



## RUSSIA REFORM MONITOR

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

# Russia Reform Monitor: No. 2165

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**Related Categories:** Democracy and Governance; Intelligence and Counterintelligence; Balkans; Russia; Ukraine

### October 9:

Russian attempts to influence the 2016 U.S. election was more far reaching than commonly understood, and involved targeted ads disseminated via Google and YouTube as well as social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter, London's *Independent* newspaper reports. Although Google has previously been reticent to discuss the subject, and has downplayed Russian exploitation of its services, an internal investigation carried out by the company has revealed that tens of thousands of dollars were spent by Russian agents to buy ads on Google Search, Gmail, YouTube and the DoubleClick network.

Twitter and Facebook have launched their own internal investigations into Russian influence, and have reached similar conclusions. In all, RT, the Russian troll farm known as the Internet Research Agency, and other Russian cyber actors cumulatively bought approximately 5,000 ads on Facebook, with a combined reach of 10 million people, and utilized over 200 accounts on Twitter to spread divisive racial and nationalist rhetoric in the run-up to last year's election.

### October 10:

The Russian Justice Ministry has issued letters to multiple U.S. media outlets in Russia, threatening them with unspecified "restrictions." According to CNN, the outlets being targeted by the Justice Ministry are *Current Time*, *Radio Svoboda*, and *Idel Realii*, all of which are run by *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*. The threat comes in response to alleged pressure against RT and *Sputnik* by the U.S. Department of Justice, which RT claims sent a letter in September asking it to register as a foreign agent under the Foreign Agents Registration Act. The move represents a further complication for the struggling Russian state broadcaster; Margarita Simonyan, RT's editor-in-chief, recently spoke with a different Russian media outlet regarding some of the channel's current challenges, including hiring difficulties and members of its staff leaving en masse over the negative publicity associated with working for RT.

*The Moscow Times* reports that the director of Russian opposition candidate Alexei Navalny's Anti-Corruption Foundation, Roman Rubanov, has been detained by authorities outside of his home in the Russian capital. The arrest marks the latest in an escalating campaign of governmental pressure against the Navalny camp; regional campaign heads for Navalny, Navalny ally Leonid Volkov, and Navalny himself have all been handed jail terms in recent times as a result of their political activism.

Russian officials have justified Rubanov's detention, declaring that he missed a ten day deadline to comply with a court order and pull from circulation excerpts from a controversial YouTube video in which oligarch Alisher Usmanov is accused of giving Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev an \$83 million mansion. Navalny's campaign, however, remains defiant, and has maintained that it will not remove the offending excerpts.

### October 11:

Russian financial and political authorities have finally agreed to take a more active role in regulating the Russian crypto-currency market, Reuters reports. The announcement, made by Finance Minister Anton Siluanov in coordination with the Russian Central Bank, will see the Russian government set out a regulatory framework for "the issuing of crypto-currencies, their mining and turnover." The move comes on the heels of a recent meeting of senior Kremlin officials chaired by President Vladimir Putin, at which the Russian head of state expressed concern over the proliferation of crypto-currencies and their potential use in criminal activity.

### October 12:

In response to U.S. efforts to secure NATO's eastern flank in the Baltics, Russia could deploy more Iskander missiles to the Baltic enclave of Kaliningrad, Reuters reports a top Russian lawmaker as warning. In comments to the RIA news agency, Vladimir Shamanov, the head of the Russian Duma's defense committee, accused the United States of illegally building up its forces in Poland and the Baltics - strategic moves that necessitate a response from Moscow.

