foreign Affairs Council meeting on January 24.¹²²⁸ Blinken briefed his EU counterparts on his January 18-21 visit to Kyiv, Berlin, and Geneva and US efforts to respond to Russia's military buildup around Ukraine. Blinken emphasized the US will closely coordinate next steps to deter Russian aggression with the EU, NATO, the OSCE, and other allies and partners. Blinken reaffirmed that any further military incursion into Ukraine will be met with swift, severe, and coordinated consequences.

The US Department of State ordered the family members of embassy personnel to depart and authorized the voluntary departure of US direct hire employees from the US Embassy in Kyiv due to Russian military threats on January 23.¹²²⁹ The Department of State stated that the United States Government will not be able to evacuate US citizen from Ukraine if Russia invades Ukraine and advised US citizens to be prepared to take commercial flights to leave Ukraine, if they decide to do so. *CNN* reported on January 21 that the US Embassy in Kyiv requested that the State Department authorize the evacuation of all nonessential embassy staff and their families.¹²³⁰ The Ukrainian Foreign Ministry called this evacuation “premature and an excessive precaution” on January 24.¹²³¹

The United States Government delivered approximately 90 tons of weapons to Ukraine on January 23.¹²³² The aid consists of Javelins and bunker buster munitions.

US President Joe Biden met with members of his National Security team to discuss Russia’s military buildup near Ukraine at Camp David on January 22.¹²³³ Biden affirmed that if Russia further invades Ukraine, the United States will impose “swift and severe consequences” on Russia.

US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken and Canadian Foreign Minister Melanie discussed Ukrainian security on January 22.¹²³⁴ Blinken stressed the United States’ support for Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity and US readiness to coordinate imposing “massive consequences and severe economic costs” on Russia for further aggression against Ukraine.

US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken gave interviews to NBC, CBS, and CNN on Ukraine on January 23.¹²³⁵ Blinken said that the US is building up deterrence and defense for Ukraine and engaging in diplomacy and dialogue with Russia. Blinken said that the US will share its concerns over Russia’s security demands and ideas to enhance mutual security on a reciprocal basis with Russian security demands in writing at an unspecified future date. Blinken said that there is “no question of capitulation” to Russia on foreclosing NATO membership for Ukraine. Blinken promised a “swift, a severe, and united response” to a renewed Russian incursion into Ukraine. Blinken said the German government is “resolute” in being determined to respond in tandem with the US in a swift, effective, and a united way against Russian aggression against Ukraine. Blinken warned against potential Russian false-flag operations against Ukraine.

White House Spokesperson Jen Psaki announced on January 21 that the Department of State notified the US Congress of its intent to deliver five former Afghan Air Force Mi-17 helicopters to Ukraine.¹²³⁶ Psaki did not specify a timeframe for the delivery.

The US delivered a shipment of 200,000 pounds of lethal aid, including unspecified ammunition, to Ukraine on January 21.¹²³⁷ The US Embassy in Kyiv characterized this as the “first shipment of assistance recently directed by President Biden.”

The US State Department announced sanctions on four individuals connected to efforts by Russian intelligence services to destabilize Ukraine and warned of further Russian hybrid tactics on January 21.¹²³⁸ The sanctioned individuals are Taras Kozak, Oleh Voloshyn, Volodymyr Oliynyk, and Vladimir Sivkovich. The State Department stated the sanctions are intended to “target, highlight, and undercut Russia’s ongoing

destabilization effort in Ukraine” and clarified these sanctions are distinct from the sanctions the US is prepared to impose in the event of a further Russian invasion of Ukraine. The State Department pledged the US will continue to take steps in partnership with the Ukrainian government to identify and undercut Russia’s destabilization efforts in Ukraine.

US Secretary of State Blinken held a call with Ukrainian Foreign Minister Kuleba following the conclusion of Blinken’s talks with Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov on January 21.¹²³⁹ Blinken briefed Kuleba on the results of his meetings with allied and Russian officials in recent days and reaffirmed US and allied support for Ukraine.

US Secretary of State Blinken discussed joint responses to Russian aggression with several allied Foreign Ministers and representatives of NATO, the EU, and the OSCE in Berlin on January 20.¹²⁴⁰ Blinken met in person with German Chancellor Scholz and Foreign Minister Baerbock and reiterated the US and Germany’s joint position calling on Russia to deescalate and pledging grave consequences in response to renewed Russian aggression. Blinken additionally met with the Transatlantic Quad Foreign Ministers, including France, Germany, and the UK. Finally, Blinken spoke by phone with NATO Secretary General Stoltenberg, EU foreign policy chief Borrell, and Polish Defense Minister Blaszczak, representing the OSCE chair. Blinken did not announce any new policies during the meeting and focused on reiterating the US and its allies’ support for Ukrainian sovereignty, desire for diplomatic engagement with Russia, and reiterating a further Russian attack on Ukraine would lead to a high cost to Moscow.

The *Wall Street Journal* reported on January 20 that CIA Director Bill Burns visited Berlin and Kyiv in the past week ahead of Secretary of State Blinken’s trip to Europe.¹²⁴¹

US Secretary of State Blinken held a call with Italian Foreign Minister Di Maio to discuss coordination between the US, Italy and the EU to address Russian threats to Ukraine on January 19.¹²⁴² Blinken emphasized the key role NATO and the EU play in ensuring security in Europe and reaffirmed that any further Russian invasion of Ukraine would result in massive consequences for Russia.

US Secretary of State Blinken held talks with Ukrainian Foreign Minister Kuleba in Kyiv on January 19.¹²⁴³ Blinken and Kuleba discussed ongoing Russian aggressive actions against Ukraine, particularly noting Russia’s efforts to destabilize the situation inside Ukraine and undermine Ukraine’s economic and financial stability. Blinken and Kuleba reaffirmed US support for Ukraine and the inviolability of the principle “no decisions on Ukraine without Ukraine.” They further discussed steps to implement a package to deter Russia from increased aggression, including preparing economic sanctions on Russia and deepening defense cooperation with Ukraine.

US Secretary of State Blinken gave an interview to Voice of America’s Ukrainian Service on January 19.¹²⁴⁴ Blinken stated that the US would respond to renewed Russian aggression in three ways: imposing extensive sanctions on Russia, further defensive military assistance to Ukraine, and reinforcing NATO defenses on its eastern flank. Blinken declined to confirm or deny whether the US would disconnect Russia from SWIFT as part of a new sanctions package. Blinken noted that Russia continues to deploy forces to Ukraine’s borders but is willing to continue the diplomatic path, and stated the US will pursue the diplomatic

path “as long and as far as we can.” Blinken praised Ukrainian President Zelensky’s ongoing reform efforts and called on him to continue down the path of reform.

US President Joe Biden gave a press conference and discussed the possibility of renewed Russian aggression against Ukraine and likely US responses on January 19.¹²⁴⁵ Biden predicted Russia will “move in” to Ukraine and stated Putin “as to do something,” but promised a firm US response to any level of Russian offensive operations against Ukraine. Biden admitted that NATO may face disunity if Russia conducts a “minor incursion” and openly stated “it depends on what [Putin] does, to what extent we’ll get total unity on the NATO front.” Biden’s comments led to immediate backlash in Kyiv, with Ukrainian officials expressing surprise that Biden would distinguish between an incursion and invasion. The White House clarified Biden’s remarks following the press conference, stating the US would consider any attempt by the Russian military to take Ukrainian territory by force would be considered an invasion.

US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken met with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky in Kyiv and reiterated that the US will impose costs against Russia for new aggression against Ukraine on January 19.¹²⁴⁶ Blinken stated that the US, and its allies and partners, will impose “crippling costs on Russia’s economy, reinforce NATO’s presence in frontline Allied states, and increase defensive assistance to Ukraine above and beyond what we are already providing” if Russia chooses to conduct more aggression against Ukraine. Blinken also said that Russia can take further aggressive action against Ukraine “on very short notice.”

US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov discussed the results of the three mid-January meetings on January 18.¹²⁴⁷ Blinken and Lavrov discussed the January 10 strategic stability dialogue, January 12 NATO-Russia Council meeting, and January 13 Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe Permanent Council meeting. Blinken reiterated the US’s “unshakable” commitment to Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity and underscored that any discussion of European security must include NATO Allies and European partners, including Ukraine. Lavrov stressed that the Kremlin awaits the US’ formal written response to the Kremlin’s security demands on each concrete proposal “as soon as possible.” Lavrov urged Blinken to not speculate about “alleged impending ‘Russian aggression’” against Ukraine; Lavrov instead framed Russian military pressure as a means to “force the authorities in Kyiv to implement the Minsk Accords in full.” This is the first time the Kremlin has explicitly stated that it would use force to compel Kyiv to implement the Minsk II Accords.

A bipartisan delegation of seven US senators met with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky in Kyiv on January 17.¹²⁴⁸ Senators Rob Portman, Chris Murphy, Jeanne Shaheen, Amy Klobuchar, Richard Blumenthal, and Roger Wicker participated in this delegation. Zelensky thanked the senators for the US Congress’ bipartisan support for Ukraine and reiterated the need to prepare a preventive package of sanctions to deter Russian aggression. The Ukrainian readout stated that all parties agreed that Russia’s Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline poses an energy security threat to Europe. The US delegation also met with Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba separately on January 17.¹²⁴⁹

US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken and Polish Foreign Minister Zbigniew Rau discussed Ukrainian security on January 17.¹²⁵⁰ Blinken reiterated the US’ “firm commitment” to Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity. The officials also discussed

continued cooperation to pursue diplomacy with Moscow while taking steps to deter further Russian aggression. Blinken thanked Rau for Poland's leadership on NATO's eastern flank and Poland's service as country chair for the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe in 2022.

CNN reported that US Central Intelligence Agency Director William Burns met with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky in Kyiv on January 12.¹²⁵¹ CNN reported that Burns also consulted his Ukrainian intelligence counterparts on threat assessments of a Russian invasion of Ukraine.

US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken said on January 13 that the US will continue consultations with its allies following US-Russia, NATO-Russia Council, and Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)- Russia summits on January 10-13.¹²⁵² Blinken said that the US did not expect any "breakthroughs" during the summits, instead warning Russian President Vladimir Putin of potential consequences if the Kremlin decides to invade Ukraine. Blinken said that Putin is keeping "his options open" and has not "fully decided on what he is going to do." Blinken said the US is coordinating with European countries within and outside of the Group of Seven (G7), NATO, and the European Union to shape further measures against Russian aggression.

US Permanent Representative to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Michael Carpenter rejected Russia's security demands but rearticulated calls for dialogue at the Russia-OSCE Meeting on January 13.¹²⁵³ Carpenter stated that the US would not tolerate "overt or tacit spheres of influence" or restrict states' right to join NATO if they so choose.¹²⁵⁴ Carpenter said the OSCE must "decisively reject blackmail" and never allow "aggression and threats to be rewarded."¹²⁵⁵ Carpenter encouraged a dialogue on concerns over conventional military forces, enhancement of military transparency, confidence building, and deconfliction. Carpenter told reporters following the meeting that the West must prepare for the eventuality that Russia could escalate against Ukraine; Carpenter said that "the drumbeat of war is sounding loud, and the [Russian] rhetoric has gotten rather shrill."¹²⁵⁶

US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken said on January 13 that the Group of Seven (G7), European Union, and NATO informed the Kremlin about "massive consequences" if Russia invades Ukraine during US-Russia strategic stability and Russia-NATO Council summits on January 10 and January 12, respectively.¹²⁵⁷ Blinken said that the West is drafting unprecedented and "very significant" sanctions against Russia's economic and financial sectors. Blinken added that the US and NATO are looking at "shoring up even more the defenses of Ukraine if necessary." Blinken stated that NATO will not restrict its membership to eligible countries and urged Russia to engage in a dialogue with the US, NATO, and Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman met with French, German, Italian, and UK representatives who participated in the NATO-Russia Council summit to discuss potential sanctions against Russia in Brussels, Belgium, on January 12.¹²⁵⁸ The officials met after the summit's conclusion and agreed to impose "massive consequences and severe costs," including "coordinated, restrictive economic measures" on Russia if Russia invades unoccupied Ukraine.

US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman discussed Russia's military buildup on Ukraine's borders during a meeting with the Chief of Staff for the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen in Brussels, Belgium, on January 12.¹²⁵⁹ The meeting took place after the NATO-Russia Council summit.

US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken briefed new Czech Foreign Minister Jan Lipavsky on US efforts to resolve the conflict in eastern Ukraine on January 13.¹²⁶⁰

US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman met with European External Action Service Secretary-General Stefano Sannino in Brussels on January 12.¹²⁶¹ The officials discussed a "united approach" to Russia's military buildup near Ukraine's borders.

US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman met with officials from the European Union's Political and Security Committee in Brussels on January 11.¹²⁶² Sherman briefed the European officials on the results of the January 9-10 US-Russia strategic stability dialogue in Geneva and discussed Russia's military buildup near Ukraine's borders. The US Department of State readout stated that this meeting underscored US commitment to work closely with the European Union.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Dutch Foreign Minister Wopke Hoekstra discussed Russia's military buildup near Ukraine on January 11.¹²⁶³ Blinken reiterated US support for Ukraine's independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity and stressed the US's commitment to impose "significant costs" against Russia if Russia escalates against Ukraine. This was Blinken and Hoekstra's first call after Hoekstra was appointed Dutch Foreign Minister on January 10.

US Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Victoria Nuland gave a briefing on the US-Russia strategic stability talks on January 11.¹²⁶⁴ Nuland characterized the January 9-10 talks in Geneva as "constructive and worth doing" and reiterated that the US demonstrated commitment to diplomacy by proposing military and exercise transparency and risk-reduction measures. Nuland stated that the US is interested in having "deeper discussions" on arms control with Russia and that treaties about nuclear weaponry "can't be negotiated overnight." Nuland stated the US has not observed Russian military de-escalation. Nuland stated that Russia amassed 100,000 troops near Ukraine's borders and prepared internal sabotage, destabilization, and false flag operations for Ukraine. Nuland stated that Russia now faces two options: "diplomacy and dialogue or instead ... confrontation and the massive consequences that that will bring." Nuland stated that the US and its partners are ready to impose "severe costs," and unprecedented "massive economic measures" if the Kremlin further invades or destabilizes Ukraine.

US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman briefed NATO officials in Brussels on January 11 on the results of the bilateral US-Russia strategic stability talks in Geneva on January 9-10.¹²⁶⁵ Sherman stated that the US is committed to working closely with NATO allies and partners to urge Russian de-escalation.¹²⁶⁶

CNN reported on January 11 that the Biden Administration secretly authorized an additional \$200 million in security assistance for Ukraine in late December 2021.¹²⁶⁷ CNN reported that four anonymous US government sources reported that the US authorized small arms and ammunition, secure radios, medical equipment, spare parts, and

other equipment consistent with previous US security assistance to Ukraine. *CNN* reported that the security assistance would likely not arrive in Ukraine quickly given that a previous \$60 million aid delivery authorized in summer 2021 is only nearing delivery completion in winter 2022, though the US may rush the delivery to increase Ukrainian capabilities. Kremlin news outlet *Federal News Agency* criticized *CNN*'s story on January 11, claiming that the US added insult to injury by sending Ukraine weapons ahead US-Russia talks, where the US refused to consider Russia's security demands.¹²⁶⁸

US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken and Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba discussed Ukrainian security on January 7.¹²⁶⁹ Blinken briefed Dmytro Kuleba on the outcome of the January 7 NATO foreign ministerial and said that NATO members have a position of solidarity with Ukraine ahead of talks with Russia on January 9-13. Both officials coordinated their positions and reaffirmed that states cannot make decisions about Ukraine without Ukrainian participation.

US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken and EU Foreign Policy Chief Josep Borrell discussed Ukrainian security on January 8. Borrell briefed Blinken on his recent assessment of the situation in Ukraine after visiting Ukraine and the Donbas frontline in early January. The officials coordinated their positions ahead of talks with Russia on January 9-13 and agreed that any further Russian military aggression against Ukraine will result in "massive consequences" and a "severe response."¹²⁷⁰

***The Associated Press (AP)* reported on January 9 that the Biden Administration issued new warnings to Russia on January 8.**¹²⁷¹ *AP* reported that the US will impose strict economic sanctions if Russia intervenes in Ukraine by targeting Russian entities, financial institutions, and restricting US exports to Russia for technology and foreign-made products under US jurisdiction. *AP* reported that anonymous US officials "flatly rejected" Russian demands to end NATO expansion and remove US troops and weapons from Eastern Europe. *AP* reported that US officials said that the US would not make any decisions without the consent of Ukraine or NATO. *AP* reported that US officials said that the United States would consider dialogue on reducing possible future "offensive missiles" (likely referring to cruise missiles which could strike Russia) deployments to Ukraine and defining limits on NATO exercises in Eastern Europe.

US State Department Spokesman Ned Price said that Senator Ted Cruz's bill to sanction Russia's Nord Stream 2 pipeline would "undermine unity" among European allies on January 6.¹²⁷² Cruz's bill imposes sanctions against Nord Stream within weeks of the bill's adoption and allows Congress to vote to reinstate sanctions if the US president waives them.

US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin spoke with Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu about "risk reduction near Ukraine's borders" on January 6.¹²⁷³ Both US and Russian readouts did not include any further details.

US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken and German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock met to discuss Ukraine in Washington on January 5.¹²⁷⁴ The officials emphasized a preference to pursue diplomacy and de-escalation to deal with Russia's force buildup near Ukraine. Blinken stated that the US, Germany, NATO, the EU, and G7 have been very clear that Russia will face "massive consequences" for renewed aggression against Ukraine. Blinken suggested that Nord Stream 2 would not become operational if Russia renews

aggression against Ukraine. Baerbock stated Germany is already providing Ukraine with military medical aid (as opposed to weapons), and Blinken stated the US will continue to deliver equipment to Ukraine in coming months through a range of mechanisms.

US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan called his counterparts from Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden to discuss transatlantic security and Ukraine on January 4.¹²⁷⁵ The officials discussed their readiness to impose “severe consequences” on Russia if it engages in further aggression against Ukraine. They also underscored the importance of diplomacy to de-escalate the situation, including through the US-Russia strategic stability dialogue, NATO-Russia Council, and OSCE meetings planned for January 9-13. Participants reaffirmed the right of each country to choose its alliances.

US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken had a phone call with the foreign ministers of the Bucharest Nine (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Czechia, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria) to reaffirm US commitments to transatlantic security and NATO’s Article V on January 3.¹²⁷⁶ The ministers discussed Russia’s military buildup near Ukraine, the need for a “united, ready, and resolute NATO stance for the collective defense of Allies,” and de-escalation through deterrence, defense, and dialogue. Blinken underscored US “unwavering commitment” to NATO’s Article V on collective defense.

US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken had a phone call with Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu on the Russian threat to Ukraine on January 3.¹²⁷⁷ Blinken and Cavusoglu discussed the importance of continued coordination regarding the threat of Russian escalation in Ukraine and other topics.

US President Joe Biden and Russian President Vladimir Putin had a phone call on Ukraine on December 30. Both sides confirmed that the US and Russia will hold talks on January 9 to 10 in Geneva, Russia-NATO Council talks in Brussels on January 12, and then Russia-OSCE talks on January 13.¹²⁷⁸ The Kremlin said that “large-scale” US sanctions against Russia in the event of an escalation against Ukraine would be a “grave mistake” that could lead to a “complete fracture” of US-Russia relations. The US readout emphasized that Biden made clear that the US and its allies will respond “decisively” if Russia further invades Ukraine.¹²⁷⁹ Biden reiterated that substantive progress in these dialogues can occur only in an environment of de-escalation rather than escalation.

US President Joe Biden and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky had a phone call on January 2.¹²⁸⁰ Biden stated that the US and its allies will “respond decisively” if Russia further invades Ukraine and reaffirmed US support for Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity. Zelensky thanked Biden for US support and discussed the steps Ukraine is taking within the Minsk and Normandy Formats. Zelensky also thanked the US for supporting a Ukrainian proposal to hold a NATO-Ukraine Commission meeting “in the coming days.”

US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken discussed having a “strong, united response to further Russian aggression against Ukraine” with Canadian Foreign Minister Melanie Joly on December 31.¹²⁸¹ Blinken and Joly also discussed willingness among NATO allies and partners to impose “massive consequences and severe costs on Russia.”

US President Biden and Russian President Putin will hold a phone call at 3:30 EDT on December 30.¹²⁸² Putin requested the call on December 29. The Kremlin stated the call would discuss Russian security demands ahead of planned US-Russia talks in early January.

Ukrainian President Zelensky spoke with US Secretary of State Blinken on December 29 ahead of Biden-Putin call on December 30.¹²⁸³ Blinken reiterated the United States' support for Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity. Blinken and Zelensky discussed upcoming diplomatic engagements with Russia and efforts to peacefully resolve the conflict in eastern Ukraine.

The US Navy canceled a planned redeployment of the carrier USS *Harry S Truman* and its battle group from the Mediterranean to the Middle East in response to Russia's buildup around Ukraine on December 28.¹²⁸⁴ US defense officials stated the *Harry S Truman* and its five escorting warships (a cruiser, three US guided missile destroyers, and a Norwegian frigate) would remain in the Mediterranean to reassure US allies and partners in the region.

The US deployed unspecified elements of the 335th Fighter Squadron from Seymour Johnson, North Carolina, to Campia Turzii, Romania, on December 15.¹²⁸⁵ At least two American F-15 fighter jets deployed. The jets conducted joint flights with the Italian and Romanian Air Forces to protect NATO airspace in the Black Sea from December 18 to 22. Italian Eurofighters will further operate with Romanian aircraft in the Black Sea area for the next three months (until March 2022). The mission of the 335th Fighter Squadron is to be prepared to deploy anywhere in the world on short notice and deliver an array of air-to-ground weapons with high accuracy.¹²⁸⁶

Chief of the Russian General Staff Valery Gerasimov and US Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Mark Milley had a phone call on December 22. TASS reports that the Russian Ministry of Defense stated they discussed "issues of international security."¹²⁸⁷ The Joint Chiefs of Staff readout states they discussed "regional security-related issues of concern."¹²⁸⁸ This was likely on Ukraine.

The New York Times reported on December 20 that the US and UK deployed unspecified cyberwarfare experts to Ukraine to help prepare Ukraine against potential planned Russian cyberattacks. The New York Times reported that Russia could attack Ukraine's power grid in early January 2022, potentially around or after Orthodox Christmas on January 7.¹²⁸⁹

Ukrainian Armed Forces Commander-in-Chief Valeriy Zaluzhnyi and US Joint Chiefs of Staff General Mark Milley discussed Russian aggression in a phone call on December 15.¹²⁹⁰ This is the third phone call between Zaluzhnyi and Milley in less than a month to discuss Russian aggression against Ukraine. Zaluzhnyi and Milley discussed Ukraine's strategic partnership with the US. Zaluzhnyi thanked Milley for the US' continued support for Ukrainian territorial sovereignty and commended the U.S.-Ukraine Strategic Defense Framework established on November 10, 2021 that expanded Ukrainian-US cooperation in Black Sea security, cyber defense, and intelligence sharing, and countering Russia's aggression. Zaluzhnyi stated that American experts have conducted assessment of Ukrainian Air Defense capabilities following Ukrainian Defense Minister Reznikov's visit to the United States.

US Deputy Secretary of State Karen Donfried met Russian Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister Sergei Ryabkov in Moscow on December 15.¹²⁹¹ Ryabkov and Donfried discussed Russia's demanded security guarantees from the United States and NATO. The Russian MFA only published a one-sentence readout and the US State Department has not published a readout as of 1600 December 15.

The American guided-missile destroyer USS Arleigh Burke exited the Black Sea on December 15.¹²⁹² The Arleigh Burke conducted exercises with NATO partners in the Black Sea from November 25 – December 14. The Arleigh Burke's deployment placed NATO anti-air, anti-submarine, and surface-to-surface capabilities in the Black Sea and prompted several false Russian claims of NATO aggression.

US Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Karen Donfried met with Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba in Kyiv, Ukraine on December 13.¹²⁹³ Donfried stated her agreement with the principle of “no decisions on Ukraine without Ukraine” and reaffirmed the United States' full support for Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty. She stated the United States' readiness to implement comprehensive measures to deter Russia aggression against Ukraine. Kuleba emphasized the need for political and diplomatic approaches to resolving Russian-Ukrainian armed conflict and welcomed American assistance in de-escalatory efforts. The Ukrainian MFA's readout stated Kuleba suggested unspecified security and humanitarian courses of action Russia could take to effectively implement the Minsk Agreements. No new inflections or theoretical changes emerged from the meeting. Donfried will meet with Russian Deputy FM Ryabkov in Moscow on December 15.

The US strategic RC-135W Rivet Joint Electronic Reconnaissance Aircraft plane conducted a reconnaissance mission near Donbas on December 11.¹²⁹⁴ This is reportedly the first time the Rivet Joint Electronic Reconnaissance Aircraft has operated inside Ukrainian airspace.¹²⁹⁵ The Russian Defense Ministry stated it scrambled Su-27 fighters to intercept French and US reconnaissance flights with CL-600 Artemis and RC-135 reconnaissance aircraft over the Black Sea on December 9.¹²⁹⁶

Biden called the heads of state of the Bucharest Nine (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Czechia, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria) to reaffirm US commitments to transatlantic security and NATO's Article V on December 10.¹²⁹⁷ The leaders discussed the need for a NATO defensive stance against growing Russian aggression in Ukraine.

Zelensky and Biden discussed the situation in Ukraine during a December 9 telephone call.¹²⁹⁸ Zelensky stressed Ukrainian readiness for extending the peace process in various formats. Biden and Zelensky discussed ways to provide financial, security, and political support to Ukraine in response to Russia's ongoing aggression. Zelensky emphasized the importance the Nord Stream 2 pipeline plays in deterring Russian aggression.

US Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs Victoria Nuland testified to the US Senate on December 7 that Russia deployed approximately 100 battalion tactical groups (BTGs) near the Ukrainian border.¹²⁹⁹ Nuland added that Russia deployed forces near eastern, northern, and southern Ukrainian borders in an interview following her testimony at the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.¹³⁰⁰ Nuland said Russian forces could

deploy to Belarus and “mask” themselves to appear as Belarusian forces.¹³⁰¹ Nuland pointed out that Lukashenko’s recognition of Russian occupation of Crimea is “particularly concerning” given his previous leverage against Russian influence.

Biden and Putin held a videoconference about Ukraine on December 7. The Kremlin readout accused Ukraine of attempting to completely dismantle the Minsk Agreements and shirk its commitments from the Normandy Format meetings.¹³⁰² Putin stated that NATO seeks to “conquer Ukrainian territory” and deploy military forces near Russian borders. Putin reiterated his demand to obtain “legally fixed guarantees excluding the expansion of NATO in the eastern direction and the deployment of offensive strike weapons systems in the states adjacent to Russia.” The Kremlin readout stated that the presidents agreed to undertake “substantive consultations” on these issues. Biden stated that the US and its allies would respond with “strong economic and other measures” in the event of a military escalation against Ukraine.¹³⁰³ Biden reiterated his support for Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity and called for de-escalation and a return to diplomacy. Biden spoke with French, German, Italian, and British leaders to brief them on his call with Putin.¹³⁰⁴

US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken called Zelensky on December 6.¹³⁰⁵ Zelensky and Blinken discussed their respective positions ahead of Biden’s call with Putin on December 7. Zelensky and Blinken agreed on the importance of coordinating sanctions pressure against Russia, restoring Ukraine’s full sovereignty and territorial integrity, and strengthening security cooperation.

US Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Mark Milley participated in a virtual meeting with the NATO Military Committee to discuss “significant security developments across Europe” on December 6.¹³⁰⁶

Blinken and Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba discussed implementing deterrence measures against Russia on the sidelines of the OSCE ministerial in Stockholm, Sweden, on December 2. Blinken and Kuleba discussed the implementation of deterrence measures against Russia including enhanced security and defense cooperation, the preparation of “tough” economic sanctions in the event of intensified Russian aggression, and political and diplomatic pressure against Russia.¹³⁰⁷ Blinken reiterated US commitments to Ukraine’s independence and territorial integrity and stressed the full implementation of the Minsk Agreements.¹³⁰⁸

Blinken and Kuleba discussed implementing deterrence measures against Russia on the sidelines of the OSCE ministerial in Stockholm, Sweden, on December 2. Blinken and Kuleba discussed the implementation of deterrence measures against Russia including enhanced security and defense cooperation, the preparation of “tough” economic sanctions in the event of intensified Russian aggression, and political and diplomatic pressure against Russia.¹³⁰⁹ Blinken reiterated US commitments to Ukraine’s independence and territorial integrity and stressed the full implementation of the Minsk Agreements.¹³¹⁰

Blinken met with Lavrov on the sidelines of the OSCE ministerial in Stockholm, Sweden, on December 2. Blinken reiterated US calls for Russia to demobilize forces near Ukraine, adhere to the Minsk Agreements, and observe the ceasefire in Donbas. Blinken stated the United States and its allies are prepared to impose “significant costs” against Russia if it escalates militarily.¹³¹¹ Lavrov warned that if the United States continues to ignore Russia’s “concerns,” it will result in “most serious consequences and will force [Russia] to take

retaliatory measures to straighten the military-strategic balance.”¹³¹² Lavrov restated desire to establish a US-Russia dialogue in accordance with the agreements that Putin and Biden reached at the June 2021 Geneva summit.

