

Russia in Review: a digest of useful news from U.S.-Russia Initiative to Prevent Nuclear Terrorism for June 28-July 5, 2013

I. U.S. and Russian priorities for the bilateral agenda.

Nuclear security agenda:

- At the IAEA conference on nuclear security in Vienna, US Energy Secretary Ernest Moniz announced that the United States and Russia have successfully removed all highly enriched uranium from Vietnam. (AP, 7.2.13)
 - Two batches, nearly 16kg (35lb) of HEU, have been shipped out from Vietnam's Dalat Nuclear Research Institute to Russia where the material will be downblended into LEU for use in power reactors.
- Russian deputy foreign ministers Vladimir Titov and Igor Morgulov met North Korea's chief nuclear negotiator Kim Kye Gwan on July 4 in Moscow to discuss the resumption of the Six-Party Talks. (Reuters, 7.4.13)
 - After the meeting, Morgulov said, "A number of substantial differences remain," without giving further details. (AFP, 7.5.13)
 - The Foreign Ministry said in a statement that Russia "underscored the need for joint efforts aimed at easing tension and creating the conditions for the swift resumption of six-party talks on the basis of principles agreed in the declaration of September 19, 2005."
 - The Russian diplomats also told Kim that "normalizing the situation on the peninsula" would enable Russia and North Korea to step up economic ties and "begin implementation of large-scale international economic projects."

Iran nuclear issues:

- Russia voiced concern that no progress has been made towards organizing new talks with Iran on its nuclear program after Hassan Rouhani's election. (Reuters, 7.4.13)
 - Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov: "There is no agreement now on when and where the next round will be. That worries us...After the election of the Iranian president, we stepped up work in preparation for a new round of talks but so far the work is not being done transparently."
- President Putin met with outgoing Iranian President Ahmadinejad on the sidelines of the Gas Exporting Countries Forum in Moscow. (Interfax, 7.2.13)
 - Ahmadinejad said Tehran hopes to collaborate with Russia on building a new nuclear power plant.

NATO-Russia cooperation, including transit to and from Afghanistan:

- No significant developments.

Missile defense:

- No significant developments.

Nuclear arms control:

- No significant developments.

Counter-terrorism cooperation:

- No significant developments.

Cyber security:

- President Putin told a Russian Security Council meeting that the armed forces must be better prepared to ward off cyber attacks, “first and foremost for strategic and critically important installations.” Earlier, Defense Minister Shoigu called for “a big hunt for programmers” to join the armed forces. (RIA Novosti, 5.7.13; RT, 4.7.13)

Energy exports from CIS:

- At a meeting of the Gas Exporting Countries Forum in Moscow, President Putin urged natural gas exporting countries to join forces and defend traditional long-term oil-linked gas contracts in the face of growing popularity of spot pricing. (Wall Street Journal, 7.1.13)
- European Energy Commissioner Guenther Oettinger said, “The decision to build TAP and later to deliver more gas also means that the supply path to Austria – Nabucco West at the moment – is still in the conversation,” and in the medium term both routes will be needed. (Reuters, 7.5.13)
- Gazprom CEO Alexei Miller met Yury Boiko, Vice Prime Minister of Ukraine. In a statement Gazprom noted that Naftogaz Ukrainy must boost its reserves of gas in underground storage to at least 19 billion cubic meters by the fall-winter season to ensure uninterrupted gas transit to Europe. (Interfax-Ukraine, 7.2.13)
- Gazprom will seek to control 15% of the world liquefied natural gas (LNG) market, up from its 5% share today, CEO Alexei Miller said at an annual shareholder meeting. (The Moscow Times, 7.1.13)

Bilateral economic ties:

- No significant developments.

Other bilateral issues:

- Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov said Russia “cannot solve anything” for NSA leaker Edward Snowden, and he “needs to choose a place to go.” “As of this moment, we do not have a formal application from Mr Snowden asking for asylum in the Russian Federation,” and the situation should now be resolved “one way or the other.” (Reuters, 7.4.13)
 - Earlier, President Putin’s spokesperson, Dmitry Peskov, said Snowden had withdrawn his interest in asylum in Russia after Putin spelled out the terms: “If he wants to stay here... he must stop his work aimed at harming our US partners.”
- US Secretary of State John Kerry met with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov on the sidelines of ASEAN to discuss Syria. Kerry said they agreed on the need to set up a transitional government and made progress on plans to hold a peace conference, which would likely take place after August. (Reuters, 7.2.13)

II. Russia news.

Domestic politics, economy and energy:

