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FROM The Washington Post

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The Daily 202



By [Olivier Knox](#)

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*Welcome to The Daily 202! Tell your friends to [sign up here](#). On this day in 1989, the Soviet Union announced that the last of its troops had left Afghanistan, nearly a decade after Moscow invaded.*



## The big idea

### As Ukraine heats up, Biden faces the Putin puzzle

&nbsp;This combination of pictures shows President Joe Biden speaking at the White House in Washington, DC, on January 20, 2021; and Russian President Vladimir Putin holding his annual press conference in Moscow on December 19, 2019. &nbsp;(Photo by JIM WATSON,ALEXANDER NEMENOV/AFP via Getty Images)

This combination of pictures shows President Joe Biden speaking at the White House in Washington, DC, on January 20, 2021; and Russian President Vladimir Putin holding his annual press conference in

Moscow on December 19, 2019. (Photo by JIM WATSON,ALEXANDER NEMENOV/AFP via Getty Images)

**President Biden's** efforts to keep Russian forces from pushing further into Ukraine hinge on **finding the right mix of threatened responses to deter Russian President Vladimir Putin**. That requires knowing what he wants and what costs he's willing to bear to get it.

Biden himself has alternately called Putin a "killer" who leads a "paranoid" regime and dissected the Kremlin master's decision-making as driven by fears of losing control at home and eroding influence abroad. **Biden has also (wisely) said he's "not confident" he can change Putin**.

After **decades of openly hostile or downright weird presidential interactions** with the wily former KGB colonel, gauging Putin's intent and his pain threshold is very hard to do.

Here's a look at some reasons reading the Russian leader isn't a straightforward exercise.

**Let's start with that "wily" cliché about Putin's intelligence background**, which is common in news media coverage (I once called him, with ill-considered levity, "the judo-loving former KGB colonel with the nuclear arsenal and the unsettling fondness for being photographed shirtless.")

It's true. But it's poor shorthand for a tenacious, ruthless veteran of the world stage who also happens to believe — or professes to believe — some pretty bizarre stuff, even with the resources of what is supposed to be a world-class spy service.



I don't mean his 2005 claim that the Soviet Union's collapse was "the greatest geopolitical catastrophe" of the 20th century, or his July 2021

essay arguing Ukrainians and Russians were really “one people.” Both have been read as **evidence of his intent** to push deeper into Ukraine.

**No, I mean the chicken plants.**

In his magnificent “Days of Fire: Bush and Cheney in the White House,” Peter Baker of the New York Times recounted an amazing encounter between President **George W. Bush** and Putin, centered on American chicken exports to Russia.

“Russia had retaliated against Bush’s steel tariff by cutting off exports of American chicken drumsticks known as ‘Bush legs.’ As they discussed the impasse privately, Putin asserted that the Americans deliberately sent bad poultry to Russia,” Peter wrote.

**“I know you have separate plants for chickens for America and chickens for Russia,’ Putin told Bush.”**

“Bush was astonished. ‘Vladimir, you’re wrong.’”

“Putin refused to believe him. **‘My people have told me this is true.’**”

In another vignette, Bush told British Prime Minister Tony Blair that Putin had asked “why I didn’t change the Constitution so I could run again.” An autocrat’s little joke? Maybe, though that’s not how it comes across in the book.

In Bush’s own memoir, “Decision Points,” Bush reveals an awkward backstage interaction with the Russian leader.

At a February 2005 summit in Bratislava, Putin defended his control over the news media in Russia. “Don’t lecture me about the free press,” he said, “not after you fired that reporter.”





“Vladimir, are you talking about **Dan Rather**?” Bush asked. Yes, replied Putin, it was about the CBS News anchor, on his way out after doing a report based on fraudulent documents.

“I strongly suggest you not say that in public,” he added. “The American people will think you don’t understand our system.” (At the subsequent news conference, Putin didn’t bring it up, but a Russian reporter did, indignantly.)

And then there was the June 2013 news conference where he suggested he saw a trap in President Barack Obama’s small talk.

