



Russia One Year In

As the Biden Administration nears its first full year in office, its strong rhetoric condemning Putin's aggression has not been matched by equally strong action. This has emboldened Putin – as evidenced by Russia's destabilizing military buildup in and around Ukraine. Ahead of the series of dialogues with Russia next week, here are the top five areas where the administration's Russia policy has given Putin the dangerous impression he can get away with his growing aggression:

New START: Extension or Concession?

One of the first foreign policy moves of the Biden Administration was to [extend the New START nuclear arms reduction treaty](#) with Russia, handing Putin exactly what he asked for with a full five-year extension – and no strings attached. That surrendered U.S. leverage to fix structural flaws in the treaty and surrendered our ability to capture all types of Russian nuclear weapons, including tactical nuclear weapons and all their new “exotic” strategic systems.

Failure to Stop Russia's Nord Stream 2 Gas Pipeline

In May 2021, the Biden Administration waived U.S. sanctions on the key company behind the Nord Stream 2 pipeline, paving the way for the Russian malign influence project's completion. A subsequent – and [deeply flawed](#) – U.S.-German deal has predictably failed to address the serious consequences of an operational pipeline for Ukraine and Europe. Most notably, despite the deal's commitment to penalize the Putin regime for weaponizing energy, the U.S. and Germany have allowed the Kremlin's exploitation of the current European energy crisis to go unanswered. This has serious consequences for Western credibility when we threaten sanctions now and in the future.

If gas is permitted to flow through Nord Stream 2, it will undermine Ukraine's security, fill Putin's coffers and increase the Kremlin's leverage over Europe's gas supplies. And all of this will happen right as European resolve is desperately needed to rally a tough response to Russia's troop buildup. Therefore, the pipeline must be stopped immediately. Threatening to stop it only after a further Russian invasion, as the [Biden Administration](#) and [some in Congress](#) have proposed, risks handing Putin another powerful geopolitical weapon to wield over Ukraine and the rest of Europe.

For more on the Biden Administration's failed Nord Stream 2 policy, read [here](#).

Weak Response to the Russian Military Buildup this Spring

Putin is well known for testing Western resolve to see how much malign behavior he can get away with. The Biden Administration failed this test in its weak response to the Russian military buildup near Ukraine this spring. Amidst this earlier Russian escalation, the Biden Administration scrapped plans to send two Navy destroyers into the Black Sea to avoid “[escalating tensions](#)” and [delayed](#) a supplemental military aid package to Ukraine. These actions send a dangerous signal that the administration is not prepared to follow through on its strong statements of unwavering support for Ukraine.



Unenforced Cyber “Red Lines”

Cyberattacks against the United States emanating from Russia, like those that seriously disrupted [critical U.S. infrastructure and supply chains](#), [continue unabated](#). Yet, we have not seen a strong visible U.S. response. This significantly undermines the “red lines” President Biden delivered personally to Vladimir Putin at the Geneva summit in June 2021 and serves to further undermine the credibility of U.S. threats to respond resolutely to Russian malign behavior.

Response to Putin’s Demands for Western Security Guarantees

The [Russian security proposals](#) set to be discussed next week aim to weaken NATO by severing the alliance’s ties with Central and Eastern Europe, and in its place allowing the Kremlin to assert control over what it deems its sphere of influence. These proposals must be rejected outright as the legitimate basis of any dialogue. The U.S. must also oppose any effort to undermine Kyiv’s sovereignty over all of Ukraine or Ukraine’s freedom to choose its own security arrangements.

Dialogue must be approached from a position of strength. Yet, like before the Geneva summit, the administration set no preconditions for the upcoming bilateral meeting, such as a significant de-escalation at Ukraine’s border. Moreover, as the threat of Western sanctions has thus far failed to convince Putin to change course, the administration appears to now be more focused on determining “[accommodations](#)” to offer the Kremlin, instead of redoubling efforts to deter the Putin regime. The administration must focus on speeding up the delivery of [emergency military assistance](#) to Ukraine – which should have started months ago when the Russian buildup began – and urging our European allies to join the U.S. in ratcheting up the threat of significant sanctions further.

Conclusion

If the Biden Administration rewards Putin by giving into his revanchist demands, it will show the world’s autocrats that all one needs to do to win U.S. concessions is instigate a crisis. After the disastrous withdrawal from Afghanistan, doing so would also seriously undermine U.S. support for our partners and lead to a further weakened America on the world stage.