



RUSSIA REFORM MONITOR

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Related Categories: Russia; Ukraine

October 20:

The *Krasnodar*, a new and lethal Russian attack submarine recently used to target Islamic State forces in Syria, is the latest manifestation of an "unexpected resurgence" in Russia's development of underwater warfare capabilities, reports the *Wall Street Journal*. Development of craft like the *Krasnodar*, in turn, are raising concerns among NATO policymakers, who worry that increasingly robust Russian undersea capabilities will give Moscow an advantage in the event of a future conflict with the Alliance. "Top officials of North Atlantic Treaty Organization say the alliance must consider new investments in submarines and sub-hunting technology," notes the *Journal*. The concerns are especially acute given the findings of a recent study by the Center for a New American Security, a prominent Washington, DC think tank, that "the U.S. and its allies weren't prepared for an undersea conflict with Russia."

Russia's defense partnership with India appears to be on the rocks. *Defense News* reports that India's Defence Ministry is seeking to terminate a joint program with Russian industry to develop a fifth generation fighter aircraft for the Indian Air Force. Citing design flaws and shortcomings, an Indian defense official has confirmed that the "IAF is not keen to continue with the program."

Russian and Iranian firms are poised to profit handsomely from the Syrian civil war. Planning for post-conflict reconstruction in the war-torn nation is already underway, notes *Foreign Policy*, and Russian companies - as well as their Iranian counterparts - are in an advantageous position to capitalize on the process. Indeed, Russia appears to have already established a major stake in Syria. "As early as April 2016, not long after it jumped into the Syrian war, Russia had already signed almost \$1 billion in infrastructure and other contracts," according to the magazine. "In November 2016, Damascus pledged to give Moscow priority in awarding contracts, according to RT. A pair of Kremlin-linked energy firms have already started doing business in oil, gas, and mining in areas just cleared of the Islamic State. The two countries are even considering creating a new joint bank to smooth such transactions."

October 22:

Tourism between Turkey and Russia is surging as trade and political relations between Moscow and Ankara continue to warm. The *Hurriyet Daily News* reports Russian Energy Minister Alexander Novak as saying that tourism between the two countries rose tenfold in the first half of this year. "The flow of tourists to Turkey increased significantly this year in view of lifting restrictions that were introduced earlier for charter transportation. We expect that about 1.6 million people already visited Turkey, according to data, in the six months, while there were just 168,000 people in the same period last year."

Russian opposition politician Alexei Navalny has been released from his latest stint in prison, Reuters reports. Navalny had been sentenced to 20 days in jail following his arrest in September for purportedly violating government ordinances by organizing political rallies. The Kremlin critic, however, remains undaunted, attending a protest in Moscow against the government of president Vladimir Putin on the same day he was released.

October 23:

According to the *New York Times*, a knife-wielding attacker broke into the studios of Ekho Moskvyy, the city's most prominent talk-radio station, and attacked a broadcast announcer. The radio host, Tatyana Felgenhauer, is now in critical condition in a Moscow hospital. The assailant's motives were not immediately clear, but political motivations cannot be ruled out; Ekho Moskvyy is a decidedly liberal political outlet, and "has been a much-frequented spot for dozens of liberal commentators and politicians in the capital," notes the *Times*.

October 24:

Ksenia Sobchak, the high-profile socialite and journalist who recently threw her hat into the Russian presidential ring, is making the plight of political prisoners in Russia a key campaign issue. *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty* reports that, in her inaugural press conference as a presidential contender, Sobchak "called on the authorities to release all political prisoners" currently being held by the Kremlin on a variety of charges.

Sobchak, however, did not stop there, also tackling the Putin government's most important foreign policy priority: Ukraine. According to her, Ukraine is "Russia's most important partner," and restoring relations with Kyiv is "the most important task that lies before Russia." She also gave an indication as to her views of what such a reconciliation might look like, noting that, "from the point of view of international law, Crimea is Ukrainian -- full stop."