“We compared notes on President Putin’s expertise in judo and my declining skills in basketball,” Obama joked. “And we both agreed that as you get older it takes more time to recover.”

**Putin, who reacted with a tense smile, responded: “The president wants to relax me with his statement of age.”**

Questions about Putin’s intent color every Western response to each Russian move.

This morning, my colleagues Robyn Dixon, Rachel Pannett, and Loveday Morris reported: “After ... Putin signaled Monday that he was open to diplomacy to resolve the crisis between Russia and NATO over Ukraine’s bid to join the alliance, **Moscow sent a barrage of contradictory signals Tuesday** — announcing that some Russian forces were being sent home after completing drills, **even as major military exercises continued near Ukraine.**”

“Russia’s military said Tuesday more than 30 of its naval vessels were carrying out a live fire exercise in the Black Sea with aircraft taking part, in

preparation for a 'major' naval exercise that would be supervised by Russia's naval commander."

"But it also announced that some units from Russia's Western Military District and Southern Military District were loading equipment onto rail cars to return to base after completing military exercises, in line with Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu's report to Putin on Monday that some drills were ending and others would end soon."

And, they reported, "[q]uestions remain about Moscow's intentions, with Kremlin officials, diplomats and military officials **sending contradictory messages and keeping Western leaders off balance** in trying to gauge whether Putin will give the order to invade Ukraine and when it might happen."

The only person who can answer that is a wily former KGB officer with unorthodox theories about American chicken processing.



## What's happening now

Sandy Hook families announce settlement with Remington Arms, marking first time a gunmaker is held liable for a U.S. mass shooting

 Remington rifle cartridges. (Julie Jacobson/AP)

Remington rifle cartridges. (Julie Jacobson/AP)

"The settlement marks the end of a protracted court battle between Remington and the Sandy Hook families that sued the company for how it marketed its Bushmaster AR-15 style semiautomatic rifle. Sandy Hook shooter Adam Lanza was armed with the high-powered rifle during his rampage in Newtown, Conn., that killed 28 people, including 20 young children," [Kim Bellware reports](#).

## Prince Andrew reaches settlement with woman who says Jeffrey Epstein trafficker her to him

“Andrew was sued in August by ██████████, who said she was recruited by Epstein and his longtime paramour Ghislaine Maxwell when she was a teenager in Palm Beach, Fla., where Epstein maintained a villa residence. She alleged that the couple introduced to Andrew, who was a friend of theirs,” writes Shayna Jacobs. “In a one-page statement filed in U.S. District Court in Manhattan on Tuesday, the parties agreed that Andrew “never intended to malign Ms. ██████████ character, and he accepts that she has suffered both as an established victim of abuse and as a result of unfair public attacks.”

## Rep. Kathleen Rice (N.Y.) becomes 30th House Democrat to announce her retirement this cycle

“As I turn to the next chapter of my own personal and professional story, I do so with profound thanks to the community leaders, colleagues and staff who have lived our shared commitment to service with courage and humility,” Rice, who has represented New York’s 4th Congressional District since 2015, said in a statement, reports John Wagner.

## ‘Freedom Convoy,’ police face off near U.S.-Canada border crossings as Trudeau invokes Emergencies Act

“Canadian police tried to clear protesters near crossings at the U.S.-Canada border, making arrests as Prime Minister **Justin Trudeau** invoked the country’s Emergencies Act on Monday,” Ellen Francis and Andrew Jeong report.

“Standoffs between police and protesters in Coutts, Alberta, and Surrey, B.C., persisted overnight after authorities had earlier reopened the Ambassador Bridge, the busiest land border crossing and a key trade artery connecting Windsor, Ontario, to Detroit.”

## Pentagon says contractor mergers hurt national security, economy

“The Defense Department on Tuesday released a report that says mergers and consolidation among its contractors pose risks to the U.S. economy and national security,” the **Associated Press’s** Josh Boak reports.