US Sixth Fleet announced that the USS Arleigh Burke guided missile destroyer began deploying to the Black Sea “to operate with NATO allies and partners in the region” on November 25.¹³¹³ Missile ship Shuya of the Black Sea Fleet conducted an exercise in response to the announcement of Arleigh Burke’s deployment.¹³¹⁴

Ukraine’s navy received two refurbished former US Coast Guard patrol boats on November 23.¹³¹⁵

Chief of the Russian General Staff Valery Gerasimov and US Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Mark Milley had a phone call on November 23. TASS reports that the Russian Ministry of Defense stated they “discussed topical issues of international security.”¹³¹⁶ The Joint Chiefs of Staff readout states they discussed “several security-related issues of concern.” The topic was likely Ukraine, given that Milley had a phone call with Commander in Chief of the Ukrainian Armed Forces Valery Zaluzhny on November 22.¹³¹⁷

The Biden Administration is reportedly considering sending military advisors and weapons to Ukraine. CNN reported on November 22 that the Biden Administration is considering sending Ukraine US military advisers and weapons (Javelins, stingers, Mi-17 helicopters, and mortars).¹³¹⁸

The US imposed new sanctions against the Nord Stream 2 pipeline on November 22. Blinken announced that the State Department submitted to Congress a list with two vessels and one Russia-linked entity involved in the pipeline to be sanctioned.¹³¹⁹

Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III met with Ukrainian Defense Minister Oleksii Reznikov in Washington on November 18. The ministers agreed to work closely together to advance the shared priorities outlined in the US-Ukraine Strategic Defense Framework signed on August 31.¹³²⁰ Austin stated interest in deepening cooperation in Black Sea security, cyber defense, and intelligence sharing.

Canada

Canada announced on January 26 that it will send \$340 million worth of aid to Ukraine and extend Operation UNIFER, Canada’s training and capacity building mission in Ukraine, through March 2025.¹³²¹ Canada will also deploy 60 personnel to join the 200 Canadian personnel already in Ukraine, with the option to deploy up to 400 personnel in total. Canadian personnel will particularly support intelligence cooperation and cyber security. Finally, Canada will provide \$50 million for development and humanitarian assistance in Ukraine and unspecified non-lethal military equipment.

Canadian Foreign Minister Melanie Joly and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky met on January 18.¹³²² Joly reaffirmed Canada’s continued support for Ukraine’s territorial integrity and independence. Joly also met with Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba and reiterated Canada’s support for Ukraine joining NATO on January 18.¹³²³

Canadian news outlet *Global News* reported on January 17 that unspecified elements of the Canadian Special Operations Regiment deployed to Ukraine around January 9.¹³²⁴ *Global News* reported the elements deployed to deter Russian aggression in Ukraine, identify ways to assist the Ukrainian government, and develop evacuation plans for Canadian diplomats in the event of a full-scale Russian invasion.

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky discussed Ukrainian security in a phone call on January 11.¹³²⁵ Zelensky briefed Trudeau on the military situation in eastern Ukraine and near the Ukrainian border. Zelensky stressed that Western states' position in dialogue with Russia must remain "firm and decisive" and that the West must be ready to immediately impose a "preventative sanctions package" against Russia as a deterrent. Zelensky proposed updating the Joint Declaration on a Special Partnership between Ukraine and Canada. Zelensky reiterated the importance that states make no decisions about Ukraine without Ukrainian participation.

Reznikov met with Canadian Chief of the Defense Staff Wayne Eyre and called Canadian National Defense Minister Anita Anand on December 3.¹³²⁶ Eyre met with Reznikov during his official working visit to Kyiv aimed at developing cooperation between Ukraine and Canada's armed forces. Both parties discussed bilateral defense cooperation in light of Russian security threats

France and Germany

German newspaper *Der Spiegel* reported on February 11 that the US Central Intelligence Agency and other unspecified US defense officials assess that Russia could invade Ukraine as early as February 16.¹³²⁷

***The Financial Times (FT)* reported that unspecified French officials said that Russian President Vladimir Putin moved towards de-escalating the crisis in Europe by promising not to undertake any new "military initiatives" on February 8, reports which the Kremlin denied.**¹³²⁸ *FT* reported that Putin agreed to withdraw Russian troops from Belarus after the completion of planned exercises on February 20. *FT* reported that French officials said that Putin and Macron reached an agreement to "not undertake new military initiatives and to have a broad dialogue on troop deployments." Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told *FT* that Putin and Macron were "prepared to continue dialogue" on French proposals but that Macron and Putin had not yet reached an agreement. Peskov publicly denied that Putin and Macron reached a deal on Ukraine immediately following the publication of the *FT* report on February 8.¹³²⁹

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky met French President Emmanuel Macron in Kyiv on February 8.¹³³⁰ Zelensky thanked Macron for taking an active role in the Normandy Format and helping "achieve peace in Ukraine." Zelensky stated that he expects to hold a Normandy Format meeting "in the near future." Zelensky stated that Ukraine does not respond to Russian provocations. Macron commended Ukrainian reform progress and level-headedness given the Russian military buildup near Ukraine. Macron stated that France and Germany will play a "mediating role" in resolving the war in Donbas in Normandy Format meetings with Russian President Vladimir Putin. Macron stated that Ukraine reaffirms its readiness to implement the Minsk II Accords. Macron noted that Putin also confirmed readiness to continue implementing the Minsk II Accords during Macron's meeting with Putin on February 7. Macron stated there is a need to work together on a "new mechanism to ensure

security” in Europe without specifying any other details. Macron additionally announced that France will provide Ukraine with 1.2 billion euros for unspecified “development project” funding involving French suppliers and contractors. French and Ukrainian authorities signed a series of bilateral cooperation agreements likely on military-technical cooperation and emergency response issues.

French President Emmanuel Macron and Russian President Vladimir Putin discussed Ukraine and Russian security demands in Moscow on February 7.¹³³¹

Putin said that France has been taking a “very active part in resolving fundamental issues of European security.” The Kremlin readout states that Macron said that the Putin-Macron dialogue “will ensure real stability and security for the European continent” and that “today's conversation can pave the way for us to go.” The Kremlin readout states that Macron sought a “practical answer” that “avoids war” and that “builds stability, transparency, and trust for all” without providing additional details.

French President Emmanuel Macron stated Russian President Vladimir Putin most likely seeks to reform relations with NATO and EU rather than invade Ukraine in an interview with French outlet Journal du Dimanche on February 6.¹³³²

Macron expressed optimism that the West and Russia can find a peaceful resolution to the current crisis ahead of planned talks with Putin in Moscow on February 7. Macron emphasized that the West may have to negotiate and address Russia’s “legitimate” security concerns that include NATO expansion into Eastern Ukraine. The French President also stated that the West must not compromise Ukraine’s sovereignty when cooperating with Russian officials but warned that the West may have to make concessions in other areas.

German Defense Minister Christine Lambrecht reiterated that Germany will not “supply weapons to crisis regions as to not contribute to further aggravation” on February 6.¹³³³

Lambrecht added that Germany will work with NATO allies in the NATO-Russia Council and Normandy Four formats. Lambrecht also said Germany deployed military personnel to Lithuania due to a possible Russian threat.

German tabloid *Blid* published an article on “Putin’s Coup Plan for Ukraine” on February 5, detailing President Vladimir Putin’s alleged plan to create a triune Russia-Ukraine-Belarus Union State.¹³³⁴

Blid claimed that Russia will first surround large Ukrainian cities and Putin will install loyal politicians and intelligence officers in local governments. *Blid* claimed that Russia will seize strategic infrastructure until all Ukrainian cities fall “peacefully” under Kremlin's control. Putin then will create a new parliament called the “Narodnaya Rada,” which will act as a puppet government in Ukraine. The new Narodnaya Rada will have only one objective – to destroy Ukrainian defenses and opposition to Russian occupation. The Kremlin will enforce societal control via secret services. *Blid* claimed that Putin is actively recruiting Ukrainian politicians to create a larger Union State. Reputable sources have not supported Bild’s reporting as of February 7.

French President Emmanuel Macron and Russian President Vladimir Putin discussed the situation in Ukraine and Russia’s demanded security guarantees on February 3.¹³³⁵

Putin reiterated that the Ukrainian government’s “provocative statements and actions” run counter to the Minsk II Accords. The Kremlin readout states that Putin and Macron agreed to continue personal contacts.

The Elysee announced that French President Emmanuel Macron will propose “path of de-escalation” to Russian President Vladimir Putin “in the coming days” on January 24.¹³³⁶ The Elysee said France is “very careful to not create ambiguity and additional volatility” when responding to questions over UK accusations of Russian attempts to establish a puppet government in Ukraine and US placing 8,500 servicemen on high alert. The Elysee said France wants a coordinated and “operational” response to Russian security demands.

German Navy Commander Kay-Achim Schonbach resigned on January 22 following outrage over his comments calling for the West to treat Russian President Vladimir Putin with the respect “he demands and probably deserves” and claiming Crimea would never be returned to Ukraine.¹³³⁷ Schonbach made the comments at a think tank event in India on January 21.¹³³⁸

French President Emanuel Macron called on fellow European Union (EU) members to work together to draw proposals for a new security deal with Russia separate from the US and NATO in the coming weeks on January 19.¹³³⁹ Macron said, “it is good that Europeans and the United States coordinate, but it is necessary that Europeans conduct their own dialogue... We must put together a joint proposal, a joint vision, a new security and stability order for Europe.” Macron did not specify what the “new security and stability order” would entail. EU Foreign Policy Chief Josep Borrell likely supports Macron’s effort for the EU to have its own separate security dialogue with the Kremlin. The Kremlin likely seeks to fragment European solidarity against Russia’s economic and political objectives by driving wedges between the EU and NATO as organizations and among EU and NATO members.

German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov met in Moscow on January 18.¹³⁴⁰ This was Baerbock’s first meeting with Lavrov since she was appointed German foreign minister in December 2021. The Russian readout states that the ministers discussed the current state and future prospects of Russian-German relations, practical issues for building cooperation, and restarting existing interaction mechanisms. The ministers discussed the certification process of Russia’s Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline. Lavrov reiterated concerns about NATO’s expansion and reiterated Russia’s security demands. They also discussed prospects for cooperation in the Normandy Format. Lavrov accused Ukraine of sabotaging the Minsk II Accords and said that the Kremlin hopes that Germany will use its influence on Kyiv so that Ukraine fulfills its obligations under the Minsk II Accords.

German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock met Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky in Kyiv on January 17.¹³⁴¹ Baerbock and Zelensky discussed Ukraine’s clustered approach to implementing the Minsk II Accords and expressed hope to hold another Normandy Format summit “soon.” Zelensky stressed that Russia’s Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline is a geopolitical project and a weapon aimed against both Ukraine and Europe. The Ukrainian readout states that both officials agreed to issue “tough response measures” if the Kremlin uses Nord Stream 2 as a weapon. Zelensky stressed the need to strengthen Ukraine's energy security by ensuring long-term gas transit through Ukraine.

Adviser to the German Chancellor for Foreign Affairs Jens Plotner, Diplomatic Adviser to the President of France Emmanuel Bonn, and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky discussed Normandy Format processes in Kyiv on January

11.¹³⁴² Zelensky stated that Ukraine is ready to hold Normandy Format talks with the Russian, French, and German heads of state. Zelensky also praised the Normandy Four's progress to implement the agreements from the last Normandy Format summit in Paris in December 2019. Zelensky stressed the need to comply with the ceasefire in Donbas, conduct mutual prisoner exchanges with Russian proxy forces, and open checkpoints between Ukrainian and Russian proxy forces. The Kremlin has not discussed holding a Normandy Format meeting since the buildup began in October 2020 besides stating that the Kremlin is unlikely to offer the US to participate in the format on December 7.¹³⁴³ Kremlin Spokesman Dmitry Peskov said that a Normandy Format summit "for the sake of a summit" do not make sense in September 2021.¹³⁴⁴

German Economy Minister Robert Habeck stated that Germany may block Russia's Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline due to Russian threats to Ukraine on December 30.¹³⁴⁵ Habeck supported the German federal government's decision to not interfere with Nord Stream 2 certification processes and to consider the pipeline from a strictly legal regulatory standpoint but did not exclude the possibility of Berlin blocking Nord Stream 2 due to Russian threats to Ukraine.

French and Ukrainian ships completed passing exercises in the northwestern Black Sea on December 30.¹³⁴⁶ A Ukrainian medium landing ship and French frigate *Auvergne* conducted passing exercises to improve interoperability between French and Ukrainian naval personnel in accordance with NATO standards.

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Ryabkov met with France's ambassador to Russia on December 30.¹³⁴⁷ The Russian MFA reported they discussed Russia's proposals for legal security guarantees from the US and NATO.

The German Green Party's foreign policy representative stated on December 30 that the German government will be unlikely to completely halt the launch of Nord Stream 2 despite the Green Party's disagreement.¹³⁴⁸ Omid Nuripur, the Green Party's appointed foreign policy expert, stated "unfortunately, fundamental political decisions have already been made in recent years" and if the Nord Stream 2 operating company complies with German law there will be no way to halt the launch of the pipeline "even if I still think that the project is wrong." Germany's federal regulator suspended the certification process of Nord Stream 2 on November 16, noting the process will resume when the Swiss-based Nord Stream 2 company creates a German subsidiary.

Russian President Vladimir Putin had a phone call with French President Emmanuel Macron on December 21.¹³⁴⁹ Putin discussed Russian diplomatic work regarding the Kremlin's effort to extract its demanded security guarantees. Putin also accused Kyiv of evading its obligations under the Minsk Accords, which Putin said hinders the possibility of a new Normandy Format Summit. Macron and Putin also discussed Mali and Nagorno-Karabakh.

Russian President Vladimir Putin had a phone call with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz on December 21.¹³⁵⁰ Putin discussed Russia's demanded security guarantees and provided comments on the draft agreement that Russia gave the US. Putin also accused Kyiv of evading its obligations under the Minsk Accords, which Putin said hinders the possibility of a new Normandy Format Summit.

European leaders agreed to impose further sanctions on Russia if it invades unoccupied Ukraine at a summit in Brussels, Belgium on December 16.¹³⁵¹ The new sanctions could include targeting Russian oligarchs, banning European Union (EU) transactions with private Russian banks, and cutting off Russian banks from SWIFT – the system required for international money transfers. The EU leaders stated their desire to continue diplomatic efforts to solve the crisis and voiced their support for using the Normandy Format to achieve full implementation of the Minsk Agreements.

The German Federal Network Agency reported that Nord Stream 2’s certification should not be expected in the first half of 2022 on December 16.¹³⁵² New German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock – a member of the Green Party – said on October 20 that she sees no reason to complete the Nord Stream 2 pipeline.

Ukrainian President Zelensky met both individually and trilaterally with French President Macron and German Chancellor Scholz in Brussels on December 15.¹³⁵³ Zelensky concentrated on energy issues in his meeting with Scholz, stating Ukraine counts on Germany support to maintain gas transit through Ukraine after the expiration of Ukraine’s current gas deal with Russia on 2024. Kyiv will likely attempt to secure assurances from the new Germany government that the launch of Nord Stream 2 will not deprive Ukraine of lucrative gas transit fees. Zelensky and Macron discussed Ukraine’s Euro-Atlantic aspirations and the implementation of unspecified joint economic projects. In the trilateral meeting, all parties agreed on the need to continue the Normandy Format, called on Russia to resume constructive work in that format, and seek diplomatic solutions to compel Russia to withdraw its forces from the Ukrainian border.

Russian President Vladimir Putin and French President Emmanuel Macron held a phone call on December 14.¹³⁵⁴ The Kremlin readout stated Putin “outlined in detail” his assessments of the current situation around Ukraine in response to Johnson’s concern about the “alleged large-scale movement of Russian troops.” Putin presented “specific examples” of Kyiv’s violation of the Minsk agreements, exacerbation of the situation on the line of contact, and discrimination against the Russian-speaking population of Ukraine. Putin announced “the need to immediately begin negotiations in order to develop clear international legal agreements that would exclude any further NATO advance to the east and the deployment of weapons threatening Russia in neighboring states, primarily in Ukraine” and called on France to participate in these discussions. The Kremlin readout further stated Macron raised the issue of the Belarusian migrant crisis. Putin spoke favorably of direct discussions between the EU and Minsk, drew attention to claimed violations of “international obligations” to help refugees by Poland and the Baltic States, and expressed hope that the migrant issue “will be completely removed from the agenda” in the near future.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov held a phone call with new German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock on December 14.¹³⁵⁵ Lavrov welcomed Baerbock after her appointment on December 8. Lavrov told Baerbock that Russia needs a security guarantee that NATO will not expand eastward by admitting Ukraine and establish military infrastructure along Russian borders. Lavrov also asked Baerbock to persuade Ukraine to adhere to the Minsk Agreements and participate in the Normandy Format. Baerbock called for “open and honest” dialogue between Russia and Germany and warned Russia would face “massive consequences” in the event of a Russian invasion of unoccupied Ukraine.

Ukrainian Defense Minister Oleksei Reznikov blamed Germany for blocking NATO supplies to Ukraine in an interview with the Financial Times on December 12.¹³⁵⁶ Reznikov stated Berlin vetoed Ukraine's purchase of anti-drone rifles and anti-sniper systems via the NATO Support and Procurement Agency within the last month, but later relented on the anti-drone rifles after deeming them non-lethal. Reznikov stated "[Germany is] still building the Nord Stream 2 pipeline and at the same time blocking our defensive weapons. It is very unfair." Reznikov stated Ukraine will seek to purchase equipment bilaterally through the US, UK, Lithuania and France rather than NATO. The Germany economic ministry (responsible for arms sales) and Chancellery declined to comment on the policy, enacted by the government of former Chancellor Angela Merkel. Reznikov stated the strategy of "not provoking Russia" does not and will not work in the future but downplayed the imminent threat. Reznikov stated Kyiv estimates Russia has 100,000 troops near the Ukrainian border, and stated US estimates of 175,000 troops are based on the size of encampments constructed by Russian forces, though many tents remain empty.

German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock stated NordStream 2 will not be allowed to operate in the event of any new "escalation" in Ukraine on December 12.¹³⁵⁷ Baerbock made the statements in an interview with German television station ZDF and said Berlin and Washington agreed on this approach.

French officials issued forceful statements against a Russian offensive in Ukraine in November. Shoigu and Lavrov attended the Russian-French Security Cooperation Council meeting with French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian and Defense Minister Florence Parly in Paris, France, on November 12.¹³⁵⁸ The Russian and French ministers reiterated the necessity of compliance with the Minsk Agreements. The ministers discussed nuclear non-proliferation and arms control, prevention of an arms race in outer space, Russia-EU and Russia-NATO relations, and other topics. Le Drian and Parly warned the Kremlin of "serious consequences related to any new harm to Ukraine's territorial integrity" in a joint French ministers' statement.¹³⁵⁹ Le Drian gave an interview on November 21 in which he reiterated that "Any [Russian] violation of the [Ukrainian] border, any intrusion would lead to extremely grave consequences."¹³⁶⁰

Germany temporarily suspended Nord Stream 2's certification on November 16. Germany's energy regulator suspended the process reportedly because a Swiss-based consortium behind Nord Stream 2 needed to form a German subsidiary company under German law to secure an operating license.¹³⁶¹ The German energy regulator said it would not continue its approval process until the Nord Stream 2 company, which is registered in Switzerland, transfers its main assets and staffing budget to its German subsidiary.¹³⁶²

French, German, and Ukrainian foreign ministers had a working meeting in Brussels on November 15. France and Germany issued a joint statement in support of Ukraine's independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity.¹³⁶³ France and Germany called on Ukraine to implement the Minsk Agreements and expressed regret that Lavrov has refused to meet at the ministerial level for a Normandy Format meeting.

NATO/EU Activity

Reuters reported on February 16 that NATO is considering establishing new multinational battlegroups in Central and Eastern Europe in response to the Russian military buildup near Ukraine.¹³⁶⁴ Reuters reported that NATO defense

ministers discussed setting up multinational battlegroups in Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary, and Slovakia as part of a wider effort to strengthen NATO's deterrence and defense mechanisms on its eastern flank. NATO already has battlegroups stationed in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland. US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin announced on February 17 that the United States will deploy a US Army Stryker group to Bulgaria "in the coming days."

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said that there are no indications of Russian de-escalation on the ground near Ukraine despite Russian statements about beginning to withdraw some forces on February 15.¹³⁶⁵ Stoltenberg reiterated to NATO allies that further Russian aggression against Ukraine will provoke massive consequences. Stoltenberg characterized the Russian bill to formally recognize the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics as a violation of the Minsk II Accords. Stoltenberg also said that NATO remains ready to engage diplomatically with Russia to resolve the situation in Ukraine peacefully.

Latvian Foreign Minister Edgars Rinkevics and European Union (EU) Foreign Policy Chief Josep Borrell condemned the Russian State Duma's proposal to recognize the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics' independence on February 15.¹³⁶⁶ Rinkevics said that Russia recognizing the proxies is "contrary to international law" and urged the EU to "act and impose sanctions" should Russian President Vladimir Putin recognize the proxies. Borrell called on the Russian government to "uphold its commitments and to engage in good faith within the Normandy Format and the Trilateral Contact Group."

G7 Finance Ministers emphasized their commitment to Ukraine's territorial and economic sovereignty and pledged continued financial support to deescalate the conflict with Russia in a joint statement on February 14.¹³⁶⁷ The finance ministers also noted they will work closely with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to support Ukrainian financial reform objectives. The finance ministers also warned they are prepared to enact substantial economic and financial sanctions on Russia in the event of a Russian invasion.

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg reaffirmed NATO's commitment to protecting Romania and other eastern NATO member countries in Romania on February 11.¹³⁶⁸ Stoltenberg cited the deployment of Spanish fighter jets to Bulgaria, the arrival of US troops in Romania, and the upcoming arrival of a French-led battlegroup in Romania as paragons of NATO's unity amid the threat of Russian aggression.

The European Union (EU) delivered a collective response to Russia's individual security proposals to all 27 member states on February 10.¹³⁶⁹ Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov sent European security proposals to each EU member state's foreign ministry on January 28. Lavrov stated that a collective response would lead to a breakdown in talks on February 10. *Reuters* reported that EU diplomats saw the individual Russian proposals as an attempt to weaken and divide the EU on February 10. European External Action Service for Security and Defense Policy Director Jonnikke Balfoort said that the EU "does not intend" to publicize the collective response's contents.

German Minister of Defense Christine Lambrecht announced that Germany will increase its troop presence in the German-led NATO battlegroup in Lithuania by 350 personnel on February 7.¹³⁷⁰ Lambrecht stated the deployment is "a clear sign of

resolve” to Germany’s allies. These soldiers will likely participate in exercises with other NATO deployments in the Baltics such as the exercise that occurred in Tapa, Estonia, in January 2022.

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg discussed the Russian military buildup around Ukraine with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on February 7.¹³⁷¹ Stoltenberg thanked Erdogan for his efforts to find a political solution for Russia-Ukraine tensions, according to the Turkish readout. Erdogan invited Russian President Vladimir Putin and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky to Turkey for mediation talks.

Ukrainian news outlet *Ukrainska Pravda* reported that Hungary vetoed Ukraine’s accession to the NATO Cooperative Cyber Defense Center of Excellence on February 4.¹³⁷² The center is an international military organization with a mission to enhance capabilities, cooperation, and information sharing in cyber defense among NATO members. Ukrainian National Security and Defense Council Secretary Oleksiy Danilov stated that Ukraine submitted its application to join the center in summer 2021 and passed all relevant membership criteria. Kremlin-amenable Hungarian President Viktor Orban met with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow on February 1.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said that the commissioning of Russia’s Nord Stream 2 pipeline will depend on “how Russia behaves” on February 4.¹³⁷³ Von der Leyen condemned Russian military pressure against Ukraine and how Russian state-owned gas company Gazprom is restricting gas supplies to Europe despite high gas prices. Von der Leyen said “it is quite clear that Nord Stream 2 cannot be removed from the table as far as sanctions are concerned.”

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg stated that NATO expects that Russia will deploy up to 30,000 “combat troops” to Belarus on February 3.¹³⁷⁴ Stoltenberg did not state that the 30,000 Russian troops are already in Belarus, as some Western news agencies incorrectly reported.¹³⁷⁵ Stoltenberg said that this deployment as the largest Russian military deployment to Belarus “since the Cold War.”

Spanish newspaper *El Pais* published the confidential US and NATO response to Russia’s security demands on February 2.¹³⁷⁶ Pentagon Press Secretary John Kirby confirmed that the document is authentic on February 2.¹³⁷⁷ The document reaffirms US officials’ publicly stated positions on Russia’s security demands. The document called on Russia to withdraw forces from Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova and reaffirmed commitment to NATO’s Open Door Policy under NATO’s Article 10. The document states that NATO is in favor of: making “full use” of existing military-to-military communication channels to promote predictability, transparency, and reduce risks; reestablishing NATO’s and Russia’s mutual presence in Moscow and Brussels respectively; working on a Russian proposal to establish a civilian telephone hotline to maintain emergency contact; continuing exchanging briefings on Russian and NATO exercises in the NATO-Russia Council to reduce risks; engaging constructively on modernizing the Vienna Document in the OSCE; increasing exercise transparency by lowering notification and observation thresholds; holding reciprocal briefings on Russia’s and NATO’s nuclear policies and elaborating on reciprocal strategic risk reduction measures; consulting on ways to reduce threats to space systems, including Russia refraining from conducting anti-satellite tests; promoting a free, open, peaceful and secure cyberspace by consulting on ways to reduce threats in the cyber domain; Russia resuming the implementation on the Treaty on Conventional Arms Forces in Europe (CFE); Russia

negotiating with the US on future arms control and disarmament agreements that encompass all US and Russian nuclear weapons; and Russia engaging with the US on ground-based intermediate- and shorter- range missiles and their launchers, among other provisions. The document also states that the US is prepared to discuss a transparency mechanism to confirm the absence of Tomahawk cruise missile at Aegis Ashore sites in Romania and Poland and to provide Russia offers of reciprocal transparency measures on two ground-launched missile bases of US choosing in Russia.

At least nine US and Swedish aircraft conducted reconnaissance sorties over Europe, including over Ukraine and near Russia and Belarus, on February 1.¹³⁷⁸

European Union (EU) Foreign Policy Chief Josep Borrell stated that the EU devised “high-impact” measures that would “inflict severe costs on the Russian economy and financial system” to deter Russian aggression should diplomacy fail on January 30.¹³⁷⁹

Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen announced that Denmark ready to provide Ukraine with military equipment and weapons if Russia escalates against Ukraine further on January 29.¹³⁸⁰

The *Financial Times* reported on January 27 that the European Central Bank (ECB) has warned European banks about the need to prepare for the introduction of sanctions against Russia.¹³⁸¹ The ECB additionally urged banks to share details of their plans for “unforeseen circumstances” and a variety of possible sanctions scenarios to ensure the banks can quickly comply with any sanctions regime.

***Bloomberg* reported on January 25 that the German government recently pressured the US for an exemption for the German energy sector in the event of US sanctions blocking Russian banks from conducting transactions using US dollars, alongside similar requests for exemptions from other European states.**¹³⁸² *Bloomberg* sourced its report to documents circulated among Western states discussing possible sanctions packages against Russia. An unnamed official stated the US will likely grant the exemption as part of a final package of penalties the US will impose on Russia in the event of a further Russian invasion of Ukraine. Germany is reportedly arguing to the US that without an exemption for dollar transactions with Russia in the energy sector, Europe’s energy supply could be jeopardized. Germany reportedly additionally stated any unwanted consequences beyond the targeted Russian institutions is a “red line” for Germany, citing the example of US sanctions on Iran forcing most European institutions to halt nearly all commercial activity with Iran. *Bloomberg* additionally reported several other “major European countries” have sought to insert similar carve-outs in other sectors, as well as transition measures before the full force of sanctions take effect.

Political advisers to the heads of state of the “Normandy Four” (Russia, Ukraine, France, and Germany) met in Paris on January 26.¹³⁸³ Deputy Head of the Presidential Administration Dmitry Kozak represented Russia and Presidential Representative Andriy Yermak represented Ukraine. Yermak stated prior to the meeting that the participants did not set a specific agenda and that the meeting was for consultation purposes only, without the authority to approve any agreements.

Sweden's Defense Material Administration (FMV) activated its "crisis and war staff" on January 25.¹³⁸⁴ The Swedish government entity, responsible for arms acquisition and management for the Swedish armed forces, stated it does not assess "an acute crisis is imminent" but must be prepared to supply the Swedish military "in the event of further deterioration." The FMV announcement does not mention Russia by name but is almost certainly directed at Russia's ongoing aggressive actions.

The European Union (EU) announced a new 1.2 billion Euro macroeconomic assistance package of grants and emergency loans to Ukraine on January 24.¹³⁸⁵ The EU will likely deliver the first tranche of €600 million in the next several weeks.

Ukrainian President Vladimir Zelensky had a call with European Union Foreign Policy Chief Josep Borrell on January 24.¹³⁸⁶ Zelensky and Borrell discussed international political and diplomatic efforts to de-escalate the security situation around Ukraine. Zelensky stressed the importance of preserving European Union member states' unity on supporting Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Zelensky and Borrell discussed the European Union's preparation of preventive sanctions that could curb potential further Russian escalation. Zelensky thanked Borrell for the new 1.2 billion European macroeconomic assistance package to Ukraine.

NATO made a statement on its ongoing and planned force deployments to Eastern Europe on January 24.¹³⁸⁷ The NATO statement summarized ongoing and planned NATO states deployments. The deployments include Denmark sending a frigate to the Baltic Sea and deploying four F-16 fighter jets to Lithuania in support of NATO's long-standing air-policing mission in the region at an unspecified future date; Spain sending ships to join NATO naval forces and is considering sending fighter jets to Bulgaria; France expressing readiness to send troops to Romania under NATO command; the Netherlands sending two F-35 fighter aircraft to Bulgaria in April to support NATO's air-policing activities and putting a ship and unspecified land-based units on standby for NATO's Response Force. NATO framed these deployments as measures to reinforce allied deterrence.