- Draft legislation to overhaul Russia's Academy of Sciences passed its second of three readings in the State Duma on Friday. Meanwhile, police raided the basement of the Academy's Moscow headquarters for illegal immigrants. (RIA Novosti, 7.5.13)
 - Earlier this week, the Academy's presidium harshly criticized the government-backed proposal to restructure its nationwide network of research institutions, calling the plans "radical and destructive." (RIA Novosti, 7.1.13)
- Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev has endorsed a roadmap of steps to improve the investment climate in Russia, specific elements of the Doing Business rating of the World Bank and the global competitiveness rating of WEF. (Itar-Tass, 7.1.13)
- Russia's Duma, the lower house of parliament, has approved the setting up of a "mega-regulator" under the roof of the Bank of Russia, which will assume the responsibilities of the Federal Financial Markets Service. (Wall Street Journal, 7.5.13)
- The Duma approved an amnesty for several thousand entrepreneurs jailed for economic crimes. (Reuters, 7.2.13)

Defense:

- Russian Army General Valery Gerasimov met Fang Fenghui, chief of General Staff of the Chinese People's Liberation Army. They announced the dates for two joint military exercises: Naval Interaction 2013 in the Sea of Japan, July 5-12, and Peace Mission 2013 in the Urals region, July 27-August 15. (RIA Novosti, 7.1.13)
 - China's Defense Ministry said the joint drills that began July 5 marked the navy's "single biggest deployment of military force in a China-foreign joint exercise." (BBC, 7.5.13)
 - *People's Daily* wrote, "Assertions have been made that this drill has a symbolic significance in terms of safeguarding the sovereignty of islands in the area, and represents a response to the US-Japan alliance," but the paper said, the joint naval drill was part of series of routine exercises with "no aggressive element."
- After a meeting of the Russian Security Council, Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu announced plans to "increase the number of cruise missiles fivefold within the next three years and 30 times over by 2020." (Interfax, 7.5.13)
- The Russian military anticipates fielding conventional hypersonic weapons between 2018-2025, according to Deputy Defense Minister Yuri Borisov. (GSN, 7.1.13)
- Russia will bolster its Moscow-area missile defenses with four transportable radar units intended for use with S-300 and S-400 interceptors. (GSN, 7.1.13)
- An unmanned Russian Proton-M rocket carrying three Glonass satellites crashed seconds after takeoff from Kazakhstan's Baikonur space center. Prime Minister Medvedev has ordered an investigation and will seek tighter oversight of the space sector; all Proton-M launches have been suspended. (RIA Novosti, 7.2.13)

Security and law-enforcement:

- Chechen rebel leader Doku Umarov has urged his fighters to “do their utmost to derail” the upcoming Winter Olympics in Sochi. (AP, 7.3.13)
 - Russia’s interior minister pledged to make the 2014 Sochi Games the “safest Olympics in history,” by deploying 37,000 police officers to protect the Games. (AP, 7.5.13)
- Rebels killed a Russian policeman and injured 14 others in Chechnya after opening fire on a police patrol in the southern Shatoi district. (Reuters, 6.29.13)
- Russian prosecutor Sergei Bogdanov asked a judge to convict prominent opposition leader Alexei Navalnyi for theft and sentence him to six years in prison. Earlier, Bogdanov dismissed the notion that the case is politically driven. The verdict is expected on July 18. (Wall Street Journal, 7.5.13)
- Investigators detained a prominent anticorruption campaigner, the Mayor of Yaroslavl, Yevgeny Urlashov, charging him with soliciting a large bribe from a city contractor. He has denied wrongdoing and said the charge is politically motivated. (Wall Street Journal, 7.3.13)
- Russian police arrested dozens of gay rights activists and nationalists at a rally in St. Petersburg, declared illegal under a new law against “homosexual propaganda.” (AP, 6.29.13)

Foreign affairs and trade:

- Moscow hosted the Gas Exporting Countries Forum (GECF). On the sidelines of GECF, President Putin met with Venezuelan counterpart Nicolas Maduro, separately with Iranian President Ahmadinejad, as well as other leaders attending the summit. (Interfax, 7.2.13)
- Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi discussed Syria, North Korea, and Iran on the sidelines of ASEAN in Brunei. (Itar-Tass, 7.1.13)

Russia’s neighbors:

- The Foreign Minister of Belarus, Vladimir Makei, will meet with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov in Moscow on July 10. (BelTA, 7.5.13)
- Georgia’s next presidential election will be held on 31 October 2013. (RIA Novosti, 7.1.13)
- During a visit to Kazakhstan, British Prime Minister David Cameron signed several business accords with the oil-rich country and pledged to double trade turnover by 2017. (RIA Novosti, 7.1.13)
 - After Cameron raised concerns over human rights in Kazakhstan, President Nazarbayev responded coldly, “Nobody has a right to instruct us how to live.” (Reuters, 7.1.13)

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