



## RUSSIA REFORM MONITOR

The American Foreign Policy Council's Review of  
Russian Government Actions and U.S. Policy

# Russia Reform Monitor: No. 2164

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**Related Categories:** Russia; Ukraine

### October 4:

*The Moscow Times* reports that, for the first time in 11 years, a memorial event for a murdered Kremlin critic, Anna Politkovskaya, has been denied approval by St. Petersburg authorities. Politkovskaya, a journalist for the *Novaya Gazeta* newspaper who rose to prominence with her reporting on the Chechen conflict, was slain in her Moscow apartment building on October 7, 2006. Five individuals were sentenced for Politkovskaya's murder in 2014, although authorities have failed to charge anyone for orchestrating the killing. Since 2006, around 300 individuals have attended an annual memorial for the journalist. Despite the rejection by city officials, organizers plan to go ahead and gather near the Solovetsky Stone in St. Petersburg.

Russia has been engaging in a cyber campaign designed to gauge NATO movement in Europe and intimidate Western forces, according to the *New York Post*. The paper cites a *Wall Street Journal* report describing highly coordinated efforts, including smartphone hacks and cyber hacking, and the employment of sophisticated technology such as military-grade drones. The campaign's main targets were the 4,000 NATO troops stationed in Poland and the Baltics. Hackers have geo-tracked service members and syphoned contacts and other information off of their devices while attempting to bypass security on the smartphones of soldiers stationed there in an effort to increase confusion and miscommunication in the event of NATO action. Keir Giles, an associate fellow specializing in Russia and Eurasia at the British think tank Chatham House, characterizes the motive behind the attacks as historical, but the attacks as unprecedented.

### October 6:

According to Interfax, Russia's General Prosecutor is considering the possibility of labeling some American media outlets and their endeavors as "undesirable," reports Estonian news portal Meduza. The revelation is the result of an October 5th meeting between the prosecutor's office and "other competent organizations," in which the parties involved discussed U.S. government pressure on Russian media outlets in America, and American media activity in Russia. The office specifically cites the U.S. requirement that *Russia Today*, a Russian state media organization, formally register as a "foreign agent" under U.S. law as a contentious issue, using this as justification to label foreign media as undesirable if they "threaten the foundations of the constitutional system of the Russian Federation, the country's defense, or state security." The office has further threatened criminal punishment against such organizations.

The Senior Editor of *Agentura*, Andrei Soldatov, has elaborated on the oddly familial relationship between modern Russian IT services and state surveillance operations. In his article entitled "Special Relationship," Soldatov explains that Soviet technical educational culture contributed to the modern dynamic between the state and IT services. According to Soldatov, the Soviet Union educated and trained engineers narrowly, providing them with technical knowledge but no understanding of a larger purpose to their work; rather, the Soviet Union was training these people to be "technical servants of the state."

With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Soviet military industrial complex, these engineers and their children pivoted to the IT industry, maintaining their loyalty to the state and building the Russian IT infrastructure. This culture of coercive loyalty continues to pervade Russian IT, with Yandex, the Russian equivalent of Google, dominating Internet search and email traffic; Yandex was recently pressured to appoint ex-Kremlin ministers to its board, and to install backdoor technology for state surveillance organizations to use. These nationalist undertones and loyalties will continue to affect the relationship between private organizations, the state, and the general public, Soldatov concludes.

### October 7:

According to Reuters, police have detained over 200 anti-Kremlin activists across 27 Russian cities supporting opposition candidate Alexei Navalny on Vladimir Putin's birthday. Signs declaring "Putin is a thief" and "Russia will be free" could be seen in the crowd of over 2,000 people that gathered in Pushkin Square in Moscow, and among the 1,500 person crowd in Putin's hometown of St. Petersburg. Navalny is currently serving a 20 day jail term for violating rules on public meetings, but expressed his support for the protests he organized; the opposition candidate plans to run for the country's presidency next year despite claims of his ineligibility as a result of a past (and allegedly politically motivated) suspended jail sentence.

**October 9:**

President Putin has signed a decree allowing foreigners to be part of Russian combat operations outside its borders, *The Moscow Times* reports. Since 2015, foreigners, particularly those from former Soviet republics, have been allowed to enlist in the Russian army and Interior Ministry forces. Now, they will be able to fight in Russia's foreign wars as well.