The Dutch Ministry of Defense announced plans to deploy two F-35 fighter aircraft to Bulgaria in April and May to support NATO operations on January 21.¹³⁸⁸ The Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs additionally stated the Netherlands would look at the question of sending weapons to Ukraine "sympathetically" in the event of further Russian aggression.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba and European Union Foreign Policy Chief Josep Borrell discussed Ukrainian security on January 19.¹³⁸⁹ Kuleba and Borrell discussed a comprehensive package of measures to deter Russia from further aggression, including the preparation of "tough" sanctions. Borrell stated that there is a clear understanding in the European Union that only a strong deterrence package will stop Russia.

NATO's Communications and Information Agency and the Ukrainian government renewed a memorandum of agreement to continue developing Ukrainian command and control capabilities on January 17.¹³⁹⁰ The memorandum continues Ukraine-NATO technology cooperation originally established in 2015. Ukraine's Ambassador to NATO stated that NATO and Ukraine plan to further improve Ukraine's military command and control systems by adopting more modern information technologies and services on January 17.

The Danish Government approved a 22-million Euro support program for Ukraine to improve Ukrainian resiliency and improve Ukrainian defense reforms from 2022 – 2025 on January 16.¹³⁹¹ The program supports stabilization, development, and defense-oriented assistance, including Ukraine's defense reforms and defense capacity-building. The Danish Foreign Ministry and Ministry of Defense contributed 10.75 million and 11.3 million Euros to the program, respectively.

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg stated that NATO and Ukraine will sign an agreement on enhanced cyber cooperation “in the coming days” on January 14.¹³⁹² Stoltenberg condemned the January 13-14 cyberattacks against Ukraine and framed this agreement as a NATO response. Stoltenberg specified neither the scale or scope of this cooperation agreement nor planned timing of its adoption.

Swedish Chief of Joint Operations Michael Claesson told the *Associated Press* (AP) on January 14 that the Swedish military increased its readiness level in response to increased Russian military activity in the Baltic Sea.¹³⁹³ Claesson told AP that Sweden “repositioned its troops” and that Swedish forces would “be visible” on Gotland – a strategically significant Swedish island located approximately 300 kilometers from the Russian exclave of Kaliningrad.

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg reiterated that NATO decided in 2008 that Ukraine and Georgia will become NATO members in an interview with Italian newspaper *La Repubblica* on January 13.¹³⁹⁴

Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas said that the Baltic states and NATO are discussing the possibility of increasing NATO military deployments to the Baltics to deter Russian aggression in Europe on January 12.¹³⁹⁵ *Reuters* reported that military deployments to the Baltic states could be discussed at a planned NATO defense ministerial in mid-February.

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said that NATO did not compromise its core values and offered Russia further dialogue on arms control and non-proliferation during the NATO-Russia summit on January 12.¹³⁹⁶ Stoltenberg said NATO will not close membership opportunities for eligible states and will preserve each state's right to seek its own security arrangements. Stoltenberg said that NATO allies will not withdraw forces from Eastern Europe. Stoltenberg stated that Russian representatives did not accept nor reject NATO's proposal for further dialogue on reciprocal missile limitations, nuclear policies, military exercise transparency, and arms control. Stoltenberg said that NATO warned Russia that any use of force against Ukraine will be a “serious strategic mistake” resulting in economic and political sanctions, and a potential increased NATO force presence in NATO's “eastern part.” Stoltenberg reiterated that NATO would provide unspecified practical defense support to Ukraine in case of further Russian military aggression.

The *New York Times* (NYT) reported on January 10 that European Union (EU) Foreign Policy Chief Josep Borrell said that the EU wants to join US-dominated security talks with Russia and called on EU foreign ministers to develop their own security guarantee proposals with Russia.¹³⁹⁷ The NYT reported that it obtained a letter in which Borrell urged European foreign ministries to develop their own “separate European proposals on security” and that he “initiated a discrete direct conversation” with Russian

Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov. The NYT reported that not every EU foreign ministry supports Borrell's approach, despite Borrell's promise that European security proposals would be based in "full coherence and coordination with NATO." The NYT separately quoted Borrell saying, "European Union is the most reliable partner of Ukraine," and that the EU "cannot be a spectator" while the United States, NATO, and Russia discuss European security. The Kremlin will likely exploit growing fissures among EU and NATO member states, and fissures between the EU and NATO as organizations.

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg warned Russia of "severe costs" if Moscow launches a further attack on Ukraine on January 10.¹³⁹⁸ Stoltenberg said NATO is working for a peaceful political solution, but that NATO members must be prepared if Russia decides to conduct an offensive.

NATO's foreign ministers held an extraordinary meeting on January 7 to coordinate positions ahead of the January 12 NATO-Russia Council meeting.¹³⁹⁹ NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg reiterated that NATO calls on Russia to de-escalate and withdraw its forces from Ukraine. Stoltenberg said NATO is ready for "meaningful dialogue" with Russia and that the January 12 NATO-Russia Council meeting will be an opportunity for Russia to demonstrate it is "serious about dialogue, diplomacy, and its international commitments." Stoltenberg said that NATO will engage Russia in dialogue in good faith, but that Russia must also be ready to listen to NATO members' concerns about Russian actions. Stoltenberg said NATO must also be prepared for the possibility that diplomacy may fail and reiterated that NATO is prepared to protect its members.

Bloomberg Business assessed on January 4 that European natural gas reserves in underground storage could decrease to 15 percent by March 2022.¹⁴⁰⁰ The current level of natural gas reserves in underground storage is 56 percent, which is more than 15 percent below the current 10-year average. A decrease down to 15 percent would be the lowest level of European gas reserves ever recorded.

European Union (EU) foreign policy chief Josep Borrell visited Ukraine to signal EU support for Kyiv against Russian aggression on January 4.¹⁴⁰¹ Borrell will meet Ukraine's foreign minister and other officials during his visit, which will last until January 6. Borrell reportedly will also visit the front line in Donbas

Finish President Sauli Niinisto and Finish Prime Minister Sanna Marin said that Finland has the right to seek NATO membership on December 31 despite previous Kremlin threats against Finish NATO membership.¹⁴⁰² Niinisto and Marin gave separate New Year's Eve speeches in which they said that Finland has the right to seek NATO membership if it decides to do so. The Kremlin stated that Finland and Sweden joining NATO "would have serious military and political consequences that would require an adequate response from the Russian side" on December 24.¹⁴⁰³

Chief EU diplomat Josep Borell stated the EU must be involved in any security discussions between Russia and the US in an interview with German newspaper Die Welt on December 29.¹⁴⁰⁴ Borell stated discussions between the US and Russia on European security "only make sense... in close coordination with and with the participation of the EU." Borell asserted that NATO cannot negotiate on behalf of Europe, as several European states are not members of NATO. Borell additionally said he will soon submit a proposal to EU member states on creating an EU Military Advisory and Training Mission to Ukraine. The

Kremlin is highly unlikely to agree to involve the EU in security discussions. Disagreements between NATO and the EU could impede a unified response to Russian pressure and aggression.

TASS reported on December 26 that NATO confirmed it will convene a NATO-Russia council meeting on security guarantees in Europe in Brussels on January 12.¹⁴⁰⁵ Russian media previously reported that Russia would hold high level talks with NATO on security in Europe on January 12-13. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said on December 24 that he hopes that NATO will provide the Kremlin clear answers on its demanded security guarantees in January 2022.¹⁴⁰⁶

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe announced that Ukraine and Russia's proxies in eastern Ukraine reached a new ceasefire on December 22.¹⁴⁰⁷ The ceasefire likely will not end the fighting in Donbas. The Russian Foreign Ministry criticized Ukrainian officials' statement that Ukraine seeks to comply with the Minsk Accords on December 23, claiming that the Ukrainian military's refusal to ban Ukrainian field commanders from returning fire without permission from central leadership in Kyiv undermines Ukraine's commitment to peace.¹⁴⁰⁸ Kremlin proxy forces violated the ceasefire at least six times on December 26.¹⁴⁰⁹

Sweden announced it increased its military readiness on December 23.¹⁴¹⁰ Swedish Commander-in-Chief Micael Byden stated that the increase was due to the situation in Ukraine. Byden met with US Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Mark Millie on December 15.¹⁴¹¹

Secretary of State Antony Blinken spoke with European Union High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell about responding to Russian aggression against Ukraine on December 22.¹⁴¹² Both the US and European Union readouts emphasized the need for coordinated action to support Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity and reaffirmed that any further Russian military aggression against Ukraine would have "massive consequences" for the Russian Federation.

German news outlet *Welt* reported on December 22 that unspecified element of NATO's very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) – a NATO rapid reaction force of approximately 20,000 soldiers – increased its combat readiness.¹⁴¹³ Unspecified VJTF elements reportedly increased its readiness from being ready to deploy to a crisis area within five days instead of seven days. Leading VJTF elements are ready to deploy within two to three days.¹⁴¹⁴

The US, United Kingdom, Germany, France, Canada, Poland and several other EU and NATO states issued a joint statement at the United Nations condemning Russian behavior at the United Nations Security Council on December 22.¹⁴¹⁵ The statement condemned Russia's misuse of claims of minority persecution in Donbas in a Security Council Arria-formula meeting that Russia hosted on December 22. The statement reiterated international support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, condemned Russia's disinformation campaign against Ukraine, and called on Russia to de-escalate the situation and withdraw Russian forces and equipment it has stationed in Ukraine. The statement also warned that any further military aggression against Ukraine would have "massive consequences and a severe cost in response."

NATO released a statement calling on Russia to deescalate aggression towards Ukraine on December 16.¹⁴¹⁶ NATO said that they are seriously assessing implications for NATO security and will take measures through a collective defense strategy. NATO said that they are ready for a dialogue with Russia and called on Russia to meet with the NATO-Russia council. NATO mentioned that the OSCE is a relevant platform for reducing tensions and strengthening confidence-building measures. NATO said that any further Russian aggression towards Ukraine will have immense financial and security consequences. NATO reaffirmed its support for Ukrainian sovereignty.

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg reiterated that Russian aggression against Ukraine or Georgia would “come at a high price” during a meeting with Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili at NATO Headquarters in Brussels, Belgium on December 15.¹⁴¹⁷ Stoltenberg stated NATO’s full support for Georgia’s territorial integrity and called upon Russia to end its claims on Abkhazia and South Ossetia. He also stressed the need for continued vigilance in response to Russian military buildup near Ukraine and in the Black Sea. Stoltenberg stated that Georgia and Ukraine have the right to choose their own alliances without any interference from Russia and discussed NATO efforts to strengthen Georgia’s defense capabilities with maritime support, joint exercises, and information sharing. Stoltenberg stated “any future Russian aggression would come at a high price and have serious political and economic consequences for Russia.”

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky met with European Council President Charles Michel in Brussels, Belgium on December 15 ahead of a European Council meeting scheduled for December 16.¹⁴¹⁸ Zelensky emphasized the importance of pursuing cooperation through the EU’s Eastern Partnership and reiterated that Ukraine seeks full membership in the European Union. Michel and Zelensky expressed the need to continue joint efforts to prevent an escalation along the borders of Ukraine. Zelensky expressed hope that EU leaders will send “clear signals” to Russia following the European Council meeting on December 16.

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said that Russia has “no right to interfere” in Ukraine’s sovereign decision to pursue NATO membership at the Riga NATO meeting on November 30.¹⁴¹⁹ Stoltenberg emphasized Ukraine is a sovereign state and that the Kremlin has no right to dictate Ukraine’s policies. Stoltenberg said “any future Russian aggression against Ukraine would come at high price,” and called on Russia to de-escalate under threat of “serious political and economic consequences.”

Eastern and Central European Allies

Lithuania deployed instructors from an unspecified Lithuanian air defense battalion to Ukraine to train Ukrainian operators of the FIM-92 Stinger man-portable air-defense system on February 15.¹⁴²⁰

The Lithuanian government delivered an unspecified quantity of Stinger man-portable air-defense systems to Kyiv, Ukraine, on February 13.¹⁴²¹

Polish Interior Minister Mariusz Kaminski said that Poland is preparing for a possible Ukrainian refugee influx on February 13.¹⁴²² Kaminski stated that Poland is preparing for additional crisis scenarios related to Russian aggression against Ukraine.

Lithuanian President Gitanas Nausėda announced intent to request a permanent US troop deployment on Lithuanian territory on February 9.¹⁴²³

The government of Estonia gave Ukraine's Ministry of Defense an Estonian-made Role 2 mobile field hospital on February 8. The Role 2 mobile field hospital provides medical support at the brigade level. Estonia gave Ukraine the mobile field hospital during a Ukrainian Ministry of Defense delegation visit to Estonia on February 7 to 8.¹⁴²⁴

The Polish Border Guard stated that Belarus may be preparing a provocation at the Polish-Belarusian border on February 8.¹⁴²⁵ The Polish Border Guard observed that a Belarusian border post sign was suddenly missing screws that hold the Belarusian coat of arms on the post. Poland's Border Guards characterized this anomaly as a potential Belarusian preparation for a provocation; Belarusian authorities have accused Polish authorities of firing at Belarusian border outposts before.¹⁴²⁶

The Polish Senate unanimously adopted a resolution to support providing Ukraine weapons and financial aid and authorizing NATO military personnel to train the Ukrainian servicemen on February 4.¹⁴²⁷ The resolution states that a free Ukraine is one of the guarantors of Poland's security.¹⁴²⁸

Ukrainian MP Oleksiy Honcharenko claimed on February 2 that Lithuania will send Javelin anti-tank guided missiles to Ukraine on February 12-13.¹⁴²⁹

Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki specified that Poland will provide Ukraine ammunition, Grom man-portable air-defense systems, and "various types of drones" on February 1.¹⁴³⁰ Polish National Security Bureau Head Paweł Soloch first announced that Poland will send Ukraine tens of thousands of rounds of unspecified ammunition and unspecified air defense weapons on January 31.

Lithuania closed its territory for the transit of Belarusian potash fertilizers due to US sanctions on February 1.¹⁴³¹ Belarus will likely export its potash fertilizers via Russia, instead.

Polish National Security Bureau Head Paweł Soloch announced that Poland will send Ukraine tens of thousands of rounds of unspecified ammunition and unspecified air defense weapons on January 31.¹⁴³² Poland may send Ukraine the Polish PZR Grom man-portable anti-aircraft missile.¹⁴³³

The Czech Republic announced on January 26 it will ship 4,000 152mm artillery shells to Ukraine "as a gesture of solidarity," according to the Minister of Defense.¹⁴³⁴

Czech Defense Minister Jana Černochová stated Czechia would consider deploying Czech troops to Ukraine if Ukraine's government formally requested troops in an interview with Czech newspaper *Denik* on January 24.¹⁴³⁵ Černochová additionally stated that Czechia is ready to provide military assistance to Ukraine, including delivering 152mm artillery ammunition to Ukraine. This statement indicates the divergent policies and attitudes among European Union (EU) and NATO members on providing Ukraine military assistance against Russian aggression. The Kremlin likely seeks to exacerbate and exploit fissures among EU and NATO members.

Estonian Defense Minister Kalle Laanet, Latvian Defense Minister Artis Pabriks, and Lithuanian Defense Minister Arvydas Anušauskas issued a statement noting that the US Government approved their proposals to send weapons to Ukraine on January 21.¹⁴³⁶ Estonia reportedly will provide Ukraine an unspecified quantity of Javelin anti-armor missiles, and Latvia and Lithuania will provide an unspecified quantity of Stinger anti-aircraft missiles, on an unspecified future date.

Latvian Defense Minister Artis Pabriks said that Latvia intends to send unspecified weapons to Ukraine on January 5.¹⁴³⁷ Pabriks said that Latvia will provide both humanitarian and military assistance, including “weapons and equipment necessary for defense” after meeting with Ukraine’s ambassador to Latvia.

Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas characterized January talks with Russia as diplomatic dialogue and not negotiations on January 5.¹⁴³⁸ Kallas said that neither NATO nor the West is “negotiating” with Russia and said the mid-January talks are “a dialogue to maintain diplomatic communication.” Kallas also said that it is “not possible to negotiate” Russia’s “absurd conditions.” Kremlin media criticized Kallas’ statement.¹⁴³⁹

Latvian Foreign Minister Edgars Rinkevics called on the European Union and NATO to better prepare for Russian hybrid actions against Ukraine on January 5.¹⁴⁴⁰ Rinkevics said that Latvia intends to draw attention to the need for more active preparation against Russian hybrid threats against Ukraine at the January 7 NATO foreign ministerial and other meetings scheduled in January.

A senior Estonian defense official said Estonia is working on gaining US, Finish, and German permission to transfer Ukraine more Javelin anti-tank missiles and 122mm howitzers on December 30.¹⁴⁴¹ Peeter Kuimet, the Head of the International Cooperation Department of the Estonian Ministry of Defense, said Estonia is working on sending more aid to Ukraine, but that it must receive permissions from the United States to export Javelins to Ukraine. Kuimet said that Finland and Germany must give Estonia permission to transfer 122mm howitzers to Ukraine because the howitzers were previously owned by Finland and Germany.

The US State Department approved a sale of Javelin anti-tank missiles to the government of Lithuania for approximately \$125 million on December 21.¹⁴⁴² The sale includes 341 FGM-148F Javelin missiles and 30 launchers, spares, and technical support.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, Polish President Andrzej Duda, and Lithuanian President Gitanas Nausėda discussed trilateral security concerns at a Lublin Triangle meeting on December 20.¹⁴⁴³ The heads of state made a joint statement reaffirming the states’ commitment to expanding security, defense, and economic cooperation, mutual support regarding the migrant crisis in Belarus, and condemning Russian aggression and the Nord Stream 2 pipeline.¹⁴⁴⁴

Russian President Vladimir Putin and Finnish President Sauli Niinistö held a phone call on December 14.¹⁴⁴⁵ The Kremlin readout stated Putin informed Niinistö of the results of his call with US President Biden on December 7, Putin’s assessment of the situation around Ukraine, and Kyiv’s claimed violation of the Minsk agreements. Putin announced “the need to immediately begin negotiations in order to develop clear international legal

agreements that would exclude any further NATO advance to the east and the deployment of weapons threatening Russia in neighboring states, primarily in Ukraine.” Putin stressed that “this is fully consistent with the principle of the indivisibility of security, enshrined in the 1975 Helsinki Final Act and the 1999 Istanbul Charter” and “expressed support for Sauli Niinistö's initiative to organize a summit in 2025 to mark the 50th anniversary of the Helsinki Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe.” The Finnish readout stated “the Presidents had a thorough discussion on the situation at the borders of Ukraine. President Niinistö expressed the grave concern on the tense situation and stressed the need to find a diplomatic resolution to it.”

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Vladimir Titov met jointly with ambassadors from Austria, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Germany, and Switzerland on December 14.¹⁴⁴⁶ The Russian readout did not specify the topics of conversation.

The Deputy Foreign Ministers of Ukraine, Poland, and Lithuania (the “Lublin Triangle”) signed a joint action plan for countering Russian disinformation in Lutsk, Ukraine on December 11.¹⁴⁴⁷ Ukrainian Deputy Foreign Minister Mykola Tochytsky, Polish Deputy Foreign Minister Marcin Przydacz, and Lithuanian Deputy Foreign Minister Mantas Adomenas participated in the meeting. The three states created the “Lublin Triangle” format on July 28, 2020 to support trilateral dialogue and “support Ukraine’s Eur-Atlantic aspirations.”¹⁴⁴⁸ The Lublin Triangle is a non-binding discussion format similar to the Visegrad Four or Bucharest Nine. The ministers discussed the Belarusian migrant crisis and Russian military escalation near the Ukrainian border. They emphasized the need for coordination with NATO and the European Union to counter hybrid threats and prevent Russian aggression towards Ukraine. The ministers additionally signed a (non-public) Joint Action Plan for Countering Disinformation in 2022-2023. The plan “provides for the preparation of regular joint reports on information challenges and threats, the development of a joint response mechanism to Russia's destabilization campaigns, the exchange of experience and the strengthening of institutional capacity to counter hybrid threats.”

Ukraine, Lithuania, and Georgia signed a memorandum of understanding to create a cybersecurity cooperation group on December 8.¹⁴⁴⁹ The joint group’s mission is to develop multistate capabilities for cyber threat analysis by developing standard procedures for tactical and operational-level information exchanges on cyber threats, security vulnerabilities, and incident response.

Ukrainian Defense Minister Oleksiy Reznikov and Lithuanian Defense Minister Arvidas Anushauskas discussed mutual Russian and Belarusian threats on December 8.¹⁴⁵⁰ The ministers discussed the intensification of Russian-Belarusian military cooperation and the concentration of Russian troops near the border with Ukraine. They also discussed Belarusian migrant trafficking on the Lithuanian-Belarusian border and the possible risks of Belarus moving a wave of migrants to the border with Ukraine.

Polish Air Force F-16 aircraft from Siauliai Air Base, Lithuania, conducted the first Alpha Scramble training over the Baltic Sea to intercept a Russian IL-20 reconnaissance aircraft on December 8.¹⁴⁵¹ The Polish detachment Orlik-10 practiced intercepting an unknown aircraft visually resembling Russian IL-20 COOT A, which had failed to submit a flight plan and communicate with air traffic control. The exercise is a component of NATO’s Air Policing mission.

Kuleba met Lithuanian Foreign Minister Gabrielius Landsbergis on the sidelines of the OSCE ministerial in Stockholm, Sweden on December 3.¹⁴⁵² Kuleba and Landsbergis discussed Russian military deployments near Ukraine and Belarus' migrant trafficking against Lithuania and Poland.

Zelensky, Lithuanian President Gitanas Nausėda, and Polish President Andrzej Duda issued a joint statement reaffirming support for Ukraine's EU and NATO accession on December 2.¹⁴⁵³ Nausėda and Duda reiterated Lithuania's and Poland's support for Ukraine joining the EU and NATO. The statement also asserted that Belarus presents hybrid threats that impact all of European security and restated Polish and Lithuanian readiness to jointly oppose Russia's Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline.

Kuleba met with Estonian Foreign Minister Eva-Maria Liimets on the sidelines of the NATO ministerial meeting in Riga, Latvia on December 1. Kuleba informed Liimets of the Russian military deployments near Ukraine and Liimets agreed to jointly oppose Russian aggression in the Baltic-Black Sea region.¹⁴⁵⁴ Liimets reiterated Estonia's support for admitting Ukraine into the EU and NATO. Kuleba and Liimets also discussed further joint defense cooperation and responses to hybrid threats.

The defense ministers of the Bucharest Nine (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Czechia, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria) issued a statement calling for the strengthening of NATO's eastern flank "from the Baltic to Black Sea" on November 25.¹⁴⁵⁵ They also said it was necessary to work on a new defense strategy within NATO. US Deputy Secretary of Defense Kathleen Hicks addressed the allies virtually and "affirmed the U.S. commitment to NATO's eastern flank and commented on recent Russian activity around Ukraine, the migrant crisis on the Belarusian-EU border, and strategic competition with the People's Republic of China."¹⁴⁵⁶ Hicks also underscored that EU defense initiatives should remain coherent, mutually reinforcing, and interoperable with and available to NATO.

Ukrainian Political Activity

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said that Ukraine's only path is to join NATO in a BBC interview on February 17.¹⁴⁵⁷ Zelensky said that joining NATO would guarantee Ukrainian security and that Ukraine's NATO and European Union (EU) membership ambitions are about guaranteeing Ukrainian independence, not about NATO and the EU themselves. Zelensky has continuously reiterated that Ukraine will not concede to Russian demands that Ukraine not join NATO or the EU.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky visited Ukrainian troops on the frontline in Donbass to check their readiness on February 17.¹⁴⁵⁸ Zelensky met with the heads of the Ukrainian governors of the Donetsk and Luhansk regional state administrations to inspect the formation of local territorial defense units and the overall security situation in the area. Zelensky additionally stressed the importance of maintaining morale amongst Ukrainian citizens in Donbas by countering Russian propaganda efforts and strengthening Ukrainian media influence in Donbas.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and European Council President Charles Michel discussed Ukraine's current security situation on February 17.¹⁴⁵⁹

Zelensky stated that there is no evidence of a Russian troop withdrawal from the Ukrainian border. Zelensky reported several proxy violations of the ceasefire and deemed the shelling of a Ukrainian kindergarten a provocation. Zelensky stressed the need for international diplomats and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's Special Monitoring Mission to remain in Ukraine as deterrents against further Russian aggression. Michel affirmed his support of Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic aspirations and the country's territorial integrity. Michel also pledged to discuss the information Zelensky provided with European leaders.

Ukrainian Defense Minister Oleksiy Reznikov discussed Russian aggression, the West's response, and Ukrainian air defense needs on February 17.¹⁴⁶⁰ Reznikov stated that the Kremlin is using information blackmail tactics and admitted that Russian President Vladimir Putin may recognize the Luhansk and Donetsk People's Republics. Reznikov stated Ukraine does not plan to launch an offensive to return the Russian occupied territories to Ukraine. Reznikov stated that Ukraine must strengthen its air and missile defense, developing its own and when possible, sourcing weapon systems from partners. Reznikov also stated that Ukraine still aspires to join NATO and that Ukraine's former "non-aligned" status did not deter Russian invasion in 2014. Reznikov discussed financing Ukraine's decision to improve the living conditions and increasing the salaries of the Ukrainian Armed Forces. Reznikov also asserted that everything the West does primarily serves their own national interests and that many countries are currently supporting sanctions although they would prefer not to. Reznikov stated that Ukraine is ready to implement the Minsk II Accords and that there is no alternative to the Minsk II Accords.

Ukrainian Deputy Defense Minister Oleksandr Polyschuk and UK Defense Committee Head Tobias Elwood discussed opportunities for bilateral security cooperation on February 16.¹⁴⁶¹ Elwood reaffirmed the UK's steadfast support for Ukrainian sovereignty and promised close collaboration on cybersecurity, intelligence sharing, and joint-military planning.

The Ukrainian Defense Ministry (MoD) stated that Russia is increasing provocations in Donbas during a United Nations Security Council meeting on February 17.¹⁴⁶² The Ukrainian MoD said that the Russian-backed Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics shelled Ukrainian forces over 40 times in Novoaydarsky, Popasnyansky, and Toretsky between 0445 and 1300 on February 17. The Ukrainian MoD accused Russia of increasing shelling to further an information campaign justifying Russian armed aggression against Ukraine. Pro-Kremlin media outlets are mischaracterizing and amplifying the separatist shelling of schools that injured schoolchildren in Luhansk and Vrubivka villages, Luhansk Oblast, as Ukrainian Joint Forces shelling.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky held a meeting with Ukrainian Joint Forces Commander Oleksandr Paviluk, Donetsk Governor Pavlo Kyrylenko, and Luhansk Governor Serhiy Haidai on Ukrainian security and defense readiness in Mariupol, Donetsk Oblast, on February 16.¹⁴⁶³ Paviluk gave a report on the operational environment in Donbas. Zelensky additionally stressed the importance of increasing Ukraine's media presence in Donetsk and Luhansk to combat Russian disinformation campaigns.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky oversaw tactical security and defense force exercises in Rivne Oblast (on Ukraine's border with Belarus) as part of Ukraine's ongoing "Blizzard-2022" exercises on February 16.¹⁴⁶⁴ Zelensky inspected foreign weapons sent to Ukraine, including Turkish drones and antitank systems, and met with

operational staff to examine how servicemen participated in variety of training exercises using varied weapon systems.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba spoke with Polish Foreign Minister Zbigniew Rau about the security situation on the Ukrainian border and the (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe) OSCE Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine on February 16.¹⁴⁶⁵ The ministers reiterated the importance of continued vigilance even after Russia claimed it withdrew some elements from near the Ukrainian border. Kuleba additionally noted that Russia's recognition of the self-proclaimed Luhansk People's Republic (LNR) would negatively impact international law and global security. Both ministers agreed on the importance of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine and encouraged Russian officials to act with transparency in accordance with the Vienna Document of 2011 and comply with Ukrainian defense requests.

Ukrainian Defense Minister Oleksiy Reznikov delivered an address on Ukrainian Unity Day to emphasize Ukraine's military readiness on February 16.¹⁴⁶⁶ Reznikov stressed that Ukraine's military is at high readiness and that Ukraine is thoroughly protected and ready for any scenario. Reznikov stated that Ukraine is strengthening its defenses daily but does not intend to launch offensive action, stating he wishes to return Russian occupied territories to Ukraine through diplomatic – not military – means.

Ukrainian Railways announced the indefinite suspension of the Belarusian mineral fertilizers transport to Slovakia, Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic, Romania, the Commonwealth of Independent States, and the Baltic States in accordance with American sanctions against Belarusian entities on February 16.¹⁴⁶⁷ The ban specifically pertains to fertilizers produced by Belaruskali and the Belarusian Potash Company, which were both subject to sanctions due to their affiliation with Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko's regime.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba and UK Foreign Minister Liz Truss discussed the situation on the Ukrainian border on February 15.¹⁴⁶⁸ Kuleba thanked Truss for British financial and security support and emphasized the need to counter Russia's proposition to officially recognize the Luhansk and Donetsk People's Republics. Truss affirmed support for Ukraine's initiatives in the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. The ministers pledged future cooperation between Poland, Ukraine, and the United Kingdom.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba met with Italian Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio in Kyiv to coordinate executing a comprehensive deterrence package against Russia on February 15.¹⁴⁶⁹ The participants emphasized their commitment to finding a diplomatic solution with Russia. Kuleba thanked Italy for its support for new European Union sanctions against Russia. Di Maio confirmed that Italy's embassy will continue to operate in Kyiv. Both leaders committed to strengthen cooperation in politics, technology, trade, and investments.

