



RUSSIA REFORM MONITOR

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Related Categories: Democracy and Governance; Europe Military; Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues; Islamic Extremism; Military Innovation; Science and Technology; Terrorism; Afghanistan; Baltics; Central Asia; Russia

LAUNCHING THE "MOSCOW FORMAT"

Moscow is moving forward in its diplomatic efforts to resolve the long-running Afghan conflict. Since this summer, the Kremlin has launched a new political bid to directly engage major stakeholders in the conflict in negotiations - a controversial move that has been decried by officials in Kabul as a usurpation of authority (see *Russia Reform Monitor* No. 2268). Russia's efforts are now bearing fruit; in early November, the Russian government hosted landmark talks in Moscow bringing together key players - including members of Afghanistan's High Peace Council and representatives of the militant Taliban movement - in what is being billed as the start of a new "format" of talks.

The parlay is being hailed by Russian officials as a breakthrough in the political stalemate that has long prevailed in the war-ravaged nation, where Islamist forces are now making a comeback. But serious impediments remain. The Taliban, for example, has ruled out the possibility of holding direct negotiations with the government of President Ashraf Ghani in Kabul, declaring that the movement is only prepared for talks with the U.S., which the militants see as the true power broker in the conflict, despite Moscow's manipulations. (BBC, November 9, 2018)

JAMMING NATO'S "TRIDENT JUNCTURE"

During NATO's most recent maneuvers in the North Atlantic, the Baltics, and Scandinavia, Finnish and Norwegian commercial pilots reported episodes of GPS signal loss - and the Finnish government suspects foul play. Although contingency systems prevented the disruption from causing any casualties, Finnish Prime Minister Juha Sipilä publicly accused Moscow of jamming the signal. Sipilä asserted that Russia may have decided to demonstrate its cyber capabilities to send a strong message to Finland, a non-NATO member which nonetheless chose to partner with the Alliance during the TRIDENT JUNCTURE exercises. He promised a full investigation into the disruption and has announced his intention to treat the incident as a breach of Finnish airspace. (Berlin *Deutsche Welle*, November 11, 2018)

NEW TROUBLE FOR NAVALNY

Although Alexei Navalny has once again been released from jail, Russian authorities continue to find creative ways to hassle the Kremlin critic. On November 13th, while attempting to fly to Europe, Navalny tweeted from Domodedovo Airport that border guards had confiscated his passport, telling him he was "forbidden" to leave the country without further explanation. Russian authorities responded to Navalny's tweet by claiming he still owes an outstanding \$31,000 fine levied during his 2013 embezzlement conviction (a charge widely recognized to have been politically motivated). Navalny countered that Russian law mandates he receive written notification of any fines and a five day period for payment - and that, since he received neither, the measures used to prevent him from traveling are ostensibly illegal. (Doha *Al Jazeera*, November 13, 2018)

RUSSIAN CENTRAL ASIAN BASING MAKING IT A TARGET

Authorities in the Central Asian republic of Tajikistan have arrested a dozen Islamic militants over a plot to attack a Russian military installation located in the country's capital. While authorities in Dushanbe initially denied the incident, representatives of the State Committee for National Security now confirm that the extremists, purportedly members of the Islamic State terrorist group, had been apprehended near the Russian military base in early November.

The incident sheds light on Russia's potential vulnerability in at least one part of the "post-Soviet space." Currently some 7,000 Russian military personnel are stationed in Tajikistan at three separate military installations - in Dushanbe and in the southern cities of Kulob and Qurgonteppa, near the Tajik border with Afghanistan. Tajikistan, meanwhile, boasts a significant Islamist presence, with at least 1,000 nationals estimated to have traveled to the Middle East to join the ranks of the Islamic State, and an undisclosed number of "alumni" from the Syrian civil war now having made their way back home. (*Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, November 13, 2018)