



Summary of and Perspectives on Russia's Policy Towards the U.S. after Biden's First Year

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Russia is not satisfied with U.S. policy in Joe Biden's first year of his presidency. Russian diplomacy was counting on what it considered more pragmatism. With the Russian military threats against Ukraine, the U.S. declared readiness for talks, which encouraged Russia to make more demands. However, Russia has failed to obtain legal security guarantees from the U.S., including on the non-expansion of NATO to Ukraine. Therefore, Russia will continue to escalate tensions in Europe, testing U.S. alliance commitments.

Russia's Goals Towards the U.S. under Biden. After a period of difficult and chaotic Russian-American relations under Donald Trump, Russia [counted on predictability](#) from the Biden administration and the establishment of proper U.S.-Russia contacts. The Russian authorities wanted a return to bilateral talks, which is understood in Russia as an appreciation of its superpower status. At the same time, Russia expected a reduction of U.S. pressure on it and recognition of its interests in Eastern Europe, especially in Ukraine.

Russia assessed the Biden administration as weak and unwilling to confront. This conviction intensified after the U.S. [withdrawal from Afghanistan](#) last August. At that time, Russia decided to undermine the U.S. leadership and use the image of defeat of the U.S. to try to shatter NATO unity. It also wanted to reduce support for the U.S. in Central and Eastern Europe, mainly in Ukraine and Georgia. The Russian authorities confirmed this last December by [demanding legal security guarantees](#), including a halt to NATO's eastward enlargement and a [reduction of the U.S. military presence](#) in Central Europe, which had become the most important objective in Russia's relations with the U.S. and the collective West.

The Russian government assumed that the dialogue-oriented Biden administration, whose priorities include the rivalry with China and domestic affairs, would be less committed to promoting democracy and protecting human rights in Russia. Russian accusations of U.S. interference in

internal affairs intensified during the civil unrest following the return of opposition activist Alexei Navalny early last year and demonstrations in support of him. However, these accusations were more an element of the Russian government's internal political game with the opposition than the result of actual U.S. actions.

Bilateral Relations. During Biden's first months in office, the Russian authorities adopted a wait-and-see attitude. During this time, without preconditions, the U.S. extended the 2010 Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty until 2026 (New START). The U.S. sanctions pressure was partly maintained, but to a lesser extent than Russia was concerned about. Among other restrictions, in April this year the U.S. introduced limitations on investment by U.S. financial entities in Russian sovereign debt, but only on the primary market. In response, Russia officially recognised the U.S. as an unfriendly state and decided to demonstrate its resolve. Russia's amassing of more than a hundred thousand troops on the border with Ukraine had the effect of raising the profile of the U.S.-Russia talks. During [the first meeting between](#) Presidents Joe Biden and Vladimir Putin in June last year, the parties agreed to conduct a political dialogue on the security sphere, including [strategic stability](#) (mainly arms control) and cybersecurity. The presidents outlined spheres of cooperation (the climate, the Arctic), but also outlined "red lines" concerning, for example, cyberattacks. The Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) in January this year arrested the criminal group Revil, responsible for attacks on, among others, the Colonial Pipeline (an oil and gasoline pipeline on the east coast of the

U.S. and the Gulf of Mexico, which was paralysed last May as a consequence of a hacking attack).

In the latter part of 2021, mostly at the initiative of the U.S., various meetings were held, including at the military level—chiefs of staff and chiefs of intelligence—and at the civilian level between deputy foreign ministers (the Russian government lifted sanctions on Victoria Nuland, head of the Bureau for Europe and Eurasia at the State Department, for the occasion). The Biden administration's stated desire to establish "stable and predictable" relations with Russia was interpreted by the Russian government as weakness and an opportunity to make more concessions to Russia. The presidents' subsequent [remote meeting on 7 December](#) last year already took place against the backdrop of U.S. intelligence reports of a new concentration of Russian troops around Ukraine. Russian demands for legal security guarantees were the subject of bilateral talks in Geneva [on 10 January](#) between deputy foreign ministers and on 21 January between foreign ministers, but did not lead to an agreement. Russia has threatened a "military-technical" response if its demands are not met, including the withdrawal of the U.S. military presence from Central Europe.

Multilateral Relations. Russia has reaped the benefits of Biden's policy geared towards multilateral dialogue. A joint Russian-American document on cooperation in the sphere of cybersecurity, which was voted on by a UN General Assembly committee last November, has been submitted to the full body. It took into account the Russian demands that the code of conduct of states in the sphere of information security should be discussed in a wider group.

More importantly for Russian foreign policy, however, it turned out that thanks to the revival in U.S.-German relations, Russia succeeded—through Germany—in easing sanctions on Nord Stream 2 (NS2). With the completion of this gas pipeline last September—although the German regulator has not yet approved it for use—Russia gained a tool to put pressure on Europe, including Ukraine.

At the end of last year, Russia began to increase the pressure on the U.S. and tried to break NATO unity. Russia demanded that the Alliance move away from its open-door policy and limit the U.S. and Alliance military presence and activity in the Russian neighbourhood. On 26 January this year, the U.S. and NATO in a written response rejected the main Russian demands and reaffirmed the fundamental principles of the Alliance and partnership with Ukraine. However, the U.S.

and NATO, on the basis of [reciprocity](#), expressed readiness to discuss arms control, transparency of military activities and prevention of military incidents.

Conclusions and Perspectives. Russia's policy towards the Biden administration in his first year in office was to press the U.S. into talks mainly by applying military pressure around Ukraine. Facilitating Russia's goals was the fact that Biden maintained the approach of previous U.S. administrations to seek rapprochement and contacts with Russia (wanting to focus on other international challenges at the time, such as the rivalry with China).

Russia has benefited from the U.S. openness to dialogue both at the UN (a cybersecurity resolution) and with Germany. The easing of sanctions on NS2 was seen by the Russian government as a signal that the Biden administration would not impose restrictions on this pipeline or its certification even if the situation in Ukraine escalated. This opened the possibility for Russia to use military pressure against the Ukrainian state when the [energy crisis in Europe](#) began.

However, Russia has failed to obtain security guarantees and consent for its main demands, including a NATO presence in Central Europe and blocking the Alliance's open-door policy. Although the prospect of close Russian-American cooperation has receded, the Russian side is still counting that there are those in the U.S. establishment who are prepared to sacrifice NATO enlargement for the price of calm in Europe and the need to focus on the American rivalry with China. It is also possible that the U.S. will enter into closer talks with Russia regarding mutual restrictions on the deployment of land-launched short- and medium-range missiles.

At the same time, the outcome of the past year is favourable for the Russian government from the point of view of its global interests—the diminished importance of the U.S. in the Middle East and the increased position of the authoritarian Chinese and Russian regimes.

Further aggressive actions by Russia in the region of Eastern Europe, such as the deployment of Russian military arsenals near the borders of NATO states (e.g., in Belarus), will be unfavourable to Poland's security. An escalation of military action in Ukraine is possible, which will force the Biden administration to implement its announcement of new sanctions and increased support for the Ukrainian state.