Ukrainian Defense Minister Oleksiy Reznikov and German Defense Minister Christine Lambrecht discussed regional security and deepening bilateral cooperation on February 15.¹⁴⁷⁰ Reznikov informed Lambrecht of threats to Ukrainian and European security and proposed measures to reduce them. Both parties agreed that a diplomatic settlement to the current situation is necessary. Reznikov thanked Lambrecht for

German assistance in developing the medical service of the Ukrainian Armed Forces. Lambrecht reaffirmed German support of the territorial integrity of Ukraine.

Ukrainian Permanent Representative to the United Nations (UN) Serhiy Kyslytsya appealed to UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres against the Russian proposal to formally recognize the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics (DNR and LNR) on February 15.¹⁴⁷¹ Kyslytsya reiterated that Russia's formal recognition of the DNR and LNR would indicate a conscious Russian withdrawal from the Minsk II Accords and would undermine any political-diplomatic settlement. Kyslytsya asked Guterres and UN member states to push Russia into seeking a resolution through existing diplomatic channels.

Ukrainian National Security and Defense Council Secretary Oleksiy Danilov stated on February 14 that 23 Ukrainian parliamentary MPs fled Ukraine and did not return for a parliamentary meeting on February 15.¹⁴⁷² Twelve of the 23 MPs who fled Ukraine are members of the pro-Russia Opposition Platform – For Life (OPZZh) party. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky warned that any parliamentary representative that leaves Ukraine “would face consequences”. No representatives fled to Russia; most MPs who fled are currently in European Union states.

Ukrainian Deputy Foreign Minister Denys Monastyrsky said that the February 15 Distributed-Denial-of-Service (DDoS) attack against Ukrainian government sites, banks, and other services was the largest cyberattack in Ukrainian history. Monastyrsky stressed that although the attack failed, it intended to inflict psychological and information pressure on Ukraine. Monastyrsky stated that Ukrainian cyber police units will remain vigilant in the case of any future DDoS attempts.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida discussed future collaboration and Russia's military buildup near Ukraine on February 15.¹⁴⁷³ Zelensky stressed Ukraine's desire for a diplomatic solution through the Normandy Format and other international avenues. Zelensky thanked Kishida for Japan's financial assistance and support of Ukraine's territorial integrity. Zelensky and Kishida discussed the importance of fortifying Ukraine's financial and defense stability.

The Ukrainian Foreign Ministry (MFA) and Verkhovna Rada condemned the Russian State Duma's proposal to petition Russian President Vladimir Putin to recognize the Donetsk (DNR) and Luhansk People's Republics (LNR) on February 15.¹⁴⁷⁴ The Ukrainian MFA said Russia's formal recognition of the DNR and LNR would amount to a Russian withdrawal from the Minsk II Accords and would formally implicate Russia as an aggressor in the war in Donbas. The Ukrainian Verkhovna Rada condemned the Duma bill, called on the international community to not recognize any Russian decisions on recognizing the LNR and DNR, and called for imposing immediate sanctions to further disincentivize Russian escalation in Donbas.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky announced a wage raise of 30 percent for Ukrainian Armed Forces personnel and a wage raise of 20 percent for personnel of the Ukrainian National Guard and State Border Guard Service on February 15.¹⁴⁷⁵ The wage raises will take effect on March 1.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi discussed diplomatic efforts to de-escalate the situation near Ukraine's borders on February 15.¹⁴⁷⁶ Zelensky and Draghi discussed intensifying work in all existing negotiation formats, including in the Normandy Format. Zelensky stressed the importance of further cooperation and reaffirmed Ukraine's commitment to a diplomatic solution.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba and United Nations (UN) Secretary-General Antonio Guterres discussed diplomatic solutions to the Ukrainian crisis and concerns that Russia is manipulating the Minsk II Accords on February 14.¹⁴⁷⁷ Kuleba warned that Russia's attempts to manipulate the Minsk II Accords seek to establish a direct dialogue between Kyiv and the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics. Kuleba reaffirmed that Ukraine seeks to find a diplomatic solution with Russia in the Normandy Format and encouraged Guterres to "use the good offices of the UN Secretary-General mechanism for de-escalation."

Ukrainian President Zelensky issued a declaration on February 14 naming February 16 a "national day of unity" and committing the Cabinet of Ministers to several action plans.¹⁴⁷⁸ Zelensky designated February 16 a "day of unity" in response to international media reports that Russia will begin an offensive against unoccupied Ukraine on February 16, reports Zelensky denied. Zelensky's declaration called on the Cabinet of Ministers to submit an action plan by February 15 to ensure financial support to servicemen of the Armed Forces of Ukraine increases by 30 percent starting March 1. Zelensky additionally called on the Cabinet of Ministers to create "a single information platform" to inform the public daily about "the real state of the security situation." Finally, Zelensky called for the creation and functioning of the territorial defense system to accelerate.

Germany Chancellor Scholz reassured Ukrainian President Zelensky of German support for Ukraine during a meeting in Kyiv on February 14.¹⁴⁷⁹ Scholz expressed support for Ukraine but maintained Germany's opposition to sending lethal aid to Ukraine. Scholz additionally announced a new loan of 150 million euros to Ukraine. Zelensky thanked Scholz for his support but expressed dissatisfaction at Germany's unwillingness to provide Ukraine lethal aid or abandon the Nord Stream 2 pipeline. Scholz will travel to Moscow to meet Russian President Putin on February 15.

Speaker of the Ukrainian Rada (parliament) Ruslan Stefanchuk announced on February 14 that the Rada is preparing a bill reaffirming that the territory controlled by the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics (DNR and LNR) are Ukrainian in the event Russia formally recognizes the proxy republics.¹⁴⁸⁰

Ukraine's Border Service denied reports by Ukrainian outlet Censor.net that Ukraine is preventing military age Russian men from crossing the Ukrainian border on February 14.¹⁴⁸¹

The Ukrainian State Security Service (SBU) said that the Ukrainian information space is in a hybrid war aimed to create panic on February 14.¹⁴⁸² The SBU readout does not specify the perpetrators but indirectly refers to Russian disinformation and subversive campaigns in Ukraine. The SBU called on Ukrainians to remain calm, think critically about information, and "not succumb to provocations." The SBU likely released this statement to deescalate an aggravated information space in Ukraine to reduce public panic.

Ukrainian President Zelensky spoke with EU President Michel on February 13.¹⁴⁸³ Zelensky thanked Michel for his efforts to consolidate international support for Ukraine. Zelensky and Michel discussed diplomatic situations to the current crisis and Zelensky thanked Michel for the EU states that have kept their diplomatic personnel in Kyiv. Zelensky called for preventive sanctions against Russia in order to curb the Kremlin's aggressive intentions. Zelensky and Michel additionally discussed methods to increase Ukraine's financial stability. Zelensky confirmed the invariability of Ukraine's course of European integration.

US President Joe Biden and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky discussed the Russian military buildup on Ukraine's borders and de-escalation efforts on February 13.¹⁴⁸⁴ Biden stated that the United States would respond swiftly and decisively to further Russian aggression against Ukraine. Both parties agreed on the importance of using diplomacy to address the situation and discussed potential sanctions against Russia in the event of further invasion. Zelensky acknowledged the steps taken by Ukrainian allies and affirmed that there is no European security without Ukrainian security. Zelensky stated that Ukraine's security situation is secure and that its cities are safe under reliable protection. Zelensky also confirmed Ukraine's dedication to a peaceful settlement and its commitment to a strong Ukrainian army as it is not a member of NATO. The Ukrainian president noted the importance of the United States' contributions to strengthening the Ukrainian Armed Forces and stated that Biden's arrival in Kyiv would contribute further to de-escalation.

Ukrainian newspaper *Ukrainska Pravda* reported that various Ukrainian politicians and oligarchs who are historically pro-Russia or have ties to pro-Russian parties fled Ukraine as of February 13.¹⁴⁸⁵ The fleeing Ukrainian politicians and oligarchs include Former People's Deputy Rinat Akhmetov, Ukraine is Our Home party leader Borys Kolesnikov, Opposition Bloc leader Vadym Novynsky, Oleksandr Yaroslavskiy, Igor Abramovich, Viktor Pinchuk, Andriy Stavnitsker, Vadym Nesterenko, Vadym Stolar, and Vasyl Khmelnytskyi. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky previously named Akhmetov as a potential conspirator in a potential Russia-backed coup that Zelensky said would occur on December 1 to 2, 2021.

Ukrainian President Zelensky spoke with Canadian PM Trudeau on February 12.¹⁴⁸⁶ Zelensky and Trudeau discussed the security situation around Ukraine and efforts to de-escalate. Zelensky thanked Canada for the continuation of its UNIFIER military training mission in Ukraine and continued financial assistance.

Ukrainian President Zelensky challenged media reports Russia will invade unoccupied Ukraine on February 16 during an interview with BBC's Ukraine service on February 12.¹⁴⁸⁷ Zelensky stated "there is too much information in the information space about a deep full-scale war" from Russia and "they are even talking about the relevant dates." He added that Ukraine understands the risk and said "if you or some people have additional information about a 100% invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation starting on the 16th [February], please give us such information. Zelensky stated Ukraine "also [has] intelligence" and that he doesn't think "that it works worse than the intelligence of other states."

Ukrainian Defense Minister Reznikov and Commander in Chief of the Ukrainian Armed Forces Zaluzhny issued a joint statement on February 12 praising the state of the Ukrainian military and claiming no enemy can capture large Ukrainian cities.¹⁴⁸⁸ They stressed there will be "no repeat of 2014" and claimed Ukraine has the

strongest military in Europe. Reznikov thanked international partners for their support to Ukraine, including the delivery of over 2,000 tons of lethal aid in the past month. Reznikov and Zaluzhny called for calm and praised the work of diplomats to resolve the crisis while vowing Ukraine is ready for any Russian escalation.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky presided over a Ukrainian National Security and Defense Council meeting in Kharkiv on February 11.¹⁴⁸⁹ The council discussed the formation of Ukrainian territorial defense, Ukrainian sanctions against Russian legal entities and TV channels in Ukraine, and approved Ukraine's Maritime Security Strategy.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and Polish President Andrzej Duda discussed Russian aggression on February 10.¹⁴⁹⁰ Zelensky and Duda discussed Poland's support of Ukraine's defense capabilities and future collaboration with Great Britain. Zelensky emphasized the importance of Poland's role in the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe to ensure European security and reach a peaceful settlement in Donbas. Zelensky and Duda also discussed Ukraine's potential accession to NATO and the European Union.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky thanked NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg for NATO's continued support of Ukrainian territorial integrity its diplomatic efforts to reduce tensions with Russia on February 10.¹⁴⁹¹ The two leaders also discussed the conditions for Ukraine's participation at the upcoming NATO Madrid Summit on June 29-30.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and Lithuanian Prime Minister Ingrida Šimonyte discussed Russia's military buildup near Ukraine on February 10. Zelensky and Šimonyte discussed the progression of the Normandy Format, the ongoing Russian military buildup near Ukraine, and bolstering bilateral relations. Zelensky and Šimonyte agreed to coordinate their strategies for the NATO Madrid Summit on June 29-30.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba and Ukrainian Culture and Information Policy Minister Oleksandr Tkachenko issued a joint statement to combat the international spread of Russian propaganda about Russian-occupied Donbas on February 10.¹⁴⁹² The statement reiterates that the self-declared Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics are Russian-imposed and not party to any mediation or settlement. Kuleba and Tkachenko reiterated that Russian aggression against Ukraine has existed since the Russian annexation of Crimea in February 2014 and is not an active threat. The statement also asserts that journalists may only legally visit occupied Donbas through Ukrainian checkpoints along the demarcation line.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky stated that the Russian troop buildup around Ukraine is "psychological pressure" while addressing the European Business Association on February 10.¹⁴⁹³ Zelensky said that the risk of Russian aggression has existed since 2014 and that Ukraine is taking every measure to strengthen its defenses. Zelensky stated that the Ukrainian government's main task developing its economy, stating "everyone understands who our neighbor is, but it should not affect the economy." Ukrainian officials regularly downplay the threat of an imminent Russian invasion, countering Western officials' statements of concern.

The Ukrainian Foreign Ministry condemned Russia's decision to block the Black and Azov Seas and the Kerch Strait under the pretext of naval exercises on February 10.¹⁴⁹⁴ The Ukrainian Foreign Ministry stated that Russian actions are a blatant violation of the United Nations (UN) Charter, UN General Assembly resolutions, and UN Convention on the Law of the Sea. The Ukrainian Foreign Ministry noted that the blockade will have massive implications for international shipping and trade.

Ukrainian Defense Minister Oleksiy Reznikov said that Ukraine expects a strong reaction from its defense partners in response to increased Russian militarization of the Black Sea on February 10.¹⁴⁹⁵ Reznikov said that the Russian Navy's designation of large sections of the Black Sea and Sea of Azov as unsafe from February 13-19 is a violation of Ukrainian sovereignty and maritime rights. Reznikov accused Russia of repeatedly using exercises to justify increased militarization of desired buildup areas.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba spoke at the French Institute for International Affairs about the current challenges faced by the Euro-Atlantic community, the circumstances leading to the current tensions with Russia, and further necessary steps to ensure European security on February 10.¹⁴⁹⁶ Kuleba traced the history of the Ukrainian state and its relationship with Russia and affirmed that Ukraine has always been an integral part of Europe and the West. Kuleba criticized Russian President Vladimir Putin for artificially forcing escalation around Ukraine and stressed the importance of a political-diplomatic solution to the conflict. Kuleba outlined Ukraine's strategic vision for the future peace and security of the European community through strengthening alliance blocs and organizations, incorporating smaller regional alliances, and committing to sanctions against Russia.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba and Chairman-in-Office of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and Polish Foreign Minister Zbigniew Rau discussed OSCE efforts to increase the presence of the OSCE Special Mission (SMM) to Ukraine and restore peace on February 10.¹⁴⁹⁷ Kuleba praised Poland for its initiative to implement security dialogues within the OSCE that could reduce the potential for violent military encounters. The two leaders discussed their shared interest to use the Trilateral Contract Group to further reduce tensions between Ukraine and Russia. Kuleba also stated that Ukraine's diplomatic efforts with Russia have been effective and reiterated Ukraine does not envision an imminent Russian invasion.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy met with Spanish Foreign Minister Jose Manuel Alvarez Bueno and spoke about engaging European support for Ukraine and Ukrainian initiatives within the Normandy Format on February 9.¹⁴⁹⁸ Bueno affirmed Spain's commitment to Ukrainian sovereignty and underlined the importance of galvanizing EU support for Ukrainian defense capabilities.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said that "diplomacy works and restrains Russia's aggressive intentions" during a speech on Ukrainian TV channel 1+1 on February 9.¹⁴⁹⁹ Kuleba said that the completion of active multilateral diplomacy, sanctions packages, and defense cooperation actively reduces the risk of Russian aggression. Kuleba stated Ukraine first proposed a three-pronged Russia containment package through diplomacy, sanctions, and defensive cooperation to its NATO and EU allies in November 2021.

Ukrainian Minister of Foreign Affairs Dmytro Kuleba spoke with Spanish Minister of Foreign Affairs Jose Manuel Alvarez Bueno about the security situation on the Ukrainian border and the importance of the entire European community engaging with the on-going crisis on February 9.¹⁵⁰⁰ Both ministers discussed their commitment to Ukraine's European integration through strengthening Ukrainian defense capabilities. Bueno reaffirmed Spanish support for Ukrainian sovereignty and voiced his support for Kuleba's proposal for a large-scale business forum between Ukraine and Spain.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba and French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian discussed deescalating Russian aggression in Kyiv, Ukraine on February 9.¹⁵⁰¹ Le Drian emphasized France's commitment to Ukrainian sovereignty and the importance of centering Ukraine in conversations about deterring Russian aggression. Kuleba and Le Drian discussed pursuing additional diplomatic deterrence measures through the Normandy Format. Kuleba also invited Le Drian to a summit on Crimea in August 2022.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba gave an interview about Ukraine's strategy to deter Russian aggression on February 8.¹⁵⁰² Kuleba stated that Ukraine's strategy to deter Russian aggression is "active diplomacy at all levels, including intensive visits by foreign leaders and top officials to Ukraine and the transformation of Kyiv into a center of international politics." Kuleba stated that Russia will not "take any military steps, knowing that dear international guests are currently on the territory of Ukraine."

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba met with the foreign Ministers of Czechia, Austria, and Slovakia in Kyiv on February 7 to 8.¹⁵⁰³ The Czech, Austrian, and Slovakian foreign ministers expressed their support for Ukraine against Russian aggression. The ministers agreed that Russian aggression undermines European – not just Ukrainian – security and reaffirmed the need to maintain unity to deter Russia. The ministers discussed the implementation of a "comprehensive package" of measures, including sanctions, to deter Russia from further aggression.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba and German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock discussed intensifying work in the Normandy Format and deterring Russian aggression in Kyiv on February 7.¹⁵⁰⁴ Kuleba thanked Baerbock for Germany's efforts to prepare a meeting of the political advisers to the leaders of the Normandy Format states in Berlin during the week of February 6 – 12. Kuleba reiterated Ukraine's "red lines" that Ukraine will not make any concessions on issues of sovereignty and territorial integrity within Ukraine's internationally recognized borders, will not have direct dialogue with the Russian occupation administrations in Donetsk and Luhansk, and will not allow foreign states to determine Ukraine's foreign policy.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said foreign political, security, and economic support for Ukraine exceeded 1.5 billion dollars and 1,000 tons worth of defensive weapons and military equipment on February 7.¹⁵⁰⁵

Former Ukrainian president Petro Poroshenko called for a United Nations (UN) mission in Donbas on February 6.¹⁵⁰⁶ Poroshenko said Russian aggression may spread to Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Finland, Norway, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Poroshenko stated that UN peacekeepers and an international conference would elevate the conflict in Donbas as a European and global security issue rather than simply a Ukrainian problem.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and Slovakian President Zuzana Čaputová discussed security cooperation on February 4.¹⁵⁰⁷ Zelensky briefed Caputova on Ukrainian efforts to intensify negotiations within the Normandy Format and the implement the Minsk II Accords. The leaders also agreed to hold interagency negotiations to increase the guaranteed capacity for natural gas transportation between Slovakia and Ukraine.

Ukrainian Deputy Defense Minister Hanna Malyar met with a United Kingdom parliamentary delegation of the Scottish National Party to discuss the security situation in Ukraine and measures to deter Russian aggression in Kyiv on February 4.¹⁵⁰⁸

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said that foreign support for Ukraine is at its highest level since 2014 on February 3.¹⁵⁰⁹ Kuleba stated that Russia has not achieved its strategic objectives in Ukraine.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and French President Emmanuel Macron discussed using the Normandy Format to find a diplomatic solution to the conflict in Donbas on February 3.¹⁵¹⁰ The French readout states that their discussion focused on efforts to “capitalize on recent positive advances in the Normandy Format to achieve a lasting solution in Donbas.”

Ukraine’s State Security Service (SBU) stated on February 2 that it prevented or neutralized 121 cyberattacks against Ukrainian government websites and servers in January 2022.¹⁵¹¹

Ukrainian Defense Minister Oleksiy Reznikov gave a speech stating the Russian military threat to Ukraine is low on February 3.¹⁵¹² Reznikov said that there is no “imminent invasion” threat to Ukraine. Reznikov said that Ukraine does not see the formation of offensive groups on the Belarusian-Ukrainian border. Reznikov stressed that the White House removed the word “imminent” from its lexicon when describing the potential Russian invasion threat to Ukraine. Reznikov said that there is no reason for Ukrainian “panic, fear, flight, or packing of any suitcases.” Reznikov stated that Russia has approximately 115,000 troops near Ukraine’s borders, that Russia is deploying forces to Crimea and Voronezh, that the Kremlin is supplying military materials to Russia’s proxy militias in Donbas, and that landing ships of the Russian Northern Fleet are deploying to the Mediterranean Sea. Reznikov stated that Ukraine is not planning an invasion of Donbas or Crimea.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan signed a cooperation agreement on Bayraktar drone production, a free trade agreement, and other agreements in Kyiv on February 3.¹⁵¹³ Turkish and Ukrainian officials also signed memorandums of understanding and agreements on cooperation in customs, taxation, law enforcement, and other policy areas. Erdogan stated that Turkey supports Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity, including Crimea, and reiterated Turkey’s willingness to mediate and host a summit in Turkey with Zelensky and Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba participated in a Bucharest Nine (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Czechia, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria) NATO foreign ministerial meeting on February 3.¹⁵¹⁴ The ministers agreed that Russia’s aggressive actions threaten not only Ukraine’s security but also that of other

Central European countries and the Euro-Atlantic area in general. The Ukrainian readout states that the Bucharest Nine states are opposed to “spheres of influence” and that a “number of members of the Bucharest Nine” are preparing solutions to strengthen Ukraine's defense capabilities, cyber defense, and economic stability, as well as coordinating steps to implement a package of deterrence measures against Russia.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba and UK Foreign Minister Liz Truss discussed Ukrainian security on February 2.¹⁵¹⁵ Kuleba and Truss coordinated further steps to develop the new trilateral cooperation format between Ukraine, the United Kingdom, and Poland. They also discussed UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson's visit to Kyiv and agreed on priorities to implement the agreements that Johnson and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky reached on February 1.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte issued a joint statement on February 2.¹⁵¹⁶ Rutte stated that the Netherlands will expand its rehabilitation program for wounded Ukrainian servicemen. The leaders condemned any third-party efforts to use energy as a weapon and expressed a goal to enhance Ukrainian energy security, green transition, and gradually integrate Ukraine into European Union gas and electricity markets. The leaders discussed the importance of strengthening cooperation between Ukraine and the European Union within the Common Security and Defense Policy framework and in the field of professional military education. Rutte announced that the Netherlands will allocate funding for Ukrainian non-governmental organizations and the United Nations Development Program to support security and justice in conflict-affected regions in eastern Ukraine. Rutte also announced that the Netherlands is ready to provide technical cyber assistance to Ukraine following the January 14 cyberattack against Ukraine and expand cooperation on countering cyber, hybrid, and disinformation threats. The Netherlands will also allocate 400,000 euros to Ukraine under a humanitarian response plan. Rutte reaffirmed that the Netherlands supports the 2008 NATO Bucharest summit declaration and Ukraine's right to decide its own foreign policy without outside interference. Zelensky claimed that Ukraine stabilized its currency and “calmed” markets despite the adverse informational situation surrounding Ukraine.¹⁵¹⁷ Zelensky added that European Union countries helped Ukraine's currency normalization by not withdrawing investments from Ukraine.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba discussed Russian military, disinformation, and cybersecurity campaigns against Ukraine with Dutch Foreign Minister Wopke Hoekstra on February 2.¹⁵¹⁸ Kuleba emphasized Ukraine needs more weapons.

Ukrainian Defense Minister Oleksiy Reznikov said that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's decree on expanding Ukrainian Armed Forces by 100,000 servicemen by 2025 is “a reaction to the challenges facing [Ukraine]” on February 2.¹⁵¹⁹ Reznikov said that Zelensky signed the decree so that “no one in the Kremlin would even think about attacking Ukraine.” Reznikov said that increasing the number of Ukrainian army personnel will accelerate the development of Ukraine's military by eliminating a constant threat of invasion. Reznikov noted that Ukraine hopes to completely replace current conscription practices with short-term intensive training lasting three-to-four months to increase military staffing by January 1, 2024. Reznikov stated that the Ukrainian government will soon propose necessary bills and regulations to implement the decree.

Ukrainian Defense Minister Oleksiy Reznikov discussed future military cooperation prospects with a European Parliament delegation on February 1.¹⁵²⁰ Reznikov reassured the delegation that Ukraine is committed to European integration and asked the European Union (EU) for continuous support against Russian aggression. Reznikov said Ukraine actively supports dialogue with the EU especially on topics related to the EU's Common Security and Defense Policy. Reznikov stated Ukraine would like to participate in the EU Defense Summit planned for March 2022.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky announced that Ukraine, Poland, and the United Kingdom are preparing a “new format of political cooperation in Europe” on February 1.¹⁵²¹ Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba characterized the new arrangement as a “new small alliance,” “tripartite cooperation,” and “a new format.”¹⁵²² Kuleba also characterized it as “an association of countries that share common principles, seek to strengthen security and develop trade, ready for concrete action.” Kuleba stated that Ukraine is now strengthening its security “by uniting friendly and close-minded countries into small alliances” because Ukraine needs security and allies now and cannot wait until Ukraine is a European Union and NATO member.¹⁵²³ Kuleba stated that Ukraine, the United Kingdom, and Poland planned to formally announce the new format on February 2 during UK Foreign Minister Liz Truss’ visit to Kyiv, however that visit was suddenly postponed because Truss became ill with COVID-19. It is unclear whether this agreement is a formal alliance as Kuleba suggested or a less formal agreement as of February 1.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky signed a decree to augment the Ukrainian military on February 1.¹⁵²⁴ The decree increases the number of personnel in the Armed Forces of Ukraine by 100,000 and creates an additional 20 brigades over the next three years (2022-2025). The decree also increases servicemen pay up to at least three times Ukraine’s minimum wage, increases military contract durations, sets conditions to improve housing for Ukrainian servicemen and veterans, and develops a career advancement system for officers. Zelensky stated that this decree is “the start of Ukraine’s transition to a professional army” and underscored that he did not sign the decree because of an impending war. Zelensky also gave a speech in which he announced that the prime ministers of Great Britain, Poland, the Netherlands and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan will arrive in Kyiv on the week of February 1-6. Zelensky said that Turkey and Ukraine are preparing to sign a free trade agreement.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba and Spanish Foreign Minister José Manuel Albares Bueno discussed the security situation around Ukraine on February 1.¹⁵²⁵ Bueno assured Kuleba of Spain's full support for Ukraine's efforts to restore its sovereignty and territorial integrity through political and diplomatic channels. Bueno also told Kuleba that Spain has no intention to evacuate its embassy in Kyiv at this time.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky met with Executive Vice President of the European Commission Valdis Dombrovskis in Kyiv on January 31.¹⁵²⁶ Zelensky thanked Dombrovskis for the European Union’s macro-financial assistance program for 1.2 billion euros. Zelensky and Dombrovskis agreed that the European Union will disburse the first tranche of 600 million euros without additional conditions immediately after Ukraine and European Union complete all necessary transfer procedures.

Ukrainian Defense Minister Oleksiy Reznikov met with his Canadian counterpart Anita Anand to discuss the security situation surrounding joint Russian-

Belarusian exercises on January 31.¹⁵²⁷ The ministers also discussed security concerns over the proxy republics and Russian occupied territories and Russian hybrid warfare against Ukraine and NATO members. Anand noted that Canada will continue to allocate democracy, reform, and defense development resources to Ukraine.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba discussed Russian disinformation campaigns within the Donbas proxy republics and occupied territories with his Swedish counterpart Ann Linde on January 31.¹⁵²⁸ Kuleba informed Linde about Russian attempts to destabilize Ukrainian financial and economic stability via hybrid warfare. Linde reaffirmed active support for full deterrence measures such as sanctions against Russian aggression.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba urged Russian President Vladimir Putin to “concentrate on the welfare and future of Russia instead of spending billions on waging war” on January 31.¹⁵²⁹ Kuleba added that Ukraine and its partners are in the process of deterring “the worst-case scenario” and prevent Putin from getting “what he wants without even crossing the red line.”

Ukrainian Defense Minister Oleksiy Reznikov said Russia poses no threat that would warrant a transition to a wartime economy on January 31.¹⁵³⁰ Reznikov said that Ukraine replenished its fuel reserves and acquired ammunition. Reznikov said if an immediate Russian threat emerges Ukrainian government will switch economic systems to address war spending. Reznikov additionally said Ukraine must establish a plan to develop the Ukrainian army for the future.

Ukraine’s Interior Ministry (MVD) announced that it detained likely Russian agents who were preparing large riots and violent clashes with Ukrainian authorities in Kyiv, Sumy, Chernhiv, Poltava, and Cherkasy on January 31.¹⁵³¹ The MVD reported that it prevented “one of the scenarios of aggression against Ukraine” and that the detained actors planned to conduct a violent protest near the president of Ukraine’s office with up to 5,000 participants.

Pro-Russian Ukrainian opposition leader Viktor Medvedchuk said that Russia recognizes Donbas as Ukrainian on January 29.¹⁵³² Medvedchuk said, “We must do everything to use this [Russian] position [that Donbas is Ukraine] and implement peace negotiations and the return of Donbas to Ukraine and Ukraine to Donbas in these territories.” The Kremlin likely still seeks to integrate the Donetsk and Luhansk Peoples Republics into Ukraine’s central government as Kremlin-controlled proxies.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky had a phone call with French President Emmanuel Macron discussing the Normandy Four and Minsk Accords on January 29.¹⁵³³ The presidents agreed to arrange the next meeting of Normandy Four Presidential advisors, continue the work of the Trilateral Contact Group, and further efforts to realize the Minsk Accords.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba held a call with French counterpart Jean-Yves Le Drian to discuss Russian aggression, threats at Ukraine’s borders, Russian-occupied territories, and the Black Sea on January 29.¹⁵³⁴ The ministers noted the importance of maintaining a firm position during contact with Russia and discussed possible diplomatic settlements of Russian escalations. The ministers emphasized the results of

the Normandy Four meeting on January 26 and Ukraine's need alleviate panic to preserve its financial stability.

