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U.S. officials told The New York Times that those plans include “cutting off Russia’s largest financial institutions from global transactions for defense-related and consumer industries, and arming insurgents in Ukraine who would conduct what would amount to a guerrilla war.”

By this week’s end, the U.S. and its allies likely will know whether Putin is willing to negotiate or whether he’s determined to escalate.

The fluidity of the situation was underscored by this past week’s swift, Russian-led military intervention in Kazakhstan, at the request of protests against a fuel price increase on Jan. 2.

It would be a mistake to separate Putin’s actions in **Kazakhstan (1)**([>](#), [i](#), [s](#), [c](#)) from his ambitions in Ukraine. By his calculations,

When the dust settles, **Kazakhstan (2)**([>](#), [i](#), [s](#), [c](#)) is likely to land deeper in Moscow’s expanding sphere of influence than its mineral riches, which include 40% of the world’s uranium reserves.

Although the situation is still unfolding and reliable information is hard to come by, what’s beyond dispute is that the timing and swift execution of strategic opportunities in the previous Soviet space. It is the fourth time in just two years that Moscow has intervened in neighboring states three.

Rumors are rife in **Kazakhstan (3)**([>](#), [i](#), [s](#), [c](#)) regarding Russia’s role in this past week’s events, ranging from the possibility that opportunistic Putin simply seized the moment.

What’s clear is that with his country in turmoil and his leadership at risk, Kazakh President Tokayev turned to Putin to ensure his political Central Asia -- that had benefited from balancing relations with Moscow, Beijing, and Washington.

With Moscow’s support, Tokayev issued shoot-to-kill orders against protesters and ousted Nursultan Nazarbayev, 81, his erstwhile boss council. He also ousted and arrested Karim Masimov, his intelligence chief, on charges of treason.

Russian troops are now on the ground protecting the country’s most crucial airports and military installations, alongside other soldiers from the previous Soviet Union, in its first such military intervention since its 1992 founding.

As U.S. Secretary of State Tony Blinken said this week, “One lesson of recent history is that once Russians are in your house, it’s so

If there is a message from **Kazakhstan (4)**([i](#), [s](#), [c](#)) to U.S. officials negotiating this week with the Russians, it is this. What the U.S. initiative, is willing to take risks, is prepared to send in troops, and sees the Biden administration – particularly following the Afghanistan

The least likely scenarios are those of Putin backing off from his demands on NATO or executing a full-scale invasion of Ukraine. What is the taking of additional swatches of Ukrainian territory, the annexation of Luhansk or Donbass provinces, where Russian separatists dominate

The question is whether the U.S. and its allies can avoid both appeasement and war. The future of Europe is again in the balance.

—Frederick Kempe is the President and Chief Executive Officer of the Atlantic Council.

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