



RUSSIA REFORM MONITOR

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

Russia Reform Monitor No. 2291

February 11, 2019 **Ilan I. Berman, Margot van Loon**

Related Categories: Democracy and Governance; Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues; Military Innovation; Science and Technology; North Korea; Russia

HACKING THE KREMLIN

A new "dark web" database is putting a spotlight on Russia's most powerful actors and their digital lives. The "Distributed Denial of Secrets" site contains 108 gigabytes of emails and documents stolen over multiple years by a diverse lineup of hacker groups, and now available on an organized site for any interested party with a TOR browser. In the past, such hacks of the Russian government have exposed controversial and vital information about the Kremlin's policies, including Moscow's ties to separatist fighters in eastern Ukraine. Other "greatest hits" and hacking coups are available on the site as well, including the source code for the Stuxnet cyberweapon and collections of emails stolen from the Enron Corporation. Most of the organizers and developers for Distributed Denial of Secrets remain anonymous, but Emma Best, the journalist and transparency advocate who co-founded the site, champions it as an archive for information "that otherwise would never see the light of day" in the fight against corruption. (*Foreign Policy*, January 28, 2019)

RUSSIA AND THE NORTH KOREAN ISSUE

Last fall, when U.S. and North Korean officials were deadlocked in negotiations over North Korea's nuclear program, Russia reportedly tried to break the impasse with a nuclear offer of its own. According to U.S. officials familiar with the matter, Moscow secretly offered to build a nuclear power plant in North Korea to meet the country's energy needs if Pyongyang would agree to dismantle its nuclear weapons and ballistic missile programs. The Russian government offered to operate the plant and transfer all byproducts back to Russia for disposal to minimize the risk of weaponization.

News of the proposal has analysts speculating over the Kremlin's motivations, which range from pragmatic money-making to accruing strategic influence on the Peninsula to an attempt to style itself as "a problem-solver for global crises." Most doubt that North Korean leader Kim Jong Un will actually agree to relinquish his country's nuclear weapons program unless the U.S. posture changes significantly at the next major presidential summit at the end of this month. U.S. officials have refused to comment on the proposal, and Washington to date has been reluctant to grant Russia a seat at the table in negotiations with Pyongyang. However, the Kremlin's desire to insert itself opportunistically into high-stakes global challenges is apparent. (*Washington Post*, January 29, 2019)

THE WAR OF THE CHURCHES, CONTINUED

The divorce of the Ukrainian and Russian Orthodox Churches was finalized last month, but the Kremlin remains unwilling to admit defeat. While attending a Moscow event with Orthodox Patriarch Kirill, President Vladimir Putin spoke out against the newly autonomous Ukrainian church. He accused the Ukrainian government of "meddling in the life of Orthodoxy" and ominously alluded to Russia's willingness to defend the rights of all people to worship. (*The Moscow Times*, January 31, 2019)

RUSSIA GETS SERIOUS ABOUT ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

For the first time, the Russian government is seeking to create a national-level strategy that will forge multiple competing lines of public and private artificial intelligence (AI) research and development into a coherent whole. After a January meeting with the Agency for Strategic Initiatives, President Vladimir Putin issued a formal call for proposals for the development of an AI strategy from various government, private, and academic actors, who have just under a month to draft their submissions. Such a roadmap, and its formal approval by Putin, will represent a deliberate step toward improving coordination and resourcing of Russian AI efforts. (*Defense One*, January 31, 2019)

THE WHEELS OF RUSSIAN BUREAUCRACY TURN SLOWLY

Nearly three decades after the collapse of the Soviet Union, one Russian's bureaucratic nightmare is coming to an end. This month, an Omsk woman received a Russian passport to replace her defunct Soviet documents, which for 28 years had prevented her from holding official employment or receiving her pension. Reportedly, the woman refused to exchange passports because she feared having to pay a fine of 3,000 rubles (\$46), equivalent to one month's earnings; she only applied for the new passport once the Omsk region instituted an amnesty program to protect low-income citizens in similar positions. The Civic Assistance Committee estimates that there may be over 300,000 remaining Soviet passport holders in Russia facing the same challenge. (*The Moscow Times*, February 1, 2019)