Ukrainian President Zelensky held a press conference with international media on January 28 in which he downplayed the risk of a Russian escalation against Ukraine.¹⁵³⁵ Zelensky thanked international partners for their economic and military support for Ukraine, calling for further shipments of military aid. Zelensky downplayed the risk of a Russian invasion of unoccupied Ukraine and stated Western warnings of an imminent Russian invasion of Ukraine can cause as much economic damage to Ukraine as actual Russian action. Zelensky stated he does not see a greater threat from the current buildup of Russian troops than that in March-April 2021. Zelensky accused Western states of causing panic and destabilizing Ukraine by evacuating personnel from their embassies. Zelensky directly rejected US President's Biden's claims of an imminent Russian invasion, stating "I'm the president of Ukraine, I'm based here and I think I know the details deeper than any other president."

Ukrainian Defense Minister Oleksiy Reznikov gave a speech on Russian military threats, Ukraine's defense reforms, and capability building in a speech to the Ukrainian Parliament on January 28.¹⁵³⁶ Reznikov said that Ukraine's Ministry of Defense counts approximately 112,000 ground forces troops in and around Ukraine - which it defines as within 200km - as of January 28. Reznikov said that if you include Russian naval and aviation forces, Russia has approximately 130,000 troops near Ukraine. Reznikov said the Ukrainian government plans to approve three programs in 2022 to start a "systematic process of [Ukrainian military] rearmament": a Ukrainian Armed Forces development program, an arms development program, and a missile program. Reznikov said that Ukraine is receiving foreign military-technical assistance that Ukraine "could have only dreamed of before" and specifically thanked the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Sweden, Denmark, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, the Czech Republic, the Netherlands, Spain, Poland, Turkey, European Union leadership, Japan, and Croatian Prime Minister Andriy Plenković for "specific actions and a clear position."

Ukraine's State Security Service (SBU) released wiretaps claiming that a Russian military intelligence agent was planning to conduct arson and terrorist attacks with explosives against civilian and military targets in Odesa on January 28.¹⁵³⁷ The SBU announced that it detained this claimed agent on January 10.¹⁵³⁸

Ukraine's Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) announced on January 28 that the Russian Southern Military District intensified military recruitment campaigns in occupied Donetsk and Luhansk to augment the proxy militias in the second half of January 2022.¹⁵³⁹

Ukrainian Defense Minister Reznikov met with a bipartisan US Congressional delegation in Kyiv on January 28.¹⁵⁴⁰ Reznikov and the delegation discussed possible legal instruments to deter Russian aggression against Ukraine. Reznikov additionally thanked the US for its military-technical support to Ukraine.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba and EU Foreign Policy Chief Josep Borrell discussed preparations for deterrence sanctions against Russia on January 27.¹⁵⁴¹

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Kuleba met with Danish Prime Minister Frederiksen during a visit to Copenhagen on January 27.¹⁵⁴² Kuleba thanked Frederiksen for

Denmark's "proactive position" to counteract Russian aggression. Kuleba thanked Denmark for its plan to provide 22 million Euros to strengthen Ukraine's security sector from 2022-2025. Kuleba and Frederiksen discussed additional opportunities for Danish investment in Ukraine, including starting negotiations on a draft bilateral agreement on joint shipbuilding in Ukraine. **The Ukrainian Parliament ratified a Framework Agreement between Ukraine and the UK to support the development of Ukraine's Navy on January 27.**¹⁵⁴³ The agreement is intended to enable Ukraine to re-equip its navy with modernized systems. Ukraine will acquire two minesweepers, eight missile boats, and consulting and technical support from the UK for the construction of naval infrastructure in Ukraine. **Ukrainian National Security and Defense Council Secretary Oleksiy Danilov downplayed the urgency of the Russian military threat to Ukraine in an interview with the BBC on January 24.**¹⁵⁴⁴ Danilov did not deny a Russian threat to Ukraine but stated that Russia has posed a threat to Ukraine since at least 2008. Danilov said that the Kremlin seeks to destabilize Ukraine's internal situation and said the Ukrainian government's job is to "do our job in a calm, balanced atmosphere." Danilov said Ukraine is ready to defend itself and that Ukraine has been defending itself since 2014. Danilov implied that Western states created an agitated media environment about the Russian military buildup around Ukraine due to Western states' own internal political issues, such as French elections and German government changes. Danilov said that the American government's announcement urging US personnel to depart the Embassy in Kyiv further aggravated the information space in Ukraine.

Ukraine's Security Service (SBU) claimed that counterintelligence officers neutralized an organized crime group operating under Russian intelligence services in Zhytomyr and Kharkiv on January 25.¹⁵⁴⁵ The SBU claimed that the group, composed of two locals disguised as security guards, aimed to commit several robberies in urban infrastructure facilities and commercial spheres to destabilize the situation in the regions. One group member was a Russian citizen. SBU found an explosive device, small arms, ammunition, devices for radio frequency suppression, a draft of a robbery plan, communication means, and a computer with "evidence of illegal activities."

Ukrainian Defense Minister Oleksiy Reznikov said "there is no reason to believe that there will be an open Russian invasion across border" on January 25.¹⁵⁴⁶ Reznikov said that there are approximately 109,000 Russian troops near Ukrainian border – a number similar to the total Russian deployments to the border in April 2021. Reznikov reassured that Ukraine's Western partners – including the US, UK, Northern Ireland, Poland, and the Baltic countries – continue to provide military aid and support to Ukraine. Reznikov noted that the Ukrainian Armed Forces are in excellent moral and psychological state, have full staffing and enough weapons.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba and his Georgian counterpart David Zalkaliani agreed that any concessions to Russia on Ukraine and Georgia's integration into NATO "are unacceptable" on January 25.¹⁵⁴⁷ Zalkaliani confirmed that Georgia will not evacuate diplomatic families from Ukraine and Kuleba informed his counterpart of an international comprehensive package aimed at deterring Russian aggression. The ministers discussed economic cooperation within developing Associated Trio and GUAM (Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Moldova) frameworks.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky had a phone call with Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev on expanding Ukrainian-Azerbaijani cooperation on

January 25.¹⁵⁴⁸ Aliyev previously had a phone call with Russian President Vladimir Putin on January 18, where both officials discussed Aliyev's visit to Kyiv on January 14 and concerns over what the Kremlin frames as the stalled "intra-Ukrainian settlement."¹⁵⁴⁹ Azerbaijan is likely attempting to become an intermediary power in Ukrainian-Russian relations.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky held a meeting with the National Security and Defense Council on external and internal threats on January 24.¹⁵⁵⁰ Zelensky and the Council urged Ukrainians to stay calm, stating that the situation in Ukraine is "under control." Ukrainian Defense Minister Oleksiy Reznikov said 10,000 territorial defense forces and 1,000 special operations personnel joined the Ukrainian Armed Forces to form a resistance movement. Reznikov added that Ukrainian forces have formed four territorial defense battalions and will establish additional 25 brigades. Ukrainian Head of the State Service for Special Communications and Information Protection Yuriy Shchigol said the government will urgently introduce the Big Bounty bug reporting system to increase Ukrainian cybersecurity after the January 13-14 cyberattack. Shchigol said the government will hire cybersecurity officers for critical infrastructure facilities and create financial incentives for compliance with cybersecurity protocols. Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmygal said the Ukrainian economy is in stable shape, and Zelensky added that Ukraine has enough gas to outlast winter. It is likely that the meeting discussed Russian invasion threats behind closed doors to avoid panic in Ukrainian society.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky called on Ukraine's Main Intelligence Directorate (GUR) to "move onto offensive actions in defense of [Ukrainian] national interests" on January 24.¹⁵⁵¹ Zelensky likely did not intend to imply an offensive operation against Russia during the GUR meeting to celebrate Ukraine's Day of the Intelligence Service. Some Kremlin-sponsored outlets exploited Zelensky's statements to imply that Ukraine is preparing an attack on Donbas.¹⁵⁵² The Kremlin will likely use Zelensky's statement to further accuse the Ukrainian government of inciting a provocation in Donbas.

Ukrainian Defense Minister Oleksiy Reznikov summarized the objectives of the "On the Fundamentals of National Resistance" law effective as of January 1, on January 23.¹⁵⁵³ Reznikov said that the Ukrainian government passed an additional 15 acts in December to form a national resistance movement. Reznikov said Ukrainian special operations of the territorial defense forces increased their strength by 1,000 soldiers. The law will establish 25 brigades in every region which will unite 150 battalions and create separate brigades in cities of over 900,000 residents or regions with over 2.4 million people. The territorial forces have three components. The first is comprised of 10,000 contractors serving during peacetime with 50 servicemen in a battalion or 90-120 servicemen in a brigade. The second component will be comprised of 130,000 civilians and reservists who can be called up during a special alert period, with 600 personnel in each battalion. The third component allows territorial forces to assemble volunteer corps for defense and monitoring. Reznikov said brigades of the territorial forces in all border regions gained 70 percent of their recruitment capacity and can form command structure in 3-4 weeks in four command zones – North, East, West, and South – throughout the country. Reznikov said Ukraine is preparing signal networks, setting up secret facilities, and equipping weapons and ammunition storage units to support the territorial defense forces. Reznikov did not state a time frame for the establishment of these structures.

Ukraine's Main Intelligence Directorate (GUR) reported on January 21 that Russia has sent 7,000 tons of fuel, several tank and self-propelled artillery units,

and unspecified other ammunition and supplies to Donbas since the start of January 2022.¹⁵⁵⁴

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky gave an interview to the *Washington Post* on January 21.¹⁵⁵⁵ Zelensky questioned why the US and its allies are waiting to impose sanctions on Russia until after Russian forces invade unoccupied Ukraine if they assess the invasion could occur at any day. Zelensky warned that “everyone would lose” in the event of full-scale war, but stated Ukraine is ready to resist a Russian invasion. Zelensky predicted that if Russia does conduct a military operation, it will likely focus on a traditionally Russian-dominated region of Ukraine such as the city of Kharkiv.

Ukrainian President Zelensky met with Polish President Duda in Poland on January 20 to discuss threats posed by Russia.¹⁵⁵⁶ The leaders discussed bilateral relations and interactions with NATO and the OSCE, of which Poland currently holds the annual Presidency. Following the summit, Duda stated Poland support the “full Euro-Atlantic integration of Ukraine” and rejects the concept of “spheres of influence.”

Ukraine’s Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) claimed that Russia’s proxy militias in the Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics increased the exercise intensity on January 18.¹⁵⁵⁷ The GUR claimed that proxy militia artillery elements and company commanders began training exercises on the week of January 16.

Ukraine’s Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) claimed Russian forces may use chemical threats in Donbas to justify military action against Ukraine on January 15.¹⁵⁵⁸ The GUR stated that proxy forces lost control over containers with ammonia in Horlivka, Donetsk, on January 14. The GUR warned that the Kremlin could use an ammonia spill as a pretext for expanding Russian military actions against Ukraine.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky instructed Ukrainian Defense Minister Oleksiy Reznikov to “urgently” clarify issues regarding Ukraine’s expanded military draft registration for women on January 17.¹⁵⁵⁹ Zelensky stated that unclear regulations governing military draft registration caused public backlash against the military draft. Ukrainian women have protested the Ukrainian government’s December 17 decision to update military draft regulations to require Ukrainian women aged 18 to 60 years to register for the military draft.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky told UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson that the West must be ready to immediately issue a preventative sanctions package to counter Russian aggression on January 13.¹⁵⁶⁰ Zelensky reiterated that the West should not make any decisions about Ukraine without Ukrainian participation and that the West must remain “firm and decisive.” Zelensky reiterated Ukraine’s interests to intensify the negotiation process within the Normandy Format. Ukraine’s readout states that Johnson and Zelensky agreed that the Kremlin uses its Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline as a weapon.

Ukrainian Armed Forces Commander-in-Chief Valeriy Zaluzhny participated in a NATO Military Committee meeting on January 13.¹⁵⁶¹ Zaluzhny briefed NATO commanders about Russia’s military buildup near Ukraine and the Kremlin’s hybrid war methods using energy pressure, migration crises, and information operations. Zaluzhny said that Russia’s recent military threat to Ukraine and ultimatums to the West require a “consolidated response” from NATO and Ukraine. Zaluzhny said he discussed issues on the

“practical implementation of Ukraine's NATO status with enhanced capabilities and the continuation of mutually beneficial military cooperation “during the meeting.¹⁵⁶²

Ukrainian Defense Minister Oleksiy Reznikov and Ukrainian defense officials attended an unprecedented meeting with over 30 US defense industry companies on January 12.¹⁵⁶³ Ukrainian officials and unspecified US defense companies discussed increasing cooperation in providing Ukraine advanced defense systems, including automated command and control systems, air defense systems, and specialized ammunition for naval forces, intelligence, and electronic warfare units. This meeting was the first of its kind and indicates intensified US efforts to augment Ukraine’s defense capabilities.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said Ukraine’s Western partners “fully supported” Kyiv against Russian aggression at the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Permanent Council meeting on January 13.¹⁵⁶⁴ Kuleba said Ukraine and its partners will continue to “implement a comprehensive strategy to deter Russia from a new wave of war.” Kuleba added that “despite the unsatisfactory week of great diplomacy for Russia,” the Kremlin must continue dialogue within OSCE framework.

Ukraine’s Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) claimed on January 11 that the militias of the Donetsk and Lugansk People’s Republics began a week of combat and mobilization readiness exercises in proxy-controlled Donetsk and Luhansk on January 10.¹⁵⁶⁵ The readiness exercises include meetings with proxy reservists, replenishing proxy units’ resources, and checking on deployed military equipment. The GUR said that proxy forces’ administrative elements intensified internal searches for proxy reservists who are evading reserve mobilization orders.

Ukraine’s State Security Service (SBU) announced on January 5 that it disrupted 59 attempted cyberattacks against Ukrainian government services in December 2021.¹⁵⁶⁶ The SBU said that attacks against command-and-control servers and unauthorized access intrusion attacks were among the main cyber attack types for December 2021. The SBU did not specify the actors who conducted these attacks.

Ukrainian Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) Head Kirill Budanov and Turkish Military Intelligence Chief Rafet Dalkiran agreed to deepen intelligence cooperation between Ukraine and Turkey on January 5.¹⁵⁶⁷ Ukrainian readouts and Turkish reports state the intelligence chiefs exchanged views and agreed to deepen cooperation between intelligence agencies. Reports did not mention a formal signed agreement.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba and Czech Foreign Minister Jan Lipavský agreed on joint steps to deter Russian aggression against Ukraine in a January 4 phone call.¹⁵⁶⁸ This call was Kuleba’s first call with Lipavsky, who was appointed Czech foreign minister on December 17.

Ukraine enacted a law prohibiting Russian commercial and passenger naval vessels from entering Ukrainian inland waterways on January 1.¹⁵⁶⁹ The law prohibits vessels with Russian flags, vessels registered to Russian citizens or businesses based in Russia, and vessels registered to sanctioned Russian entities from entering Ukrainian inland waterways.

Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) reported on December 28 that the Russian Armed Forces sent fuel, weapons, military equipment, electronic warfare assets, and drones via railways and roads to Russian proxy forces in Donetsk and Luhansk throughout December 2021.¹⁵⁷⁰ The GUR claimed that Russia sent military supplies via humanitarian convoys and deployed additional armored combat vehicles to Donbas. The GUR claimed that Russian military personnel and mercenaries operate as scouts, snipers, artillerymen, liaison officers, and electronic reconnaissance and electronic warfare specialists in the militias of the Donetsk and Luhansk proxies.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky had a phone call with members of the US Congress on December 24.¹⁵⁷¹ Zelensky emphasized that Russian forces have not withdrawn from Ukraine, the importance of increasing US-Ukraine security cooperation, and the importance of including Ukraine in any talks regarding Ukraine.

Ukrainian Presidential Chief of Staff Andriy Yermak said that Ukraine began manufacturing Turkish-designed Bayraktar TB2 UAVs in Ukraine on December 24.¹⁵⁷² Yermak said that TB2 production in Ukraine "has already started" but did not specify when production began. Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba met with Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu on October 7 and stated that Ukraine determined the location of a plot of land where a TB2 production facility would be located.

Ukraine's Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) reported on December 24 that Russian forces in command of the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics militias are increasing exercises to improve coordination between combat and support units.¹⁵⁷³ GUR claims that the DNR and LNR are increasing small arms, artillery, tank, and combat vehicle exercises to improve coordination of motorized infantry units, tank crews, and artillery and mortar units. GUR claimed that Russian personnel are meeting with DNR and LNR artillery units to conduct exercises to fire 152-mm howitzers and 122-mm Grad multiple rocket launchers.

The Ukrainian Ministry of Defense announced on December 23 that it updated military draft regulations on December 17, requiring Ukrainian women to register for military draft in 2022.¹⁵⁷⁴ Women between 18 and 60 years old are required to register for the draft and can be mobilized in Ukraine's national guard in the event of a major war. This announcement significantly changed the Ukrainian information space dynamics regarding the public perception of the real possibility of a major war with Russia. Ukrainian women are protesting this change en masse. Over 30,000 Ukrainians have petitioned Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky to change the policy as of December 27.¹⁵⁷⁵

Head of the Ukrainian National Security and Defense Council Oleksiy Danilov said that Russia concentrated approximately 122,000 military personnel within 200 kilometers distance of Ukraine's borders and approximately 143,500 military personnel within 400 kilometers borders on December 22.¹⁵⁷⁶

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said Kyiv wants to break the deadlock in the Donbas peace process and gain clarity on Ukraine's NATO membership timeline in 2022 on December 21.¹⁵⁷⁷ Zelensky stated Ukraine is ready to hold peace talks with Russia in any format.¹⁵⁷⁸ Zelensky also stated he and NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg discussed the possibility of Ukraine participating in the NATO summit in Madrid in 2022.

Commander of the Ukrainian Navy Oleksiy Neizhpapa said on December 20 that Ukraine will acquire 12 US Mark VI high-speed combat boats at an unspecified future date in 2022.¹⁵⁷⁹ Neizhpapa said that Ukraine will likely use the Mark VI boats for special operations in the Sea of Azov or to preserve Ukrainian maritime passage rights in the Kerch Strait. The Ukrainian navy will likely utilize these boats to counter increased Russian military activity and exercises in and along the Black Sea.

The Ministry of Infrastructure of Ukraine and the Danish Ministry of Defense signed a Memorandum of Cooperation on joint ship construction on December 18.¹⁵⁸⁰ Ukrainian officials stated that joint Ukrainian-Danish ship production will occur at a Ukrainian plant with more than 50 percent of orders fulfilled by Ukrainian firms. The memorandum reportedly also stipulates that Ukraine's Sea Guard will acquire an undisclosed number of Danish-designed MPV80 offshore patrol vessels, with the completion of the first ship planned by 2024.¹⁵⁸¹

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky met with NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg in Brussels, Belgium on December 16.¹⁵⁸² Stoltenberg said that NATO will agree to a new concept of NATO-Ukraine cooperation at the 2022 NATO summit in Madrid on June 29-30, 2022. Zelensky discussed the importance of increasing NATO-Ukraine exercises in the Black and Azov Seas. Stoltenberg said that NATO and Ukraine are stronger together, and that Ukraine's right to further security cooperation with NATO does not threaten Russia. Stoltenberg said that Ukraine's dialogue with NATO is a fundamental principle of European security. Stoltenberg said that NATO has not seen a decrease of Russian military build-up near Ukraine, and that any further aggression will have serious consequences for Russia. Stoltenberg said that NATO will continue assisting Ukraine with training and advising of the Ukrainian military, the development of cybersecurity, conducting joint maneuvers, and supporting military reform.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev discussed bilateral relations and Turkish/Azerbaijani support for Ukraine at a meeting in Brussels, Belgium during the sixth Eastern Partnership Summit on December 15.¹⁵⁸³ Zelensky thanked Aliyev for Azerbaijan's ongoing support for Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity against Russian aggression. Zelensky discussed the intensification of bilateral cooperation between the countries following his working visit to Azerbaijan in December 2019. Zelensky and Aliyev discussed the need to implement a transit route along the Europe-Caucasus-Asia route using rail and sea transport. Zelensky and Aliyev discussed transit construction plans implemented under the Great Construction National Program implemented in July 2020. Zelensky proposed a summit between Ukraine, Turkey, and Azerbaijan in Kyiv in February 2022.

Ukrainian President Zelensky gave an interview to Italian newspaper La Repubblica on December 13.¹⁵⁸⁴ Zelensky stated Russia is increasing its troops numbers on the Ukrainian border to blackmail the West, and stated that "in some European capitals fear prevails," referencing Germany's decision to block the sale of weaponry to Ukraine. Zelensky stated Ukraine constantly pursues a diplomatic solution to the conflict because it is aware of the human cost, and stated "it is questionable whether or not Russian society is ready or not to pay for the attempt to occupy another part of Ukraine with the lives of its children." In response to a question on Ukraine's willingness to give up its NATO aspirations as part of a deal with Russia, Zelensky stated Russia does not honor any agreements, referencing the 1994

Budapest Memorandum. Finally, Zelensky stated he will not be able to say Western efforts have had any affect on Russia until Russia withdraws troops from the Ukrainian border.

Ukrainian President Zelensky stated Ukraine must rely on its own military and has done everything possible to prevent a Russian invasion in an interview with 1 + 1 news on December 10.¹⁵⁸⁵ Ukrainian oligarch and Zelensky backer Ihor Kolomoisky owns 1 + 1. Zelensky said that despite Kyiv’s desire to join NATO, admittance is in the hands of NATO’s member-states and that some unspecified states are putting “barriers” in Ukraine’s path. Zelensky said that Ukraine must be able to confront Russian aggression on its own if it must, and stated the willingness of every Ukrainian to fight if needed is “stronger than any military bloc.”

Zelensky stated Ukrainian society does not support coup attempts and claimed groups responsible for coups “saw that society does not support them.”¹⁵⁸⁶ Zelensky did not provide further details to support his claim of a Akhmetov-backed coup against Ukraine he claimed was planned for December 1-2, but stated “some forces” received signals from abroad that “forced them to halt their intentions” – alluding to preventing a Russian-backed coup without saying so directly.

Zelensky additionally discussed several results of his December 9 call with Joe Biden¹⁵⁸⁷:

- Ukraine must retain the Normandy Format as-is with France and Germany, stating Macron and new German Chancellor Olaf Scholz both support the format.
- Zelensky stated Biden is open to a role in the Normandy format, however, “not just moderating the process or watching from the sidelines.” Zelensky stated American participation could also take the form of a separate platform that cooperates with the Normandy Four.
- Zelensky does not rule out direct talks with Putin and “sees support for this direction” from Europe and the US. Zelensky directly stated Ukraine will not hold direct talks with the DNR/LNR without Russian participation, however, and praised Macron for his support of this Ukrainian stance.
- Zelensky claimed that *during* his call with Biden, he received a “message of assurances from Russia that it is not going to continue the escalation of the territories of our state” and praised this “small and not final but very important result” of Ukraine’s efforts to prevent an invasion.
- Zelensky noted Putin only wants to talk to the United States, not any other states, but that Ukraine and its allies seek to present a united front.
- Finally, Zelensky stated he would not rule out a referendum on the status of “Donbas, Crimea, or ending the war in general,” while claiming Ukraine will not give up its territories. This is not an inflection from Zelensky’s previous rhetoric that any possible decision could be put to a national referendum as a populist measure.

Zelensky said that he does not “exclude the possibility” of holding a “referendum” to grant Donbas increased legal autonomy on December 10.¹⁵⁸⁸ This is a significant rhetorical inflection for Zelensky, who has so far refused to capitulate to Kremlin demands and irreversibly undermine Ukraine’s sovereignty.

Zelensky and French President Emmanuel Macron discussed Russia’s military buildup near Ukraine on December 10.¹⁵⁸⁹ Zelensky and Macron discussed resuming negotiations in the Normandy Format Tripartite Contact Group (TCG). Zelensky and Macron

agreed to continue discussions on security issues at the Eastern Partnership Summit in Brussels on December 15.

Military Times reported that Ukraine's Defense Ministry assessed that there are approximately 120,000 Russian troops near Ukraine's border as of December 8.¹⁵⁹⁰ The updated Ukrainian assessment reportedly includes 98,000 ground troops and approximately 22,000 airborne and naval personnel.

Ukraine's Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) reported on December 7 that Russia is reinforcing the front line in Donbas with an unspecified number of 122mm self-propelled artillery, tanks, and infantry fighting vehicles.¹⁵⁹¹ The GUR also stated that Russian forces increased proxy sniper readiness through increased training.

Reznikov called on Canada, the United States, and the UK to provide Ukraine with additional military support in an interview published on December 5.¹⁵⁹² Reznikov stated Ukraine needs Canadian, US, and UK assistance in securing anti-aircraft missiles, modern warplanes, navy vessels, and electronic jamming equipment. Reznikov also suggested that Canada should increase its training mission in Yavoriv, Ukraine, from 50 to 500 instructors.¹⁵⁹³ Reznikov said Canada should deploy more Canadian trainers to Kharkiv, Mariupol, Kramatorsk, Odesa, and Zminiy Island to deter a Russian military action. Canadian Chief of Defense Staff Wayne Eyre said on December 2 that Canada will not increase its military presence in Ukraine.¹⁵⁹⁴

Reznikov stated Russia may conduct a large-scale escalation at the end of January during an address to the Ukrainian parliament on December 3.¹⁵⁹⁵ Reznikov said Russia has accumulated approximately 94,300 troops near Ukraine and in Donbas and Crimea. Reznikov stated that Russia deployed over 50 battalion tactical groups (BTGs) to the Ukrainian border between April and September.¹⁵⁹⁶ Reznikov said that Russia has 41 BTGs at a constant state of readiness around Ukraine, 33 on a permanent basis and eight "additionally transferred to Crimea," and implied that Russia left military equipment at Ukraine's borders after some BTGs returned to their permanent positions earlier in the year.¹⁵⁹⁷ Reznikov noted that Russia began its winter training season near Ukraine in the Bryansk and Smolensk regions, activated reconnaissance assets, established signals, and camouflaged the troops throughout the week of November 21-28.¹⁵⁹⁸ Reznikov said if two Russian Baltic Fleet landing ships redeploy from the Mediterranean to the Black Sea, Russia will have nine vessels with a capacity to transport 3,000 servicemen and up to 250 armored combat vehicles to the region. Reznikov said Ukraine and its partners are looking for political ways to frame a potential invasion as detrimental and unacceptable to Russia.¹⁵⁹⁹ Ukraine likely seeks to leverage Russia's dependence on the European gas market and the threat of further sanctions to prevent an invasion. Reznikov announced that Ukraine and the UK are building two naval bases in Ochakovo, Mykolaiv, and Berdyansk, Zaporizhia.¹⁶⁰⁰ Reznikov said that Ukraine's main priority is establishing a Western-supported anti-missile program by 2032—a goal that will likely prompt further Russian military campaigns.¹⁶⁰¹

Zelensky and Canadian President Justin Trudeau had a phone call on Russian threats to Ukraine on December 2.¹⁶⁰² Zelensky and Trudeau discussed Russian security threats to Ukraine and agreed on the need to increase economic, political, and sanctions pressure against Russia in the event of an escalation against Ukraine.

Zelensky restated Kyiv's desire to implement Ukraine's Association Agreement with the European Union and stated his readiness to talk to Russia at an address to the Ukrainian parliament on December 1.¹⁶⁰³ Zelensky reiterated that Kyiv aims to

implement the European Union Association Agreement and claimed that Ukraine has fulfilled 60 percent of the agreement's requirements.¹⁶⁰⁴ Zelensky stated that negotiating with Russia is necessary to end the war in Donbas. The Kremlin will likely intensify military pressure against Ukraine and NATO over the next several weeks to curtail Kyiv's efforts to join Western structures.

Ukraine's GUR claimed on November 30 that Russia sent the DNR and LNR more ammunition, lubricants, military equipment, UAVs, and electronic warfare assets in November.¹⁶⁰⁵ This report, if accurate, indicates a growing Russian command and control development activity in occupied Donbas that could support Russian combat operations in Ukraine.

The Ukrainian Ministry of Defense on November 29 claimed that Russia deployed an unspecified "group of Russian military personnel" to the DNR and LNR to strengthen DNR and LNR reconnaissance, sabotage, and sapper units sometime during the week of November 21-28.¹⁶⁰⁶ Ukraine's defense ministry did not provide details on the size or organization of this Russian military "group."

Kuleba gave a speech articulating Ukraine's strategy to deter a Russian invasion on November 29. Kuleba said Ukraine seeks to deter and demotivate Russia from conducting further military activities against Ukraine.¹⁶⁰⁷ He said Ukraine proposed to its international partners a package of measures consisting of three main points: political containment of Russia, economic deterrence from new sanctions tied to a new Russian offensive, and the enhancement of Ukraine's defensive capabilities through international defense cooperation.

Zelensky claimed that Ukrainian oligarch Rinat Akhmetov (a former Party of Regions funder, Viktor Yanukovich partner, and alleged Donetsk mafia boss) was planning a coup that did not occur in tandem with Russian actors on December 1 or 2 in a carefully orchestrated press conference on November 26. Zelensky stated that Ukrainian intelligence received information about a planned coup against Zelensky's government on December 1 or 2. Zelensky stated that "representatives of Russia" along with Ukrainian oligarch Rinat Akhmetov were planning the coup. Zelensky suggested that the Russian coup attempt may be enlisting Akhmetov's participation without Akhmetov's knowledge.¹⁶⁰⁸ Zelensky did not present any evidence of these claims. Zelensky also stated that Ukraine has received assurances from allies—the United States, Canada, UK, the EU, and Turkey—that they will support Ukraine in the event of an escalation.¹⁶⁰⁹

Ukrainian defense officials continue to issue contradictory statements about a Russian offensive as of November 25. Secretary of Ukraine's National Security and Defense Council Oleksiy Danilov contradicted Ukrainian GUR Chief Kirill Budanov's claims of a Russian offensive around mid-January on November 25.¹⁶¹⁰ Danilov stated "we do not see the threats that Mr. Budanov is talking about for January 15." Danilov characterized Russian threats against Ukraine as not new, and said that Ukraine is ready to respond.