**“The report suggests that mergers have left national security beholden to private companies.** There are only five aerospace and defense prime contractors, down from 51 in the 1990s. Just three sources account for 90% of U.S. missiles.”

## U.S. seeks extradition of former Honduras president on drug charges

“The United States has formally requested the extradition of former Honduran president **Juan Orlando Hernández** on drug trafficking charges, according to senior Honduran officials, **launching what could be one of the highest-profile criminal cases against a former head of state in years,**” Kevin Sieff reports.



## Lunchtime reads from The Post

Can dusting off an old peace deal stop Russia from invading Ukraine? Here’s what to know.

 From left, Russian President Vladimir Putin, French President François Hollande, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko talk in Minsk, Belarus, on Feb. 11, 2015. (Mykola Lazarenko/Ukrainian Presidential Press Office/AP)

From left, Russian President Vladimir Putin, French President François Hollande, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko talk in Minsk, Belarus, on Feb. 11, 2015. (Mykola Lazarenko/Ukrainian Presidential Press Office/AP)

“Amid the global effort to deter Russia from possibly invading Ukraine, France has dusted off a stalled peace agreement that could offer a way

out,” David L. Stern and Robyn Dixon report.

“The Minsk peace agreement, reached in 2015 between Russia and Ukraine, was supposed to end conflict in eastern Ukraine that broke out a year earlier when Russian-backed separatists took up arms. **It did not stop the fighting or solve the crisis ... So why revive it now?**”

## Avocado prices could spike as U.S. suspends imports from Mexico

“‘In a few days, the current inventory will be sold out and there will be a lack of product in almost any supermarket,’ said **Raul Lopez**, Mexico manager of Agtools, which conducts market research of agricultural commodities. ‘The consumer will have very few products available, and prices will rise drastically,’” Laura Reiley reports.

**What happened? “The USDA decided to stop imports when one of its plant-safety inspectors in Michoacán purportedly received a threatening message** on his official cellphone. The suspension will remain in place for as long as necessary to ensure actions are taken to keep APHIS personnel working safely in Mexico, according to Lucero Hernandez, an APHIS spokeswoman.”

## ... and beyond

### Conspiracy theorists fuel bump in extremist killings, report finds

 A person carries a sign supporting QAnon during a protest rally in Olympia, Wash., on May 14, 2020. (Ted S. Warren/AP)

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“Newer strains of far-right movements fueled by conspiracy theories, misogyny and anti-vaccine proponents contributed to a modest rise in

killings by domestic extremists in the United States last year, according to a report released Tuesday by a Jewish civil rights group,” the AP's Michael Kunzelman reports.

“Killings by domestic extremists increased from 23 in 2020 to at least 29 last year, with right-wing extremists killing 26 of those people in 2021, the Anti-Defamation League said in a report first provided to The Associated Press. The ADL’s report says **white supremacists, antigovernment sovereign citizens and other adherents of long-standing movements were responsible for most of the 19 deadly attacks it counted in 2021.** The New York City-based organization’s list also included killings linked to newer right-wing movements that spread online during the coronavirus pandemic and former President Donald Trump’s presidency.”

### Josh Mandel's journey to becoming a right-wing warrior

“Across the country, rising stars of the pre-Trump era have shed the traditional Republicanism of their past to follow Mr. Trump’s far-right brand of politics, cementing the former president’s influence over the next generation of the party’s leaders,” the New York Times's Jennifer Medina and Lisa Lerer report.

**“But Mr. Mandel’s transformation has been particularly striking. Friends, strategists and supporters who powered his start in public life say that Mr. Mandel has so thoroughly rejected his political roots in Cleveland’s liberal-leaning suburbs that he is nearly unrecognizable to them.** Some are convinced that his shift began as a clear political calculation — following his party to the right. But with his recent entrenchment on the fringe, many now wonder if it is not just Mr. Mandel’s public identity that has changed, but also his beliefs.”