Zelensky had a phone call with German Chancellor Angela Merkel about the Russian buildup on November 25. They agreed to coordinate international efforts to oppose Russian threats and preserve sanctions policy.¹⁶¹¹ They also discussed the migration crisis on the border with Belarus and Poland.

Zelensky had a telephone conversation with the President of the European Council Charles Michel on November 25. They agreed to coordinate efforts and discussed the Russian buildup. Michel discussed the results of his November 24 call with Putin. Michel said that de-escalation of the situation could be helped by contacts between the Ukrainian and Russian sides with the participation of the EU.

Ukrainian Military Activity

The Ukrainian Defense Ministry (MoD) said it was managing a still-ongoing distributed denial of service (DDoS) cyberattack on its website and Ukrainian state bank systems late on February 16.¹⁶¹² The Ukrainian MoD said that the DDoS attack only overloaded the affected website servers by exploiting existing vulnerabilities and did not shut down the provider or hack the website itself. The Ukrainian MoD also said that its technical experts will continue to repair vulnerabilities and strengthen its cyber infrastructure to stop the DDoS attack and guard against future attacks. The Ukrainian MoD did not specify the actors conducting the attack. The perpetrators are likely Russia-backed. The Ukrainian MoD website is functional as of February 17.

Ukraine's Main Intelligence Directorate (GUR) reported it observed an increased number of Russian military inspection groups in the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts on February 15.¹⁶¹³ The GUR stated that Russian inspection groups are checking the proxy militias' mobilization readiness. The GUR added that Russian and proxy forces are continuing to recruit personnel by raiding private enterprises and public places in Donbas to identify able-bodied people who dodged the draft.

Ukraine's Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) stated that Russian forces conducted fire and maneuver training classes for proxy militia tank, motorized infantry, and artillery elements on February 11.¹⁶¹⁴

Ukraine's Ministry of Defense stated that Ukraine's General Staff has determined that Ukraine has sufficient military fuel and lubricant stocks per the general staff's procurement plans on February 9.¹⁶¹⁵ The Ukrainian Ministry of Defense stated that it is nonetheless still planning and implementing measures to adjust to anticipated increased fuel and lubricant needs and to diversify Ukraine's fuel and lubricant sources from different European and global suppliers.

The Ukrainian military began "Blizzard 2022" command staff exercises in unspecified locations throughout Ukraine on February 8.¹⁶¹⁶ Blizzard 2022's stated objective is to increase the operational capabilities of Ukrainian military authorities, Ukrainian military units, and other Ukrainian security and defense forces to manage Ukrainian forces during "defensive operations in a crisis area." Ukraine's Ministry of Defense stated it would provide additional details of the exercise in the future.

Ukraine's Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) claimed that Russian forces intensified efforts to recruit mercenaries from Russia to augment the proxy republics' militias on February 8.¹⁶¹⁷ The GUR claimed that Russian forces intensified Russian mercenary recruitment because recruitment efforts among residents in occupied Donbas have been "unsatisfactory."

Ukrainian Minister of Defense Oleksii Reznikov announced on February 8 that Ukrainian Armed Forces will hold exercises from February 10th to 20th in various locations to parallel planned Russian-Belarusian Union Resolve 2022 exercises and to prepare for a potential Russian offensive.¹⁶¹⁸ Reznikov stated that the exercises are a response to the massive Russian military build-up of 140,000 troops on Ukrainian borders and stated that while there are no indications that Russia has formed a formal strike group, they may do so in within a month. The Ukrainian exercises will include weaponry supplied by allies such as light anti-tank weapons recently supplied by the United Kingdom.

Unspecified engineering units of the Ukrainian Armed Forces conducted anti-tank exercises at several unspecified training grounds on February 8.¹⁶¹⁹ The exercises involved time-reduction training and practical implementation exercises in order to emphasize the importance of tanks in offensive operations.

Ukraine's Ministry of Defense announced that Ukrainian security structures began executing unspecified defensive "measures" in response to joint Russian-Belarusian exercises on February 6.¹⁶²⁰ Elements of Ukraine's Armed Forces, National Guard, State Border Guard Service, State Security Service, and other unspecified national security agencies are executing the measures. Ukraine's Ministry of Defense stated that Ukrainian territorial defense elements are conducting exercises with weapon systems that Western states provided Ukraine as part of these measures.

Ukraine's Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) stated on February 4 that Russia delivered up to 9,000 tons of fuel and an unspecified quantity of tanks, armored vehicles, self-propelled artillery, UAVs, and artillery and mortar ammunition to occupied Donetsk and Luhansk throughout January 2022.¹⁶²¹ The GUR also stated that Russia delivered spare parts to repair military equipment.

Ukraine's Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) claimed on February 1 that the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics militias reinforced their forces with additional sniper pairs and anti-tank missile systems at an unspecified past time.¹⁶²²

Ukraine's Defense Ministry denied claims that Russia began deploying blood reserves closer to Ukraine's border on January 29.¹⁶²³ The Ukrainian Ministry of Defense stated that reports about blood deployments towards Ukraine to set conditions to treat Russian casualties is a just a Russian psychological warfare narrative.

Ukrainian anti-tank ground weapon instructors held their first live-fire field exercises with British Next Generation Light Anti-Tank Weapons (NLAW) in Lviv, Ukraine, on January 28.¹⁶²⁴ Ukrainian instructors successfully destroyed mock armored targets with the NLAW system. British instructors trained 40 Ukrainian instructors in NLAW theory, tactics, and practical fires over five days.

Ukraine's Main Intelligence Directorate (GUR) reported that Russian proxy army corps and artillery units are conducting tactical, fire, and fire control exercises in Donbas on January 25.¹⁶²⁵ The GUR reported that proxy engineering units are restoring fortifications while increasing minefields with Russian anti-personnel mines. The GUR said

there is an increase in proxy force detonations of their own mines due to high intensity of mining, lack of unit interoperability, and difficult weather conditions.

The Ukrainian Ministry of Defense (MoD) stated on January 21 that it will not comment on unofficial reports of foreign military aid, but praised the “unprecedented” level of aid Ukraine is currently receiving.¹⁶²⁶ The MoD stated it is “working hard to increase and expand the range of defense equipment provided to Ukraine” and confirmed it will formally announce confirmed aid at the appropriate time as long as the information does not harm national interests.

Ukraine’s Defense Ministry announced that Ukraine's Territorial Defense Forces plan to form 25 brigades that will unite more than 150 battalions throughout Ukraine on January 18.¹⁶²⁷ Each Ukrainian oblast will have a territorial defense brigade and each Ukrainian rayon will have at least one territorial defense battalion. Ukrainian Defense Minister Oleksiy Reznikov said that each battalion will contain up to 600 personnel, consisting of a Ukrainian Armed Forces skeleton crew and civilian contract reservists. Ukraine’s Ministry of Defense stated that Ukraine’s Territorial Defense Forces will have a permanent peacetime strength of 10,000 personnel with the ability to increase to upwards of 130,000 personnel during wartime. The Ukrainian Ministry of Defense did not specify a timeframe for completing this force generation.

The Ukrainian military deployed the 201st Anti-Aircraft Missile Brigade to southern Ukraine to guard southern Ukrainian territory against Russian air threats from Crimea on January 6.¹⁶²⁸ The 201st Brigade is equipped with S-300 air defense systems.

The Ukrainian military announced on January 4 that Ukrainian reconnaissance elements are conducting exercises to rapidly repel enemy forces at close range and conduct raids near Crimea.¹⁶²⁹

Ukraine's State Border Guard Service stated it constructed ditches to defend against enemy mechanized movement in Sumy Oblast on December 21.¹⁶³⁰

Several unspecified Ukrainian anti-tank and engineering units conducted joint exercises on the border of occupied Crimea on December 15.¹⁶³¹ Ukrainian Lieutenant General Sergei Naev said that participating troops simulated defending against an armored assault by redeploying anti-tank artillery and installing minefields.

The Ukrainian Defense Ministry announced on December 14 that the Ukrainian Armed Forces are strengthening air defenses around critical infrastructure.¹⁶³² The announcement specified that the Armed Forces will strengthen defenses (without specifying how) on the Dnieper River bridges, hydroelectric power plants, nuclear power plants, and other unspecified critical infrastructure. The Ukrainian MoD additionally stated Ukrainian forces are ready and able to protect critical infrastructure and the national transportation network. It is unclear from this announcement if the Ukrainian military is redeploying air defense assets or increasing the readiness of units already in place.

Ukraine launched a new operation to reinforce the Ukrainian-Belarusian border on November 24. Ukraine’s State Border Guard Service announced a new special operation on the border with Belarus called “Poissya” with border guards, national police, national guard,

Ukrainian army, and “other reserves” to counteract illegal migrants on November 24.¹⁶³³ Ukrainian Interior Minister Denis Monastyrskiy announced on November 11 that Ukraine would reinforce the border with Belarus with 3,000 border guards, 3,500 national guardsmen, and 2,000 national police.¹⁶³⁴ Ukraine has not openly deployed military units to the Belarusian border or elsewhere as of November 24.

Ukraine used Javelins for the first time in training exercises in Zaporizhia in mid-to-late November. Ukraine’s General Staff stated on November 23 that Ukraine used Javelins and Bayraktar TB2 drones in training exercises at the Shiroky Lan Training Ground, Zaporizhia Oblast, Ukraine.¹⁶³⁵ Ukraine has not used the Javelin in combat operations yet.

The OSCE observed a likely Ukrainian electronic warfare system near Donbas for the first time on November 23. The OSCE reports that they spotted a “probable” Ukrainian Khortytsia-M electronic warfare system about five kilometers from the front line, east of Mariupol.¹⁶³⁶ This is the first sighting of the Ukrainian electronic warfare system near the front.

Belarus Activity

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko spoke about maintaining Russian force deployments to Belarus, opening a new Russian-Belarusian “training center,” hosting Russian nuclear weapons in Belarus, and committing Belarusian sailors to combined Russian naval units on February 17.¹⁶³⁷ Lukashenko stated that Russian forces in Belarus will remain as long as necessary and that he can send Russian forces back to Russia “within a day” if he so chooses. Lukashenko stated that he and Russian President Vladimir Putin will decide on how long to keep Russian forces in Belarus when they meet on February 18. Lukashenko denied the need to open any new Russian military bases in Belarus, claiming that Russian bases in Belarus are “not needed from a military point of view.” Lukashenko stated that building new Russian bases in Belarus would be a waste of money given that Russia can already rapidly mobilize and deploy forces into Belarus within 24 to 48 hours and that the Union State’s Regional Grouping of Forces (RGV) is 65,000 personnel strong. Lukashenko stated that Russia may leave “ammunition” and other “equipment” (likely referencing Iskander tactical ballistic missiles and other heavy equipment) in Belarus following exercises to prevent the need to “carry it back and forth” between Russia and Belarus. Lukashenko stated that Moscow and Minsk are planning to open a fourth Russian-Belarusian training center where Russian missile specialists will teach Belarusians how to operate Iskander tactical ballistic missiles. Lukashenko stated that Belarus would resume hosting Russian nuclear weapons in Belarus if Western threats necessitate it. Lukashenko also stated that Belarus is interested in training Belarusian sailors in Kaliningrad or Murmansk who would then serve in combined Russian naval units. Belarus is landlocked and does not have a navy. Lukashenko also stated that Belarus will follow the Kremlin’s lead and would recognize the independence of the Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics if the Kremlin recognizes them.

The Belarusian Ministry of Defense (MoD) provided a readout on Union Resolve 2022’s main component exercises for February 17 on February 17.¹⁶³⁸ The MoD stated that unspecified Belarusian elements conducted exercises to destroy an enemy that broke defensive lines at the Gozhsky Training Ground in Grodno, Belarus. The MoD stated that unspecified Russian airborne elements conducted airborne landing exercises at the Brest Training Ground. The MoD stated that unspecified Belarusian special forces would conduct anti-reconnaissance and sabotage exercises in an unspecified location in Gomel Oblast. The

MoD stated that unspecified Russian motorized rifle elements are deployed in concentration areas in Mozyr and Rechitsa, Gomel Oblast, to prepare to conduct anti-reconnaissance and anti-sabotage exercises. The MoD stated that Belarusian and Russian special forces elements are conducting special training on ambush, reconnaissance, and night tactics in Marina Gorka. The MoD stated that Belarusian mechanized elements and Russian naval infantry elements would conduct a mock battle on defending lines in Baranovichi. The MoD stated that Russian air defense elements would conduct air defense exercises in Luninets, Brest, Belarus. The MoD also stated that unspecified Russian and Belarusian elements continue conducting exercises throughout Belarus in Osipovichi, Mozyr, Polesky, and Pinsk.

Russian and Belarusian forces conducted combined arms exercises to destroy an enemy airborne assault force at the Osipovichi Training Ground on February 17.¹⁶³⁹ Russian airborne elements, unspecified rocket and artillery elements, and Russian and Belarusian aviation participated in the exercises. Russian airborne forces deployed to a forward defensive line to block an enemy advance. Russian Su-35 pilots engaged enemy aircraft and Russian and Belarusian pilots of Yak-130, Su-25, and Mi-24 aircraft provided air support. Elements of Belarus' 336th Rocket Artillery Brigade and other unspecified artillery elements destroyed enemy columns with multiple launch rocket systems (MLRS) and 122mm artillery. Russian and Belarusian missile elements created a "joint group of missile forces" which included Belarusian Polonez rocket artillery systems and Russian Iskander short-range ballistic missile elements.¹⁶⁴⁰ Unspecified air defense elements conducted exercises to strike enemy helicopters with man-portable air-defense systems. Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko and Belarus Defense Minister Viktor Khrenin presided over these exercises.

The Belarusian Ministry of Defense stated that elements of the Belarusian 147th Anti-Aircraft Missile Regiment redeployed to its permanent base in Bobruisk, Mogilev Oblast, Belarus, on February 17.¹⁶⁴¹

Motorized rifle elements of the Belarusian 6th Mechanized Brigade conducted counterattack exercises with artillery and aviation air support at the Gozhsky Training Ground in Grodno, Belarus, on February 17.¹⁶⁴²

Motorized rifle elements of the Belarusian 339th Mechanized Battalion of the Belarusian 120th Mechanized Brigade conducted close combat exercises at the 227th Training Ground near Barysaw, Minsk, Belarus, on February 17.¹⁶⁴³

An unspecified number of Russian Su-35 pilots and Belarusian Su-30 pilots conducted joint air combat exercises in an unspecified location in Belarus on February 17.¹⁶⁴⁴

Unspecified Russian Eastern Military District rocket artillery elements conducted live fire exercises with multiple launch rocket systems at the Obuz-Lesnovsky Training Ground in Baranovichi, Belarus, on February 17.¹⁶⁴⁵

Russian naval infantry elements of the 155th Naval Infantry Brigade conducted air defense exercises with man-portable air-defense systems at the Obuz-Lesnovsky Training Ground in Baranovichi, Belarus, on February 17.¹⁶⁴⁶

Belarusian Foreign Minister Vladimir Makei stated that no Russian servicemen or military equipment will remain in Belarus after the conclusion of the Union

Resolve-2022 joint Russian-Belarusian military exercises on February 16.¹⁶⁴⁷

Makei claimed that Russia and Belarus did not violate any international laws by conducting joint military exercises. Makei accused the West of artificially staging a crisis around Ukraine to prevent “Russia from playing a decisive, important role in ensuring security in the region and in the world.” Makei accused the West of conducting “information terrorism” to demonize Belarus and Russia.¹⁶⁴⁸ Makei claimed that Ukraine “does not fulfill” the Minsk II Accords. Makei noted that Belarus will respond if escalations on Belarus’ western and southern borders intensify. Makei said Belarus is not interested in invading Ukraine, especially not during Union Resolve 2022 exercises.¹⁶⁴⁹ Makei added that Belarus does not want to fight but must monitor Western provocations.¹⁶⁵⁰ Makei criticized Ukraine for banning the import of Belarusian fertilizers, claiming that Minsk is developing new measures to prevent any harm to Belarus’ economy.¹⁶⁵¹ Makei announced that Belarus will soon use Russian ports for shipping Belarusian cargo.¹⁶⁵² Makei commented that Russia and Belarus are discussing interstate road connection but are unable to currently implement it due to the COVID-19 pandemic.¹⁶⁵³ Makei stated that post-Soviet countries – likely referencing Ukraine – will soon find the Union State “attractive” to join.¹⁶⁵⁴ Makei also addressed a reported incident where unknown actors removed the Belarusian flag from a Belarusian consulate in Dnipro, Ukraine, resulting in the Belarusian Foreign Ministry summoning the Ukrainian ambassador.¹⁶⁵⁵ Makei said Belarus had “a set of very serious measures” to firmly respond to any Ukrainian military provocations, stating that Belarus must respond to attacks “otherwise neighbors will begin to perceive it as weakness.” Makei also accused the European Union of ignoring the human rights of the migrants remaining at the Belarusian-Polish border.¹⁶⁵⁶

The Belarusian Ministry of Defense stated that Belarus’ defense attaché in Ukraine observed Ukraine’s “Blizzard 2022” command staff exercises in an unspecified location to increase transparency and reduce tension on February 16.¹⁶⁵⁷

The Belarusian Ministry of Defense (MoD) provided a readout on Union Resolve 2022’s main component exercises for February 16 on February 16.¹⁶⁵⁸ The MoD stated that unspecified Belarusian elements conducted exercises to destroy an enemy that broke defensive lines at the Gozhsky Training Ground in Grodno, Belarus. The MoD stated that unspecified Belarusian special forces elements conducted protection exercises against reconnaissance and sabotage groups at the Brest Training Ground. The MoD stated that unspecified Belarusian special forces and Russian airborne elements would conduct anti-reconnaissance and sabotage exercises in an unspecified location in Gomel Oblast. The MoD stated that unspecified Russian motorized rifle elements are deployed in concentration areas in Mozyr and Rechitsa, Gomel Oblast, to prepare to conduct anti-reconnaissance and anti-sabotage exercises.

The MoD stated that Belarusian mechanized elements and Russian naval infantry elements would conduct a mock battle on defending lines in Baranovichi. The MoD stated that unspecified Russian airborne elements and unspecified Russian and Belarusian missile and artillery elements would conduct exercises to destroy an enemy tactical airborne assault element at the Osipovichi Training Ground. The MoD stated that Russian air defense elements would conduct air defense exercises in Luninets, Brest, Belarus. The MoD stated that Russian Aerospace Forces elements are providing air support for ground forces from the Ruzhansky and Osipovichi aviation training grounds. The MoD also stated that unspecified Russian and Belarusian elements continue conducting exercises throughout Belarus in Marina Gorka, Pinsk, and Polesky.

Unspecified elements of Belarus' 103rd Airborne Brigade conducted unspecified "combat training" exercises in an unspecified location in Gomel Oblast, Belarus, on February 16.¹⁶⁵⁹ The elements of the 103rd brigade operated in cooperation with a special police detachment of the Gomel branch of the Belarusian Internal Affairs Directorate. The 103rd brigade is permanently based in Vitebsk in northeast Belarus.

Unspecified elements of the Belarusian 6th Mechanized Brigade conducted exercises to defend against an enemy who had broken the defensive line at the Gozhsky Training Ground in Grodno, Belarus, on February 16.¹⁶⁶⁰

Unspecified Belarusian Air Force and Air Defense Forces conducted an exercise to intercept a Mi-24 helicopter that intercepted Belarusian airspace in an unspecified location in Belarus on February 16.¹⁶⁶¹

Unspecified elements of the Belarusian 11th Mechanized Brigade conducted exercises with tank, motorized rifle, and artillery elements at the Obuz-Lesnovsky Obuz-Lesnovsky Training Ground in Baranovichi, Belarus, on February 16.¹⁶⁶²

Russian Eastern Military District and Belarusian air defense elements conducted joint air defense exercises to repel an enemy air raid in an unspecified location in Belarus on February 16.¹⁶⁶³ Russian elements operated S-400 air defense systems and Belarusian elements operated S-300 systems in coordination with a unified target detection system and a single air defense command.

Russian Su-35 pilots of the Eastern Military District and Belarusian Su-30 pilots conducted air defense exercises in Brest, Belarus, on February 16.¹⁶⁶⁴ Russian pilots intercepted Belarusian pilots who imitated enemy aircraft that violated Belarusian airspace. Russian pilots forced the Belarusian pilots to land at the Belarusian air base in Baranovichi.

Russian Su-35 pilots of the Eastern Military District and Belarusian Su-30 pilots conducted a force-on-force aerial combat dogfight in an unspecified location in Belarus on February 16.¹⁶⁶⁵

Unspecified motorized rifle elements of the Eastern Military District and unspecified Belarusian elements conducted small arms exercises to defend a line against an enemy mechanized attack in Brest, Belarus, on February 16.¹⁶⁶⁶

Satellite imagery observed a new pontoon bridge over the Pripyat River in Gomel, Belarus, on February 15.¹⁶⁶⁷ The bridge is approximately six kilometers from Belarus' border with Ukraine. The Belarusian Ministry of Defense previously stated on that Union Resolve 2022 exercise tasks would include crossing the Pripyat River on February 11.

Ukrainian Defense Minister Oleksiy Reznikov and Belarusian Ambassador to Ukraine Igor Sokol discussed bilateral cooperation and Ukrainian military exercises on February 14.¹⁶⁶⁸ Reznikov shared the Ukrainian Armed Forces' Blizzard 2022 exercise plans to minimize tension between the two states.

Satellite imagery observed a likely Russian force concentration near Vepry, Gomel, Belarus, on February 12.¹⁶⁶⁹ This location is approximately 5 kilometers from Belarus' border with Ukraine.

The Belarusian Ministry of Defense (MoD) provided a readout on Union Resolve 2022's main component exercises for February 15 on February 15.¹⁶⁷⁰ The MoD stated that unspecified Belarusian elements continued working out issues to conduct a defensive battle at the Gozhsky Training Ground in Grodno, Belarus. The MoD stated that unspecified Belarusian mechanized elements and Russian airborne and motorized rifle elements conducted protection exercises to defend rear areas at the Brest Training Ground. The MoD stated that Russian missile elements deployed to the Polesky Aviation Training Ground in Gomel, Belarus, for live fires with Tochka-U tactical ballistic missiles. The MoD stated that unspecified Belarusian special forces and Russian airborne elements would conduct anti-reconnaissance and sabotage exercises in an unspecified location in Gomel Oblast. The MoD stated that Belarusian mechanized elements and Russian naval infantry elements would conduct mobile defense exercises in Baranovichi. The MoD stated that Russian air defense elements would conduct air defense exercises in Luninets, Brest, Belarus. The MoD stated that Russian Aerospace Forces elements are providing air support for ground forces at the Obuz-Lesnovsky and Osipovichi training grounds from the Ruzhansky Aviation Training Ground. The MoD also stated that unspecified Russian and Belarusian elements continue conducting exercises throughout Belarus in Marina Gorka, Osipovichi, Pinsk, Mozyr, and Rechitsa.

Elements of the Belarusian 465th missile brigade and unspecified Russian missile personnel of the Eastern Military District conducted live fire exercises with Tochka-U tactical ballistic missiles at the Polesky Aviation Training Ground in Gomel, Belarus, on February 15. Belarusian Tochka-U missiles struck a target from over 60 kilometers away. Belarusian Minister of Defense Viktor Khrenin presided over this exercise.¹⁶⁷¹

Unspecified Russian Eastern Military District artillery elements conducted barrage fire exercises at the Osipovichi Training Ground in Mogilev, Belarus, on February 15.¹⁶⁷²

Elements of the Belarusian 6th Mechanized Brigade conducted mobile defense exercises at the Gozhsky Training Ground in Grodno, Belarus, on February 14.¹⁶⁷³ Unspecified tank and motorized rifle elements supported the Belarusian 6th Mechanized Brigade. Likely Russian Su-45 aircraft and Belarusian Yak-130 aircraft and Mi-8 helicopters provided air support.

The Belarusian Ministry of Defense (MoD) provided a readout on Union Resolve 2022's main component exercises for February 14 on February 14.¹⁶⁷⁴ The MoD stated that unspecified Belarusian elements continued working out issues to conduct a defensive battle at the Gozhsky Training Ground in Grodno, Belarus. The MoD stated that unspecified Belarusian special forces and Russian airborne and motorized rifle elements conducted protection exercises to defend rear areas at the Brest Training Ground. The MoD stated that unspecified Belarusian special forces and Russian airborne elements would conduct anti-reconnaissance and sabotage exercises in an unspecified location in Gomel Oblast. The MoD also stated that unspecified Russian airborne elements are reinforcing Belarus' border in Gomel. The MoD stated that Belarusian mechanized elements and Russian naval infantry elements would conduct mobile defense exercises in Baranovichi. The MoD stated that Russian air defense elements would conduct air defense exercises in Luninets, Brest, Belarus. The MoD stated that Russian Aerospace Forces elements are providing air support for ground forces from the Ruzhansky Aviation Training Ground. The MoD also stated that unspecified Russian

and Belarusian elements continue conducting exercises throughout Belarus in Marina Gorka, Osipovich, Pinsk, Mozyr, and Rechitsa.

Unspecified Russian naval infantry elements of the 155th Brigade (Pacific Fleet) conducted urban warfare exercises at Obuz-Lesnovsky Training Ground in Baranovichi, Belarus, on February 14.¹⁶⁷⁵

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko stated that Belarus and Russia are conducting the Union Resolve 2022 exercises in part to decide where to station Russian forces inside Belarus on February 14.¹⁶⁷⁶ Lukashenko said that Russia and Belarus are conducting Union Resolve 2022 to “decide where we should keep a small number of troops in connection with what is happening in Ukraine.” Lukashenko said that flows of weapons, fugitives, and an increase of “saboteurs” from Ukraine into Belarus necessitates this response. Lukashenko criticized foreigners who condemn Russian deployments to Belarus and stated that Russian deployments to Belarus are “our business with Putin” and that Minsk will decide when Russian forces redeploy from Belarus.

Russian and Belarusian Su-30Sm pilots conducted a joint air patrol of Belarus’ border as part of Union Resolve 2022 exercises on February 14.¹⁶⁷⁷

Ukrainian Defense Minister Alexei Reznikov and Belarusian Defense Minister Viktor Khrenin discussed regional military cooperation and security on February 14.¹⁶⁷⁸ Khrenin stated that Belarus is not the source of Ukrainian-Belarusian tension and underscored that Ukrainians are a brotherly people to Belarus. Both parties agreed to intensify their cooperation to increase transparency and mutual trust. The ministers discussed ongoing military training events and Khrenin stated that Union Resolve 2022 exercises would not jeopardize regional security. Reznikov stressed the unique nature of Belarusian-Ukrainian relations and that there are no provocations towards Belarus from Ukraine. The ministers pledged to continued contact for neighborly relations in the defense sphere and agreed to exchange visits of defense attaches to the ongoing Ukrainian “Blizzard-2022” and Russian-Belarusian “Union Resolve-2022” exercises to enhance mutual trust.

Satellite imagery of observed Russian elements of the Eastern Military District in Rechytsa, Gomel Oblast, Belarus, indicates that the Russian elements redeployed westward from Rechytsa to an unknown location around February 14.¹⁶⁷⁹

Satellite imagery observed a likely Russian field hospital at the Osipovich Training Ground in Belarus on February 14.¹⁶⁸⁰

The Belarusian Ministry of Defense (MoD) provided a readout on Union Resolve 2022’s main component exercises for February 13 on February 13.¹⁶⁸¹ The MoD stated that Belarusian mechanized elements, likely of the 6th Brigade, continued working out issues to conduct a defensive battle and that Russian airborne elements conducted anti-sabotage and reconnaissance exercises at the Gozhsky Training Ground in Grodno, Belarus. The MoD stated that unspecified Belarusian special forces and Russian airborne and motorized rifle elements would conduct protection exercises to defend rear areas at the Brest Training Ground. The MoD stated that unspecified Belarusian special forces and Russian airborne elements would conduct anti-reconnaissance and sabotage exercises in an unspecified location in Gomel Oblast. The MoD also stated that unspecified Belarusian special forces elements are protecting Belarus’ border in Gomel. The MoD stated that Belarusian elements and Russian

naval infantry elements would conduct mobile defense exercises in Baranovichi. The MoD stated that Russian Aerospace Forces (VKS) would support ground forces in Luninets, Brest, Belarus. The MoD also stated that unspecified Russian and Belarusian elements continue conducting exercises throughout Belarus in Marina Gorka, Osipovichi, Pinsk, Polesky, Mozyr, and Rechitsa.

Belarusian Foreign Minister Vladimir Makei and Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu discussed the situation in Ukraine and joint Russian-Belarusian Union Resolve 2022 exercises on February 12.¹⁶⁸² The Belarusian Foreign Ministry said that the ministers discussed the “disinformation overload” in the global information space about fake plans to attack Ukraine from Belarusian territory.

Medics of the Eastern Military District conducted exercises to care for injured soldiers and conduct medical evaluations using army aviation helicopters at the Osipovichsky Training Ground on February 12.¹⁶⁸³

Unspecified Russian rocket artillery elements of the Russian Eastern Military District and Belarusian elements conducted multiple launch rocket fire control exercises “as part of consolidated divisions” at the Osipovichi Training Ground on February 12.¹⁶⁸⁴

A Belarusian air assault battalion of the 38th Air Assault Brigade conducted exercises to defend against an enemy breakthrough at the Brest Training Ground on February 12.¹⁶⁸⁵ Unspecified mortar and grenade launcher platoons, anti-tank elements, and armored personnel carriers supported this exercise.

Belarusian Defense Minister Viktor Khrenin presided over combined arms exercises at the Gozhsky Training Ground in Grodno, Belarus, on February 12.¹⁶⁸⁶

The Belarusian Ministry of Defense (MoD) provided a readout on Union Resolve 2022’s main component exercises for February 12 on February 12.¹⁶⁸⁷ The MoD stated that two unidentified motorized rifle companies, a tank platoon, an artillery battery, and aviation elements conducted maneuver defense exercises at the Gozhsky Training Ground in Grodno, Belarus.¹⁶⁸⁸ The MoD stated that unspecified Russian airborne elements would conduct anti-sabotage and reconnaissance exercises at an unspecified location, though likely at the Gozhsky Training Ground. The MoD stated that unspecified Belarusian special forces and Russian airborne and motorized rifle elements would conduct protection exercises to defend rear areas at the Brest Training Ground. The MoD stated that unspecified Belarusian special forces and Russian airborne elements would conduct anti-reconnaissance and sabotage exercises in an unspecified location in Gomel Oblast. The MoD also stated that unspecified Belarusian special forces elements are protecting Belarus’ border in Gomel. The MoD stated that Belarusian elements and Russian naval infantry elements would conduct mobile defense exercises in Baranovichi. The MoD stated that Russian Aerospace Forces (VKS) would support ground forces in Luninets, Brest, Belarus. The MoD also stated that unspecified Russian and Belarusian elements continue conducting exercises throughout Belarus in Marina Gorka, Osipovichi, Pinsk, Polesky, Mozyr, and Rechitsa.

The Belarusian government said that “a number” of Russian units are in Belarus independently of the ongoing Union Resolve 2022 exercises to protect the

Belarusian-Ukrainian border on February 11.¹⁶⁸⁹ Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania asked Belarus on February 9 to provide transparency regarding the military activity near their territory per reporting requirements of the Vienna Document of 2011 and noted that “almost all” Belarusian forces are participating in the exercise. The Belarusian response alleged that the Union Resolve 2022 exercises do not trigger the Vienna Document’s reporting threshold and reiterated that all Russian troops are required to leave Belarus once the exercises conclude. The Union Resolve 2022 exercises began on February 10 and are scheduled to end on February 20. This is the first statement by the Belarusian or Russian governments introducing a distinction between Russian forces in Belarus temporarily for exercises, and unspecified forces unrelated to the exercises to protect Belarus’ border – likely to justify Russian forces remaining in Belarus following the conclusion of Union Resolve 2022.

Russia deployed at least 16 additional Su-25 aircraft to the Luninets Air Base in Brest, Belarus, between February 4 to 11.¹⁶⁹⁰ Satellite imagery observed 32 Su-25 at the Luninets Air Base on February 11; Satellite imagery observed only 15 Su-25 at the Luninets Air Base on February 4.

The Belarusian Ministry of Defense (MoD) provided a readout on Union Resolve 2022’s main component exercises for February 11 on February 11.¹⁶⁹¹ The MoD stated that elements of a Belarusian mechanized brigade (likely the 6th Mechanized Brigade) would conduct defensive combat exercises and that Belarusian air defense units would conduct exercises to protect command and control posts and firing positions from enemy air attacks at the Gozhsky Training Ground in Grodno, Belarus. The MoD stated that unspecified Belarusian special forces elements (likely the 38th Airborne Brigade but possibly also the 5th Brigade) and Russian airborne and motorized rifle units would conduct exercises to secure military facilities and rear logistical columns at the Brest Training Ground. The MoD stated that Russian naval infantry air defense elements (likely of the Pacific Fleet) would conduct live fire air defense exercises and that elements of an unspecified Belarusian mechanized brigade would conduct a defensive training battle in Baranovichi, Belarus. The MoD stated that unspecified Russian airborne elements would conduct reconnaissance exercises to destroy enemy sabotage and reconnaissance groups in an unspecified location in Gomel Oblast, Belarus. The MoD also stated that unspecified Russian motorized rifle elements would conduct exercises to repulse enemy air attacks, withdraw and occupy defensive lines, and cross the Pripjat River in Rechytsa, Gomel Oblast, Belarus.

Unspecified reconnaissance elements of the Russian 155th Naval Infantry Brigade (Pacific Fleet) conducted reconnaissance and search and destroy exercises at the Obuz-Lesnovsky Training Ground in Baranovichi, Belarus, on February 11.¹⁶⁹²

An unspecified number of Russian Su-35S fighters of the Eastern Military District conducted air defense exercises and an air patrol of Belarusian airspace on February 11.¹⁶⁹³

A medical detachment of the Eastern Military District conducted exercises to evacuate military casualties in combat conditions, provide first aid, and transport casualties by air at the Osipovichi Training Ground in Mogilev, Belarus, on February 11.¹⁶⁹⁴

An unspecified Russian motorized rifle battalion and Belarusian airborne elements (likely of the 38th Brigade) conducted maneuver exercises at the Brest training Ground on February 11.¹⁶⁹⁵

Unspecified Russian Eastern Military District chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear defense (CBRN) elements deployed aerosol smoke screens to conceal command posts and combat elements at the Brest Training Ground on February 11.¹⁶⁹⁶

Unspecified Belarusian air defense elements (likely of the 6th Mechanized Brigade) conducted air defense exercises with Igla man-portable air-defense systems at the Gozhsky Training Ground in Grodno, Belarus, on February 11.¹⁶⁹⁷

Unspecified motorized rifle elements of the Russian Eastern Military District and elements of the Belarusian 38th Airborne Brigade conducted mechanized combat exercises to block and destroy an enemy force at the Brest Training Ground on February 11.¹⁶⁹⁸

Unspecified elements (likely roughly a platoon) of the Belarusian 6th Mechanized Brigade conducted heliborne landing exercises at an unspecified location in Belarus, likely at the Gozhsky Training Ground in Grodno, Belarus, on February 10.¹⁶⁹⁹

An unspecified number of Belarusian Su-30sm and Russian Su-35S fighters conducted joint flights from the Baranovichi Airfield on February 10.¹⁷⁰⁰

The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) reiterated its claims that Union Resolve 2022 exercises do not pose threats to the West on February 10.¹⁷⁰¹ The MoD reiterated that the exercise will occur at the Domanovo, Gozhsky, Obuz-Lesnovsky, Brest, and Osipovichsky training grounds; the Baranovichi, Luninets, Lida, and Machulishchi airfields; and at unspecified “certain areas of the territory of the Republic of Belarus” (likely in Gomel Oblast near Belarus’ border with Ukraine). The MoD stated that the exercises emphasize defensive tasks, will last until February 20, and that the forces involved do not meet the reporting requirements of the Vienna Document of 2011. This statement is likely false given Russia routinely violates the reporting requirements of the Vienna Document of 2011 and that Russia has deployed at least 15 battalion tactical groups to Belarus. Union Resolve 2022 additionally has counterattack phases that are likely postured against Poland and/or Lithuania.

Unspecified motorized rifle elements of the Eastern Military District conducted exercise to block and destroy an enemy force at the Brest Training Ground on February 10.¹⁷⁰²

An unspecified number Russian Su-25 aircraft conducted air strikes against camouflaged enemy control posts and armored vehicles at an unspecified training ground in Brest on February 10.¹⁷⁰³

Russian S-400 units (likely a least a battalion but possibly two battalions) of the Eastern Military District began combat duty in Brest, Belarus, to defend Belarusian airspace on February 10.¹⁷⁰⁴

Unspecified elements of the Russian 155th Naval Infantry Brigade (Eastern Military District) conducted exercises at the Obuz-Lesnovsky Training Ground on February 10.¹⁷⁰⁵ Russian naval infantry detected, blocked, and destroyed enemy groups in

urban combat conditions. Russian naval infantry also identified risk areas where enemy forces could plant improvised explosive devices.

Unspecified Russian Eastern Military District artillery elements conducted live fire exercises at the Brest Training Ground on February 10.¹⁷⁰⁶

Unspecified elements of the Belarusian 6th Mechanized Brigade conducted exercises to locate enemy reconnaissance groups with UAV support at the Gozhsky Training Ground on February 9.¹⁷⁰⁷ A (likely Belarusian) motorized rifle company then blocked and destroyed the enemy force with unspecified aviation, artillery, tank support.

Unspecified Russian and Belarusian elements conducted exercises to block and destroy an enemy force at the Obuz-Lesnovsky Training Ground on February 9.¹⁷⁰⁸

A company of the Belarusian 38th Airborne Brigade conducted heliborne landing exercises at the Brest Training Ground on February 9.¹⁷⁰⁹

Russian Ambassador to Belarus Boris Gryzlov gave an interview to *Rossiia 24* on Russian-Belarusian integration and Ukraine on February 9.¹⁷¹⁰ Gryzlov stated that the Kremlin is giving “maximum importance” to unifying Russian and Belarusian tax and customs laws to support the creation of a “joint integrated tax control body” in 2022. Gryzlov stated that the creation of a unified oil market is “an issue for 2023.” Gryzlov said that existing Russian and Belarusian customs bodies’ cooperation are at a point that they already “can be called an integrated [customs] body.” Gryzlov said that Western sanctions are pushing Russia and Belarus towards more intensive integration because the Union State is an “integrated structure that can withstand Western sanctions with greater confidence.” Gryzlov reiterated that Union Resolve 2022 exercises are preplanned, do not violate the Vienna Document 2011, and that NATO is deploying forces closer to the Union State’s borders. Gryzlov accused Kyiv of violating “almost all points” of the Minsk II Accords and stated that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky did not fulfill his election promises to bring peace to Ukraine. Gryzlov stated that the Ukrainian people voted for there not to be a “party of war” in control of Ukraine’s government but that a “party of war” now has “become even worse” and is now trying to lead Ukraine into a “real war.”

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko signed a decree on February 9 enabling Belarusian state organs to call up military-aged Belarusian men for urgent military service in the Belarusian reserve from February to May 2022.¹⁷¹¹ The decree provides a legal basis for calling up Belarusian military-aged men older than 18 years to military service in Belarus’ reserve in February to May 2022. The decree applies to Belarusian men who do not have deferment rights to service in the reserve, including college freshmen at agriculture colleges. Lukashenko did not specify why activating Belarus’ reserve may be necessary at this time.

Russian Chief of the General Staff Valery Gerasimov arrived in Belarus to preside over Union Resolve 2022 exercises on February 9.¹⁷¹² The exercise’s active phase begins on February 10.

An unspecified number of Russian Su-35S fighters of the Eastern Military District began conducting force-on-force air space defense exercises with Belarusian Su-25 aircraft at the Baranovichi Airfield in Belarus on February 9.¹⁷¹³ An unspecified number of Belarusian Su-25 acted as enemy aircraft in the exercise.

Elements of the Russian 35th Combined Arms Army (Eastern Military District) began conducting combat coordination training at several unspecified training grounds in Belarus for Union Resolve 2022 exercises on February 9.¹⁷¹⁴ Elements of the 35th Combined Arms Army are undergoing training on driving combat vehicles, equipping firing positions, and executing fire missions with small arms and artillery systems.

Unspecified Russian Eastern Military District chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear defense (CBRN) elements deployed aerosol smoke screens to conceal mobile command posts in unspecified locations Belarus on February 9.¹⁷¹⁵ Joint Russian-Belarusian exercises typically do not involve CBRN elements, except during iterations of Russia's annual strategic capstone exercise for the Western Military District (e.g. Zapad-2017 and Zapad-2021).

Unspecified Russian Eastern Military District air defense elements with S-400 air defense systems (likely at least one S-400 battalion but possibly two S-400 battalions) deployed to an unspecified training ground in Brest on February 9.¹⁷¹⁶ The Russian Ministry of Defense stated that these S-400 elements will defend Belarusian airspace during the Union Resolve 2022 exercise.

Unspecified Russian Eastern Military District elements conducted UAV reconnaissance exercises to identify targets at the Brest Training Ground on February 9.¹⁷¹⁷

The Belarusian Ministry of Defense gave a briefing on aspects of the Union Resolve 2022 exercise's three main component parts on February 8.¹⁷¹⁸ Russian and Belarusian elements will conduct combined arms combat exercises at the Gozhsky Training Ground in Grodno on February 12. Unspecified elements will conduct an ambush against enemy reconnaissance elements. Russian and Belarusian forces will then conduct a maneuver defense with aviation and artillery support. A combined arms reserve will conduct a culminating counterattack, likely in the direction of Poland and / or Lithuania. Unspecified rocket elements will conduct live fires with Tochka tactical ballistic missile systems at a training ground in Polesky, near Pinsk, Belarus, on February 15. Russian and Belarusian combined arms elements will conduct a simulated combined arms battle at the Obuz-Lesnovsky Training Ground on February 19. This battle will simulate Russian and Belarusian forces defending an operational defensive line, defeating an attacking enemy, and then conducting a counterattack with tactical airborne deployments behind enemy lines. Russian and Belarusian aviation and artillery fire support will conduct support tasks throughout all stages of this battle.

Unspecified elements of the Belarusian 38th Airborne Brigade conducted counter-sabotage and counter-reconnaissance training at the Brest Training Ground on February 8.¹⁷¹⁹

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov stated on February 8 that all Russian forces deployed to Belarus will leave Belarus after Russia and Belarus complete Union Resolve 2022 exercises on February 20.¹⁷²⁰

The Grodno Branch of the Belarusian Union of Officers published an appeal on February 8 to reserve and retired officers to vote in favor of the February 27 Belarusian constitutional referendum in order to preserve the “dynamic development” and protection of the “material and spiritual heritage” of the Belarusian state.¹⁷²¹ The appeal invoked hybrid and external threats to Belarusian statehood and called on officers to support the referendum to prove their patriotism and commitment to the Belarusian sovereignty.

Unspecified motorized rifle elements of the Belarusian 6th Mechanized Brigade conducted anti-sabotage and reconnaissance exercises at the Gozhsky Training Ground in Grodno, Belarus, on February 8.¹⁷²² Belarusian rocket artillery elements of the 350th artillery group of the 6th brigade provided the brigade’s motorized rifle elements fire support.

Unspecified personnel of the of the Belarusian 11th Mechanized Brigade’s 7th battalion conducted mechanized counteract exercises at an unspecified location in Belarus, possibly at the Obuz-Lesnovsky Training Ground, on February 8.¹⁷²³

Unspecified Russian and Belarusian forces conducted unspecified “combat training tasks” to simulate combat scenarios at the Brest Training Ground on February 8.¹⁷²⁴

Unspecified Belarusian command and control elements conducted communications exercises at the Obuz-Lesnovsky Training Ground in Baranovichi, Belarus, on February 7.¹⁷²⁵

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko stated his intent to further militarize the Belarusian Ministry of Emergency Situations (MChS) as part of MChS “modernization” on February 7.¹⁷²⁶ Lukashenko said that the Belarusian MChS should serve an additional function as an armed force that can defend Belarus in the event of a conflict. Lukashenko said that Belarus’ military is locked in at 65,000 personnel and that the MChS can and should be able to reinforce the Belarusian military. Lukashenko said that MChS elements should be equipped with small arms (pistols, assault rifles, machine guns, grenade launchers) and unspecified “other equipment” (implied heavy military equipment) that will become a “serious asset to help [Belarus’] army.” Russia may grant or leave military equipment in Belarus under the rubric of modernizing Belarus’ MChS. Lukashenko may seek to imbue the Belarusian MChS with conventional military capabilities similarly to how Russian President Vladimir Putin has imbued the Russian National Guard (Rosgvardia) with capabilities on par with regular Russian motorized rifle units.¹⁷²⁷

Russian and Belarusian Su-30SM fighters conducted a joint air patrol of Belarus’ border on February 7.¹⁷²⁸

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko announced he is considering recognizing Abkhazian and South Ossetian independence and is prepared to recognize Crimea as a Russian territory on February 7.¹⁷²⁹ Lukashenko restated his

willingness to recognize Crimea as a Russian territory once all Russian oligarchs begin to supply their products to Crimea. Lukashenko stated he will also consider recognizing Abkhazia and South Ossetia should Russian President Vladimir Putin ask him to do so. Lukashenko shared that the recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia may lead to increased tensions between Russia and the West and suggested Putin may not request the recognition of the two territories.

Satellite imagery observed a newly established military camp staffed with Russian Eastern Military District personnel south of Rechytsa, Gomel Oblast, Belarus, on February 5.¹⁷³⁰ The camp includes over 40 tents, trucks, and artillery pieces.

Two Russian Tu-22 strategic bombers conducted a four-hour air patrol in Belarusian airspace on February 5.¹⁷³¹

Elements of Belarus' 11th Separate Guards Mechanized Brigade prepared a defensive position at an unknown location, possibly at the Obuz-Lesnovsky Training Ground, as part of the first stage of Union Resolve 2022 exercises on February 5.¹⁷³²

Russia's Eastern Military District stated it deployed an unspecified number of Su-25s from Primorsky Krai to Brest, Belarus, on February 5.¹⁷³³

A company of the Belarusian 6th Mechanized Brigade practiced repelling an attack on a checkpoint at the Gozhsky Training Ground on February 4.¹⁷³⁴ The Belarusian Ministry of Defense did not state this exercise was connected to Union Resolve 2022 exercises. However, this exercise likely is a component part of those exercises, as the Gozhsky Training Ground is one of the designated exercise locations for Union Resolve 2022.

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko said that the Belarusian Armed Forces will respond to a Ukrainian attack on Donbas “the same way as the Russian [army]” in an interview with Kremlin journalist Vladimir Solovyov on February 4.¹⁷³⁵ Lukashenko added that Belarus would fight with Russia against Ukraine and claimed that the US supports Ukrainian aggression in Donbas. Lukashenko reiterated accusations that a Ukrainian drone violated Belarusian air space to conduct reconnaissance on the Union Resolve 2022 exercises.¹⁷³⁶ Lukashenko claimed that Belarus would not start a war over the Ukrainian drone but warned that the Belarusian Armed Forces will respond more harshly the next time a similar incident occurs.¹⁷³⁷ Lukashenko also criticized Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky for lacking a strong character and said that the outbreak of a war would depend entirely on the Ukrainian army and government.¹⁷³⁸ Lukashenko also claimed that other post-soviet states would join the Russia-Belarus Union State out of economic necessity over the next several years. Lukashenko claimed that Ukraine will join the Union State in 15 years.¹⁷³⁹

Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu and Belarusian Defense Minister Viktor Khrenin discussed plans to modernize a patriotic education center in Brest using funds from the Union State on February 3.¹⁷⁴⁰ Khrenin told Shoigu that there is a need to focus on the “educational process of modern youth, instilling in them a sense of love for the Motherland” given the “emerging socio-political situation in the world and around the Union State.” Khrenin stated that there is a need to augment the capabilities of an existing Belarusian patriotic education center in Brest given the “growing role of patriotic education for youth in

modern conditions.” The Russian Ministry of Defense stated that funds to improve this center and finance its further operation will come from the Union State’s budget, Belarus’ state budget, and from private backers.

A Belarusian legal portal published a draft agreement between Russia and Belarus on February 4 to implement a military-technical cooperation program from 2022 – 2025.¹⁷⁴¹ The content of the cooperation program is not public. Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko will likely ratify the document soon, if he has not already done so. The cooperation agreement likely stipulates intensified joint Russian-Belarusian military exercises, formalization of the Russian-Belarusian Regional Grouping of Forces, Russian weapon sales and weapon system deployments to Belarus, and possibly the creation of additional Russian bases on Belarusian territory.

A motorized rifle battalion of the Belarusian 6th Mechanized Brigade conducted protection exercises as part of the Union Resolve 2022 Russian-Belarusian exercise at the Gozhsky Training Ground in Grodno, Belarus, on February 3.¹⁷⁴²

The Russian Ministry of Defense confirmed that S-400 air defense systems of the Eastern Military District arrived in Brest, Belarus, from Khabarovsk on February 4.¹⁷⁴³ The S-400 elements are likely at least a battalion.

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko and Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu discussed deepening Russian-Belarusian military integration in Minsk on February 3.¹⁷⁴⁴ Lukashenko stated that Belarus is ready to create more joint training centers (Russian bases) in Belarus. Lukashenko stated that the ongoing Union Resolve 2022 exercises have a new stated goal of strengthening Belarus’ border with Ukraine. Lukashenko said that Russian military specialists will help Belarus identify “painful points” on Belarus’ southern border where it is necessary to augment defenses. Lukashenko stated his intent to buy more Russian weapon systems, including “almost all the equipment [that Russian forces deployed to Belarus for Union Resolve 2022 exercises].” Russia may leave military equipment in Belarus permanently under the rubric of military sales, grants, or the formation of “training centers.”

Shoigu praised Lukashenko and stated that Belarus did “unprecedented work” to deploy a logistics support network to receive a large Russian deployment to Belarus.¹⁷⁴⁵ Shoigu stated that “everything is brilliantly organized” and that Belarusian logistics enables opportunities for Russia to deploy even more military equipment to Belarus. Shoigu told Lukashenko that Russia “highly appreciates [Belarus’] determination to resist the destructive line of the West and your readiness to form a single defense space within the borders of the Union State,” that Belarus can always rely on Russia for support, and that the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) deployment to Kazakhstan in January 2022 demonstrated Russian and Belarusian ability to “provide assistance to an ally as quickly and efficiently as possible.”¹⁷⁴⁶ Lukashenko and Shoigu stated that Russia and Belarus will participate in more than 20 joint military events in 2022, including Belarus deploying a “large” Belarusian force to eastern Russia in fall 2022 for “Vostok 2022” strategic capstone exercises.

Unspecified Russian and Belarusian airborne, tank, artillery, and other combined arms elements conducted combined arms exercises at the Brest Training Ground on February 3.¹⁷⁴⁷ Belarusian Yak-130 and Russian and Su-25 aircraft conducted joint air support tasks. Servicemen used UAVs for reconnaissance and Mi-24 attack

helicopters provided air support. Russian and Belarusian artillery elements struck simulated enemy command posts. Russian and Belarusian airborne elements conducted combat tasks using artillery fire and conducted a heliborne assault. A battalion tactical group of the Russian 217th Airborne Regiment and elements of the Belarusian 38th Airborne Brigade very likely participated in this exercise. Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu and Belarusian Defense Minister Viktor Khrenin presided over the exercises.

The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) confirmed that S-400 air defense systems of the Eastern Military District arrived in Belarus and will deploy further to Brest, Belarus on February 3.¹⁷⁴⁸ Russia will likely deploy at least one S-400 battalion to Brest. Russia previously stated it would deploy two S-400 battalions to Belarus for Union Resolve 2022 exercises.

Belarus's Ministry of Defense stated on February 3 that a Ukrainian UAV violated Belarusian airspace on January 24.¹⁷⁴⁹ Belarusian authorities claim that Belarusian air defense elements forced the Ukrainian UAV to land. Ukrainian authorities denied the accusation and pointed out that Belarus has made previous false claims about Ukrainian malfeasance towards Belarus.¹⁷⁵⁰ The Kremlin may leverage claims about Ukrainian threats to Belarus or the Union State to justify military action against Ukraine.

Unspecified Russian and Belarusian airborne, motorized rifle, artillery, and anti-tank elements began conducting joint combat coordination exercises across southwest Belarus at the Brest, Gozhsky, Obuz-Lesnovsky, Domanovo, and Osipovichi training grounds on February 2.¹⁷⁵¹ Elements of Belarus' 11th Mechanized Brigade conducted anti-sabotage and anti-reconnaissance exercises at the Obuz-Lesnovsky Training Ground in Baranavicy.¹⁷⁵² Elements of Belarus' 6th Mechanized Brigade conducted anti-sabotage and anti-reconnaissance exercises at Gozhsky Training Ground in Grodno.¹⁷⁵³ A battalion with S-300 air defense systems of the Belarusian 377th Guards Anti-Aircraft Rocket Regiment deployed to an unspecified location in Belarus for these exercises.¹⁷⁵⁴ Russian and Belarusian elements may be operating in combined units under Russian commanders. The Russian Ministry of Defense specified that Russian and Belarusian units exercised in "uniform combat formations."

Russia's Eastern Military District confirmed that it established a field camp at the Brest Training Ground in Brest, Belarus, on February 1.¹⁷⁵⁵

An unspecified (and likely combined) "Russian-Belarusian contingent" conducted a unit cohesion readiness inspection at the Brest Training Ground on February 1.¹⁷⁵⁶ This contingent likely includes elements of a battalion tactical group of the Russian 217th Airborne Regiment and elements of the Belarusian 38th Airborne Brigade.

White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said that Russia deployed approximately 5,000 troops to Belarus and that the Kremlin plans to send more "in the coming weeks" on January 31.¹⁷⁵⁷

TASS reported that Russia's Eastern Military Districted began deploying mobile command posts at unspecified Belarusian training grounds as part of preparation for the Union Resolve 2022 exercises on January 31.¹⁷⁵⁸ This activity can support a Russian effort to maintain a permanent or near-permanent Russian military presence in Belarus.

Russian Ground Forces likely deployed at least two Iskander-M short-range ballistic missile battalion sets (eight launchers) to Belarus as of January 31.¹⁷⁵⁹

Independent Belarusian outlet *Nasha Niva* reported on January 31 that Belarusian military officers began summoning Belarusian reservists.¹⁷⁶⁰ *Nasha Niva* reported that the dates for reserve mobilizations correspond with the dates of the Union Resolve 2022 exercise with Russia on February 10-20. Belarusian forces only activated a mechanized battalion's worth of reservists during the Zapad-2021 exercises in September 2021. The Belarusian reserve mobilization for Union Resolve 2022 will likely be larger than that of Zapad-2021.

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko signed a decree to increase Belarusian labor pensions by an average of 6.3 percent effective March 1, 2022, on January 31.¹⁷⁶¹ Lukashenko raised pensions likely to buy public support ahead of a national referendum to adopt Belarusian constitutional amendments in February 2022.

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko threatened unspecified retaliatory measures against Lithuania if Lithuania blocks Belarusian product exports from Lithuanian ports on January 31.¹⁷⁶² Lukashenko also instructed Belarusian state-owned enterprises to find ways to negate negative effects from being potentially shut out from Lithuanian ports.

Russian Eastern Military District Commander Alexander Chaiko visited the Belarusian 38th Airborne Brigade in Brest, Belarus, on January 29.¹⁷⁶³ Chaiko will likely command Russian Eastern Military District units in Belarus and perhaps combined Russian-Belarusian units during the Union Resolve 2022 exercises scheduled for February 10-20.

An unidentified Russian air defense battalion of the Eastern Military District arrived in an unspecified location in Belarus on January 29.¹⁷⁶⁴ The battalion is equipped with Pantsir-S short-range air defense systems.

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko gave an address to the Belarusian National Assembly (BNA) accusing the West of threatening the Union State and providing details on the new Belarusian constitution on January 28.¹⁷⁶⁵ The BNA is a congress of Lukashenko loyalists that meets every five years and currently has no governing power under Belarusian law. Lukashenko reiterated that Belarus will defend Russia in the framework of their existing treaties if foreign states attack Russia. Lukashenko stated that "hundreds of thousands" of Russian troops will be in Belarus if the West attacks Belarus. Lukashenko accused the West of deploying forces near the Union State's borders and accused Poland and Lithuania of "acting in line with Washington's policy." Lukashenko threatened the destruction of Lithuania as a state if Lithuania attacks Belarus. Lukashenko claimed that Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia are of one "Slavic brotherhood," condemned Ukraine's autocephalous orthodox church, and promised to return Ukraine to the "Slavic bosom." Lukashenko accused the West of waging a hybrid war against Belarus in 2020, against Kazakhstan in January 2022, and trying to "recklessly realize long-standing plans to create a Baltic-Black Sea bridgehead." Lukashenko stated that Belarus must develop cooperation with Russia and other Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) allies and stated that the example of the CSTO in Kazakhstan in January 2022 showed that CSTO collective security

forces became “a key factor in stabilizing the situation.” Lukashenko stated that the Union State’s new military doctrine will strengthen peace in Belarus. and stated Belarus must conduct joint measures and exercises to increase strategic deterrence effectiveness.

Lukashenko stated that the new Belarusian constitution “fully meets the needs of [Belarusian] society” and reiterated intent to hold a referendum on the constitution in February 2022. Lukashenko denied that the new Belarusian constitution will transform the BNA into a dual power structure and claimed that the BNA’s powers will not overlap with those of existing state organs under the new constitution.

Lukashenko denied that the Kremlin seeks to “absorb” Belarus in the Union State and stated that Russia and Belarus are independent states that built “a system of cooperation.” Lukashenko stated that Belarus is ready to cooperate with the West, but only if the West seeks to develop relations with Belarus without violating Belarusian sovereignty and without forcing Minsk to choose between the West and Russia.

The Russian Ministry of Defense confirmed that logistics elements of the Eastern Military District from Amur Oblast, likely of the 35th Combined Arms Army and 103rd Logistics Brigade, are continuing to deploy to Belarus as of January 28.¹⁷⁶⁶

Belarusian social media users observed a concentration of Russian equipment and field tents at the airport in Shchuchyn, Belarus (Grodno Oblast), on January 27.¹⁷⁶⁷ Russia may be creating an air base near Shchuchyn.

Belarusian Chief of the General Staff Viktor Gulevich gave a briefing on January 27 on the joint Belarusian-Russian exercise “Allied Resolve-2022,” schedule to occur from February 10-20.¹⁷⁶⁸ Gulevich stated the exercise will occur in a “difficult military-political situation” and that the CSTO deployment to Kazakhstan amid protests in early January 2022 shows the increased need for “collective military-political alliances,” referencing the Russia-Belarus Union State, to ensure national security. Gulevich stated all Russian and Belarusian troops will arrive at their designated training areas by February 10 and form integrated groups of forces. Gulevich stated the active phase of the exercise will simulate defending the Union State, including on Belarus’ border with Ukraine. Finally, Gulevich claimed all Russian forces will leave Belarusian territory following the conclusion of the exercises.