## The Biden agenda

## Biden's long-term inflation plan vs. voters' short patience

 President Biden and first lady Jill Biden walk on the South Lawn of the White House on Monday. (Yuri Gripas/Abaca/Bloomberg News)

President Biden and first lady Jill Biden walk on the South Lawn of the White House on Monday. (Yuri Gripas/Abaca/Bloomberg News)

“Even administration officials acknowledge that the initiatives outlined by the president’s seven-month-old competition council aren’t designed to quickly stop the 7.5% inflation that’s frustrating Americans and damaging Biden’s popularity. Furthermore, business groups dispute the fundamental premise that competition has faded within the U.S. economy and they are prepared to challenge the administration’s new initiatives in court,” the AP’s Josh Boak reports.

### The White House says it wants to address environmental racism. Why won’t it mention race?

“As a candidate and then as president, Joseph R. Biden promised to address the unequal burden that people of color carry from exposure to environmental hazards. **But the White House’s new environmental strategy to tackle this problem will be colorblind: Race will not be a factor in deciding where to focus efforts,**” the NYT’s Lisa Friedman reports.

“Worried that using race to identify and help disadvantaged communities could trigger legal challenges that would stymie their efforts, administration officials said they were designing a system to help communities of color even without defining them as such.”

### Biden launches task force to boost greener manufacturing

“The multi-agency ‘Buy Clean Task Force’ is being set up by the Council on Environmental Quality and White House Office of Domestic Climate Policy to help ‘create markets for low carbon materials,’ an administration official told reporters,” Reuters’s David Shepardson reports.

## Inside the White House preparations for a Russian invasion

“As fears grow of potential Russian aggression against Ukraine, a ‘Tiger Team’ led by the White House is quietly gaming out how the United States would respond to a range of jarring scenarios, from a limited show of force to a full-scale, mass-casualty invasion,” [Ellen Nakashima and Ashley Parker report](#).



## Rising car prices, visualized

“More than 80 percent of U.S. car buyers paid above MSRP in January, according to auto market research firm Edmunds. That compares with 2.8 percent the same month a year ago and 0.3 percent in 2020,” [our colleagues report](#).



## Hot on the left

One in four Democrats say the party didn't take full advantage of its power last year

“The finding echoes concerns raised by moderate Democratic members of Congress whose seats the party will have to defend in the Nov. 8 election if it wants to keep its majorities. They said the party has paid too much attention to its failures and not enough to successes like the \$1 trillion infrastructure bill passed in November,” [Reuters's Jason Lange reports](#).

“The poll, conducted online Jan. 31-Feb. 8, found **28% of Democrats said their party was unable to get things done last year because they were too busy fighting each other or lacked resolve**. Forty-seven percent

blamed Republicans for blocking Democratic efforts and only 25% said the party had been able to accomplish most of its goals.”



## Hot on the right

Coates: The Biden administration is failing on climate

“Some of President Joe Biden's failures, from the Afghanistan surrender to skyrocketing inflation, have gotten extensive—and well-deserved—press attention. But there is another fiasco that has as yet gone largely unnoticed: climate,” Victoria Coates writes for **Newsweek**.

“The Biden administration trumpeted itself as the greenest in history, and declared climate to be its driving strategic priority in everything from national security to energy policy. Yet **in Biden's first year in office, the energy crisis in Europe and supply-chain problems at home have spiked global carbon emissions to unprecedented levels, while the White House shuns practical solutions simply because they involve natural gas.**”



## Today in Washington

At 2 p.m., Biden will address bipartisan county officials from around the country at the National Association of Counties 2022 Legislative Conference.



## In closing

Pandemic love, lost and found

 (Alaina Johnson for The Washington Post)

(Alaina Johnson for The Washington Post)

We hope you enjoyed your Valentine's Day. Here's a gorgeous [project from Brittany Shammass, Timothy Bella, Meryl Kornfield, Marisa Iati and María Luisa Paúl](#) chronicling the surprising ways people connected over the pandemic.

Come for the stunning illustrations and stay for the stories, "each one a portrait of love in a time defined by loss."



author headshot

Thanks for reading. See you tomorrow.



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