The Russian Ministry of Defense confirmed that the 12 Su-35 fighters it is deploying to Belarus are from Eastern Military District on January 26.¹⁷⁶⁹ It was previously unclear whether the Su-35s were from Eastern Military District or a different Russian military district.

Elements of the Russian 217th Airborne Regiment (likely a battalion tactical group) deployed to Brest, Belarus, likely on January 24.¹⁷⁷⁰ The 217th Regiment is familiar with operating in Belarus; the Kremlin deployed a battalion tactical group of the 217th Regiment to Belarus in September 2020 for “Slavic Brotherhood 2020” exercises.¹⁷⁷¹

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko said that Belarus needs to rapidly establish a task force to “protect [its] almost 1,500 km border with Ukraine” on January 25.¹⁷⁷² Lukashenko said that Belarus planned to strengthen its border “long ago,” but the task force now coincides with pre-planned joint Russian-Belarusian “Union Resolve

2022” military exercises.¹⁷⁷³ Lukashenko added that he is “forced to [initiate the task force] because the situation at the border with Ukraine is no easier than that with the Poles.” Lukashenko reiterated claims that “rogues” previously attempted to smuggle weapons from Ukraine into Belarus. Lukashenko added that Union Resolve 2022 does not aim to start a military escalation with the West, but stated that if military escalation occurs, “then [Belarus] should be ready for anything.” Lukashenko stated that Belarus and Russia need to conduct military exercises to determine which units they “need to concentrate” in specific locations.

The Belarusian Energy Ministry claimed that Belarus began sending emergency electricity exports to Ukraine through a bilateral agreement on January 25.¹⁷⁷⁴

Ukraine’s Khmelnytsky Nuclear Power Plant’s (NPP) automatic systems turned off one power block earlier in the day.¹⁷⁷⁵ Ukraine also is expecting Zaporizhe NPP to shut down a power unit to depressurize a pipeline.

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko accused Ukrainian forces of gathering near Belarus’ southern border and stated that Belarus needs to deploy a “whole contingent of the Belarusian army” to defend its southern border on January 24.¹⁷⁷⁶

Lukashenko stated that Belarus faces military threats from Ukraine, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland. Lukashenko has accused NATO of building up forces near Belarus’ western borders since fall 2020 but has not included Ukraine under the rubric of this threat until now. Lukashenko additionally accused the US State Department of threatening Belarusian diplomats in New York against Russian force and nuclear weapon deployments to Belarus. Lukashenko accused the US of waging a war against Belarus through Polish, and Latvian proxies.

Russia’s ongoing Eastern Military District (EMD) deployment to Belarus in January 2022 is likely larger than Russia’s deployment to Belarus for the Zapad-2021 exercises in September 2021. A Telegram channel run by Belarusian rail workers on January 21 stated that since January 14, 33 military trains (“echelons”) arrived from Russia in Belarus with an average of 50 cars per train - compared to 29 trains over an entire month for the Zapad 2021 exercise.¹⁷⁷⁷ The Telegram channel claimed that 200 trains from Russia are scheduled to arrive in Belarus in total. Russia’s Ministry of Defense confirmed that EMD elements are still deploying to Belarus as of January 24.¹⁷⁷⁸ Russia is likely deploying at least seven to ten battalion tactical groups to Belarus with elements of the following units:

- 104th Logistics Brigade¹⁷⁷⁹
- 54th Command and Control Brigade¹⁷⁸⁰
- 64th Motorized Rifle Brigade¹⁷⁸¹
- 38th Motorized Rifle Brigade¹⁷⁸²
- 165th Artillery Brigade¹⁷⁸³
- 37th Motorized Rifle Brigade¹⁷⁸⁴
- 5th Tank Brigade¹⁷⁸⁵
- 155th Naval Infantry Brigade¹⁷⁸⁶
- 14th Special Forces Brigade¹⁷⁸⁷

Russia is deploying Eastern Military District (EMD) forces to southeastern Belarus near the Belarus’ border with Ukraine. The Belarusian Ministry of Defense confirmed that unspecified Russian units arrived at Polomka, central Belarus, and Kozenki, southeast Belarus about 50 kilometers north of the Ukrainian border, on January 23.¹⁷⁸⁸ Russian elements continued deploying to Gomel in southeastern Belarus bordering Ukraine over January 21-22.¹⁷⁸⁹ The Russian Ministry of Defense confirmed that the 12 Su-35 fighters

that deployed to Belarus came from the EMD on January 22.¹⁷⁹⁰ Ukraine Belarusian social media users have observed Russian elements deploying to southeastern Belarus in Grodno Oblast, bordering Ukraine, since January 17.¹⁷⁹¹

Unknown hackers reportedly conducted a cyberattack against Belarusian railways on January 24.¹⁷⁹² The attack reportedly degraded Belarusian railways' traffic control into manual mode and disrupted electronic ticket servers.¹⁷⁹³

Belarusian President Lukashenko visited Belarusian troops in Brest on January 21, decried a claimed “western buildup against Belarus,” and stated Belarus and Russia are united “from Brest to Vladivostok.”¹⁷⁹⁴ Lukashenko claimed Ukraine is “under external control” and behaving erratically, requiring Belarus to prepare to conduct military operations on its southern border. Lukashenko stated Belarus and Russia will be “indivisible” in the event of any war. Lukashenko additionally noted that the only circumstance that would prevent Belarus from holding a referendum on a new constitution would be the outbreak of war.

Russian First Deputy Chairman of the Federation Council Committee on International Affairs Vladimir Dzhubarov denied that Russia is deploying nuclear forces to Belarusian territory on January 19.¹⁷⁹⁵ Dzhubarov stated that Moscow did not react to Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko's offer for Belarus to host Russian nuclear weapons and stated that Russia and Belarus are not discussing the topic.

Russia's Ministry of Defense announced on January 18 that it began deploying unspecified Eastern Military District ground forces, two battalions of S-400 air defense systems, a battalion of Pantsir-S air defense systems, and 12 Su-35 aircraft to Belarus for “Union Resolve 2022” exercises scheduled for February 10 to 20.¹⁷⁹⁶ Russian Deputy Defense Minister Alexander Fomin announced that the deployment includes unspecified Eastern Military District ground forces elements (likely at least multiple battalion tactical groups), two S-400 battalions, a Pantsir-S battalion, and 12 Su-35 fighters on January 18.¹⁷⁹⁷ It is unclear if the Pantsir-S, and Su-35 units are also from the Eastern Military District or a different military district. The Russian Ministry of Defense confirmed on January 21 that the S-400 units deployed from Khabarovsk, indicating the 71st Brigade likely deployed to Belarus.¹⁷⁹⁸ Russian and Belarusian officials did not specify the number of participants in this exercise besides claiming that they do not fall under the reporting requirements in the Vienna Document of 2011.¹⁷⁹⁹ The Russian Ministry of Defense stated the exercises will test defending Russia and Belarus' southern and western borders and Belarus and Russia's unified regional air defense system.¹⁸⁰⁰ Russian and Belarusian forces will conduct the exercises at the Domano, Gozhsky, Obuz-Lesnovsky, Brest, and Osipovichsky training grounds; at Baranovichi, Luninets, Lida, and Machulishchi airfields; and at other unspecified Belarusian territory likely outside of confined training grounds.¹⁸⁰¹ The Kremlin will likely use the exercises as a pretext for deploying Russian forces near Belarusian border with Ukraine.

These exercises will expand Russia's long-term control over Belarus beyond immediately threatening Ukraine. Russia's S-400 deployment to Belarus is likely permanent.¹⁸⁰² The Kremlin likely seeks to use this deployment to expand Russian control over Belarus' military beyond Belarus' current contributions to the joint Regional Grouping of Forces (RGV); Fomin stated that the RGV may not be sufficient to protect the Union State and that Moscow and Minsk must be ready to “involve the entire potential of the state's military

organization” to defend the Union State on January 18.¹⁸⁰³ The Kremlin likely seeks to gain control over the entirety of Belarus’ armed forces.

New Russian Ambassador to Belarus Boris Gryzlov stated on January 18 that his top priority is to advance Russian-Belarusian integration in the Union State.¹⁸⁰⁴

Gryzlov also reiterated longstanding Russian accusations that NATO deployed forces near the Union State’s border in Belarus. Russian President Vladimir Putin appointed Gryzlov ambassador to Belarus on January 14. Gryzlov has served as the Kremlin’s Plenipotentiary Representative in the Trilateral Contact Group (TCG) – a working group among Russia, Ukraine, and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) that holds biweekly meetings on conflict resolution for the war in Donbas – since 2015. Gryzlov stated that he will simultaneously maintain his TCG position while working as Russian Ambassador to Belarus.^{xxx} The Kremlin’s decision to appoint an official who understands the Kremlin’s strategy and tactics in Ukraine to a senior position in Belarus indicates the Kremlin seeks to increase policy coordination to have Russian activity in Belarus support the Kremlin’s objectives in Ukraine.

The US State Department gave a briefing on Russia’s military deployment to Belarus on January 18.¹⁸⁰⁵ The State Department stated that the Kremlin could station troops in Belarus under the guise of joint military exercises to attack Ukraine from Ukraine’s northern border. The State Department said that Belarus’ new draft constitution could allow the Kremlin to deploy conventional and nuclear forces to Belarus. The State Department stated that Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko has demonstrated increasing readiness to trade Belarus’ sovereignty and independence in order to remain in power.

Russian and Belarusian pilots conducted their second joint air patrol of Belarusian airspace in 2022 on January 12.¹⁸⁰⁶ Russian and Belarusian pilots flew Su-30SM fighters for the patrol.

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko gave a speech on January 7 in which he said he took more measures in an unspecified past time frame to preserve Belarusian sovereignty and independence to protect Belarus “as a state.”¹⁸⁰⁷

Lukashenko said the world is “seriously” changing in 2022 and that the world will change by “uniting nations and states in unions.” Lukashenko said he took more serious measures in an unspecified past time frame to protect Belarus’ sovereignty because it would be impossible for states like Belarus to “survive alone” given these global changes. Lukashenko said that current events in Kazakhstan should be a lesson for Belarus for what could have happened during the Belarusian protests in fall 2020. Lukashenko characterized the protests in Kazakhstan as an “attempt to attack post-Soviet states along Russia’s perimeter” and praised Belarus’ joint peacekeeping efforts with Russia in Kazakhstan. Lukashenko also criticized Ukraine’s autocephalous church and said, “we need to do everything to return Ukraine to the bosom of our true faith.” Lukashenko has not spoken prominently about defending Belarusian sovereignty and independence in several months. Lukashenko may realize he needs to intensify efforts to prevent a Russian intervention into Belarus after observing the rapid Collective Security Treaty Organization operation in Kazakhstan.

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko accused NATO of deploying 30,000 troops on the Polish-Belarusian border on January 6.¹⁸⁰⁸ Lukashenko also stated his support for the Collective Security Treaty Organization’s decision to send forces to Kazakhstan and stated that “Kazakhstan cannot be given away.” Lukashenko implied that Kazakh

protesters are Western-backed. Lukashenko called for revitalization of Soviet Belarusian history to form “friendly relations” with Russia and combat Western information operations. Lukashenko claimed that certain neighboring states politicized their histories to advance political goals – likely implying Ukraine’s shift away from Soviet history.

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko held phone calls about the situation in Kazakhstan with Russian President Vladimir Putin and Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev on January 5.¹⁸⁰⁹ Lukashenko confirmed that the leaders discussed Collective Security Treaty Organization peacekeeping deployments to Kazakhstan on January 6.¹⁸¹⁰

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko signed a law condemning Nazis and Nazi-collaborators for genocide against Belarusians and Soviet citizens residing in Belarus during World War II and denounced genocide-denial on January 5.¹⁸¹¹ The law aligns with the Kremlin’s campaign to consolidate its preferred historiography on World War II. This development will more closely align Belarus and Russia’s cultural spheres and can support Russian efforts to involve Belarus in vilifying Ukraine.

Russian and Belarusian pilots conducted their first joint air patrol of in Belarusian airspace in 2022 on January 5.¹⁸¹² Russian and Belarusian pilots of Su-30SM fighters flew for 120 minutes and covered 1,150 kilometers.

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Andrey Rudenko stated that Russia opposes Western interference in Belarus and said that Belarusians will enjoy visiting Crimea on January 3. Rudenko said Western curators control Belarusian opposition leadership. Rudenko said Belarus and Russia are “brotherly peoples” – the language the Kremlin also uses to describe Russia and Ukraine as one Eastern Slavic nation. Rudenko expressed support for Belarusian constitutional amendments and stated that Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko is welcome to visit Crimea.

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko claimed he signed a decree to give Belarusian citizenship to 380 Ukrainians on December 31.¹⁸¹³ Lukashenko additionally claimed that Belarus has given Belarusian citizenship to more than 2,300 Ukrainians since August 9, 2021. Lukashenko stated that these Ukrainians came from Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, implying they are refugees from eastern Ukraine. The Kremlin and Minsk may frame Ukrainians as refugees to support a larger information operation about a humanitarian catastrophe in Ukraine that necessitates Russian intervention.

Belarus’ 56th Communications Regiment received an unspecified quantity of new Russian-made “Kestrel” automated intelligence and command and control systems on December 30.¹⁸¹⁴ The Belarusian Ministry of Defense stated that these systems will improve the “unified automated control” of Belarus’ Air Force and Air Defense Forces. This is likely a component of the Kremlin’s campaign to expand Russian integration with and control over the Belarusian Armed Forces.

Putin met with Belarusian President Lukashenko in St Petersburg and discussed economic cooperation and upcoming military exercises on December 29.¹⁸¹⁵ Lukashenko remained in Russia for the bilateral meeting following a meeting of CIS heads of state on December 28. Putin and Lukashenko discussed the implementation of the Union state roadmaps signed in early December. Lukashenko thanked Putin for Russia’s economic support

to counteract Western sanctions on Belarus. Putin stated Russia and Belarus are coordinating plans for Russian military exercises in Belarus and will likely finalize these plans by February or March.

The Russian Federal Service for Military-Technical Cooperation (FSMTC) announced on December 28 that Belarus plans to purchase Tor-M2 anti-aircraft missile systems from Russia.¹⁸¹⁶ FSMTC did not specify when Belarus will complete the purchase.

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko threatened to suspend ground cargo transit between Ukraine and Lithuania through Belarusian territory if Lithuania blocks Belarusian exports via Lithuania's Klaipeda seaport on December 22.¹⁸¹⁷

The Belarusian Ministry of Defense and Armed Forces conducted joint staff training from December 14 to 17.¹⁸¹⁸ The exercises focused on improving the structural coordination of Belarus' Ministry of Defense, General Staff, and military command and control bodies. These exercises can support Russian efforts to deploy Russian forces to Belarus.

The Belarusian military will conduct a joint staff training from December 14-17.¹⁸¹⁹ The Chief of the Belarusian General staff will oversee the exercise, which will include the "structural divisions of the Ministry of Defense," the General Staff, and unspecified command and control bodies. The exercise is intended to improve the coherence of military command and control bodies.

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko reiterated his threat to cut off gas transit to Europe through the Yamal-Europe pipeline in response to EU sanctions on December 13.¹⁸²⁰ The European Union imposed a fifth round of sanctions on Belarus in December 2021 in response to the Belarusian state-manufactured migrant crisis along the Belarus-Poland border in November 2021. Russian Press Secretary Dmitry Peskov stated that Russian state-owned gas company Gazprom will still fulfill its obligations to supply gas to Europe and that Lukashenko's threat came without Kremlin approval.¹⁸²¹ Lukashenko made the same threat on November 11, prompting Putin to state Lukashenko did not consult with him beforehand and state and decision by Belarus to halt gas transit would harm relations with Russia.¹⁸²²

Russia continues to modernize Belarusian brigades through early December. Russia delivered an unspecified quantity of modernized BTR-82A armored personnel carriers to the Belarusian 6th Mechanized Brigade in Grodno, Belarus, on December 9.¹⁸²³ Russia similarly gave an unspecified quantity BTR-82s to the Belarusian 120th Brigade in Minsk on December 2.¹⁸²⁴ The Kremlin seeks to modernize Belarus' maneuver elements to improve interoperability and integration with Russian ground forces.

Lukashenko had a phone call with Putin about Belarusian-Russian relations and "outside threats" concerning both countries on December 10.¹⁸²⁵ The call followed Lukashenko and Putin's participation in the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council on December 10. Minsk did not specify the contents of the discussed topics and the Kremlin did not confirm the call with its own readout.

Lukashenko announced he granted 448 Ukrainians Belarusian citizenship on December 7.¹⁸²⁶ Lukashenko stated that Belarus has granted Belarusian citizenship to

approximately 1,200 Ukrainians since August 9, 2021.¹⁸²⁷ The Kremlin and Minsk may frame Ukrainians as refugees to support a larger information operation about a humanitarian catastrophe in Ukraine that necessitates Russian intervention.

Active-duty Belarusian forces began countrywide combat readiness classes to improve their ability to support a mass mobilization on December 7.¹⁸²⁸ Belarusian forces have not mobilized as of December 11. The training emphasizes maintaining mobilization readiness for large Belarusian formations and command and control elements. This training supports assessed Russian efforts to permanently deploy Russian forces to Belarus.

Belarusian Prime Minister Roman Golovchenko announced Minsk’s intent to develop industrial cooperation with Russia and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) on December 7. Golovchenko stated that Western sanctions against Belarus will not achieve their goals and that Russia and Belarus can “withstand any pressure.”

Lukashenko announced that he will deliver an address to Belarus’ parliament in January and repeated false claims about a NATO buildup near Belarus on December 6.¹⁸²⁹ Lukashenko stated that Russia will not attack Ukraine and reiterated Belarus’ support for Russia. Lukashenko stated that NATO seeks to encircle Russia with a “a chain [of states hostile to Russia] from the Black to Baltic Sea.” Lukashenko repeated his claim that the West is conducting a hybrid war color revolution against Belarus. Lukashenko stated that if opposition leaders ousted Lukashenko’s regime in 2020, then there would have been a “NATO bloc near Smolensk.” Lukashenko reiterated Kremlin narratives that the Belarusian opposition seeks to break the Union State with Russia, bring Belarus into NATO, create an autocephalous (independent from Moscow) Belarusian Orthodox church, and ban the Russian language.

The Belarusian Defense Ministry claimed that a Ukrainian Mi-8 helicopter violated Belarusian airspace in Novaya Rudnya, Belarus, on December 4.¹⁸³⁰ Belarusian officials claimed that a Ukrainian Mi-8 flew one kilometer into Belarusian airspace while conducting Ukraine’s “Poissya” border security operation.¹⁸³¹ Ukraine’s State Border Service denied any violations on December 4.¹⁸³² A Belarusian border guard official said Belarusian border guards “will act extremely harshly” if Ukraine further violates the border.¹⁸³³ These claims reinforce Belarusian and Kremlin information operations about a supposed Ukrainian threat to Belarus and support Russian efforts to set informational conditions for deploying Russian forces into Belarus.

Kremlin news outlet Rossiya Segodnya published on December 2 that Lukashenko stated he would not exclude increasing Belarus’ armed forces from 65,000 to 70,000 men to “cover [Belarus’] south” during a November 30 interview.¹⁸³⁴ Lukashenko also stated that recently announced joint Russian-Belarusian exercises on Belarus’ southern border with Ukraine will occur within the next two months.¹⁸³⁵

Lukashenko said Ukraine is “under external control” during the November 30 Rossiya Segodnya interview.¹⁸³⁶ This statement supports a Russian propaganda narrative that NATO and Western states, primarily the United States, have turned Ukraine into a proxy. Lukashenko’s rhetoric is increasingly aligned with Kremlin narratives in an unprecedented manner. Analysts should consider Lukashenko’s actions as increasingly directed by the

Kremlin. Belarusian forces will likely support Kremlin objectives in any intensified military and information operations against Ukraine and/or NATO.

Lukashenko said that recent Western actions encouraged deeper Russian-Belarusian integration at a meeting with the governor of Russia's Astrakhan Oblast on December 2.¹⁸³⁷ Lukashenko's statement about "Western actions" references both a falsely claimed NATO hybrid war that Lukashenko alleges the West has waged against Belarus since fall 2020, and a falsely claimed NATO buildup near Russian and Belarusian borders since fall 2021.

Russian military units' freedom of movement in Belarus will likely increase in 2022. Belarusian Armed Forces officially began the new military training year for 2021-2022 on December 1 with an explicit emphasis on intensive combat training.¹⁸³⁸ The Belarusian MoD stated that Belarusian exercises in 2022 will occur not only at training grounds but also in "individual terrain sections of [Belarus'] territory."¹⁸³⁹ A permanent Russian deployment to Belarus is increasingly likely. Belarusian exercises typically occur at established military training grounds; the extended range of new exercises in Belarus likely presage expanded Russian force posture shifts within Belarus. Belarusian officials stated on November 29 that Russia and Belarus will conduct a joint exercise on Belarus' southern border with Ukraine at an unspecified future date.¹⁸⁴⁰ Belarusian units have not yet begun conducting exercises as of December 1, however they will likely begin within the next several days or weeks.¹⁸⁴¹

Lukashenko said he would not exclude offering to host Russian nuclear weapons in Belarus if NATO deploys nuclear weapons to Eastern Europe on November 30.¹⁸⁴² Lukashenko implied that Belarus is ready to resume hosting Russian nuclear infrastructure—as it did during the Soviet era—if NATO deploys nuclear missile structures to Eastern Europe.¹⁸⁴³ This is a significant inflection in Lukashenko's rhetoric about his openness to hosting Russian weapon systems in Belarus. Prior to August 2020 Lukashenko was stalwartly opposed to Russia increasing its military infrastructure in Belarus beyond two Soviet legacy radar stations. This statement indicates an increased likelihood of a permanent Russian force deployment to Belarus. Lukashenko and Putin also had phone call on November 29 about the situation in Belarus and Russia prior to the interview on November 30, which the Kremlin did not report.¹⁸⁴⁴ Putin warned against NATO deploying hypersonic missiles to Ukraine on November 30.

Lukashenko signaled that Belarus will support Russia during any military escalation in Donbas on November 29. Lukashenko stated that if the West conducts a military operation in Donbas or against Russian borders, then "Belarus will not be left on the sidelines. It is very clear on whose side Belarus will be."¹⁸⁴⁵ Lukashenko also reiterated false Kremlin claims about reports of a Russian offensive being propaganda and false claims of increased NATO force buildups against Belarus. This is a significant inflection in Lukashenko's rhetoric towards Ukraine. Lukashenko's rhetoric on Donbas typically has not so closely aligned with Kremlin talking points.

Belarus' Ministry of Defense announced that Russia and Belarus will conduct a joint exercise on the Belarusian-Ukrainian border, possibly on December 1. Belarusian Defense Minister Khrenin announced that all Belarusian troops will begin combat exercises on December 1 at a Belarusian General Staff meeting on November 29.¹⁸⁴⁶ Khrenin also announced a joint military exercise with Russia on the Belarusian-Ukrainian border on an unspecified future date which could correspond with the Belarusian exercises that will begin on

December 1.¹⁸⁴⁷ Khrenin stated that enemy force groups near Belarus' western and southern borders necessitate these measures to protect the Union State.¹⁸⁴⁸ Russia will very likely deploy ground forces to Belarus within the next several days or weeks.

A Belarusian Mechanized Brigade from Grodno reportedly will deploy to Belarus's southern border with Ukraine. Belarusian online news outlet Motolko reported on November 29 that the Belarusian 6th Mechanized Brigade based in Folush, Grodno, will deploy to Belarus' southern border with Ukraine.¹⁸⁴⁹ There is no open-source evidence of a deployment of the Belarusian 6th Brigade towards Ukraine as of November 29.

The Belarusian MoD continued to accuse Poland and Lithuania of deploying forces closer to Belarus on November 26. The Belarusian Head of the Main Directorate of Ideological Work of the Ministry of Defense on November 26 stated, "Unfortunately, we cannot note any positive steps taken by our neighbors [regarding alleged Polish and Baltic military deployments near Belarus]. Along with the previously announced unfriendly steps to deploy troops and infrastructure, which make it possible to significantly increase the combat strength and create groupings in a short time, we note the further actions of our neighbors aimed at escalating the situation."¹⁸⁵⁰ The official claimed that Lithuania concentrated approximately 4,000 troops near the Belarusian border and criticized Ukraine's new "Poissya" border security operation. The Belarusian MoD stated it is prepared to quickly create its own force groupings if necessary.

Russia and Belarus decided on November 25 to increase the quantity of combined Russian-Belarusian air patrols in Belarusian airspace. The Belarusian MoD stated that it made the decision to increase joint patrols due to an increase in foreign aviation around Belarus' border—a reference to claimed NATO flights near Belarus. A combined Russian-Belarusian tactical group of Su-30SM conducted a flight patrol along the Belarusian border on November 25.¹⁸⁵¹

Russian elements' presence in Belarusian exercises will likely further expand in 2022. Chief of the Belarusian General Staff Viktor Gulevich stated on November 23 that the Belarusian MoD "significantly adjusted" the training process of the Belarusian Armed Forces in 2021-2022 after "taking into account the difficult military-political situation created by Western countries" in regard to the migrant crisis. "We are forced to respond to the intensification of military activity along the outer contour of the State Border of the Republic of Belarus." Gulevich accused a "belt of unfriendly states" of surrounding Belarus like an "anaconda."¹⁸⁵² Gulevich stated Belarus will thus intensify Belarusian exercises.

Strategic Calendar

November – December: Waterways near the Pinsk Marshes in Belarus freeze.¹⁸⁵³ Some bogs never freeze.¹⁸⁵⁴ Generally, Russian bogs usually begin to freeze about two weeks after the stable transition of air temperature through 0 degrees Celsius to negative values.¹⁸⁵⁵ Pinsk historically gets to around this condition in late December through February.¹⁸⁵⁶ Russian geographic information indicates that traversing the Pinsk Marshes, even in winter, is dangerous; the ice is thin in many spots and even experienced adventurers who traverse it on foot can fall through and drown.¹⁸⁵⁷ It is unclear how traversable the marshes actually are for mechanized forces, even in ideal winter conditions.

December 1: Zelensky delivered an address to the Verkhovna Rada in which he reiterated Ukraine's desire to implement the European Union Association Agreement and articulated readiness to talk to the Kremlin.

December 2: US, Russian, and Ukrainian foreign ministers met in Stockholm, Sweden.¹⁸⁵⁸

December 6-10: New German Cabinet.¹⁸⁵⁹

December 7: Putin-Biden videoconference.¹⁸⁶⁰

December 15: Eastern Partnership summit focusing on “stability and cooperation,” in Brussels, Belgium.¹⁸⁶¹

December 23: Putin press conference.¹⁸⁶²

December 28: Meeting between Putin and Lukashenko.¹⁸⁶³

December 30: Putin-Biden phone call.¹⁸⁶⁴

December–January: Anticipated joint Russo-Belarusian exercise on Belarus' southern border with Ukraine.¹⁸⁶⁵

January: Lukashenko gives speech to the Belarusian parliament and nation.¹⁸⁶⁶

January 7: Videoconference among NATO foreign ministers.¹⁸⁶⁷

January 9-10: US-Russia talks on security guarantees in Geneva.¹⁸⁶⁸

January 12: NATO-Russia Council meeting on security guarantees in Europe in Brussels.¹⁸⁶⁹

January 13: OSCE-Russia meeting.¹⁸⁷⁰

January 21: Meeting between US Secretary of State Blinken and Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov in Geneva.

January 15–February 15: Seasonal freeze in Ukraine that the Ukrainian GUR is forecasting the Russians will plan maneuvers around. Ukraine's National Security and Defense Council contradicts GUR's claims and does not see these dates as particularly significant as of November 25.¹⁸⁷¹

Late March- Mid April: Rasputitsa, the annual period of snow melt that makes travel difficult, occurs—though it varies by region and local climate factors.¹⁸⁷²

¹ <https://tass dot ru/politika/13744389>; <https://tass dot ru/politika/13744013>; <https://tass dot ru/politika/13745077>; <https://www dot kommersant.ru/doc/5218858>; https://www dot mid dot ru/ru/foreign_policy/news/1799157/

² https://www dot mid dot ru/ru/foreign_policy/news/1799060/

3 <https://tass dot ru/politika/13739459>; <https://tass dot ru/politika/13739451>; <https://tass dot ru/politika/13739267>

4 <https://tass dot ru/politika/13738807>; <https://tass dot ru/politika/13738953>; <https://tass dot ru/politika/13740693>

5 <https://tass dot ru/politika/13741433>

6 <https://www.wsj.com/articles/ukraine-pro-russia-separatists-trade-allegations-of-cease-fire-violations-11645091832>

7 <https://ria dot ru/20220217/posol-1773369117.html>; <https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-expels-gorman-embassy-united-states/31708522.html>; https://www dot mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/news/1799198/

8 https://function.mil dot ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12409374@egNews; https://function.mil dot ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12409336@egNews; https://function.mil dot ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12409318@egNews

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10 https://function.mil dot ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12409275@egNews

11 https://function.mil dot ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12409310@egNews

12 https://function.mil dot ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12409317@egNews

13 https://www dot mid dot ru/ru/foreign_policy/news/1798971/

14 <https://tass dot ru/politika/13724271>

15 <https://tass dot ru/politika/13724239>

16 <https://tass dot ru/politika/13724229>

17 <https://tass dot ru/politika/13724615>

18 <https://tass dot ru/politika/13724631>

19 <https://tass dot ru/politika/13724213>

20 https://www dot mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/news/1798942/

21 <https://tass dot ru/politika/13729893>

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