



RUSSIA REFORM MONITOR

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

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Related Categories: Democracy and Governance; Europe Military; Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues; Europe; Russia; Ukraine

HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES CONTINUE IN CHECHNYA

Human Rights Watch has documented an increasing number of attacks by law enforcement officials on members of the gay community in Chechnya. Since December, at least 23 men in the restive Russian republic have been detained – and many tortured – solely on the basis of their sexual orientation. Representatives of the advocacy group are blaming the spike in violence on a climate permissive of abuse among Chechen law enforcement authorities that has prevailed since a similar anti-LGBT crackdown in 2017, and are calling on the Russian government to discourage this behavior and protect its citizens by opening a formal investigation. (*The Moscow Times*, May 8, 2019)

MONTENEGRO COUP PLOT THICKENS

In early May, a Montenegrin court handed down a guilty sentence to fourteen individuals accused of planning a coup in 2016 – including two Russians with ties to Russia's intelligence community. Reportedly, the group conspired in 2016 to overthrow the Montenegrin government in order to disrupt the country's upcoming parliamentary vote on the pursuit of NATO membership. The plot failed, but evidence submitted for the case suggests that the two Russians played a substantial role in orchestrating its preparation. Both men have ties to the GRU, Russia's military intelligence service, and were tried under pseudonyms. They are believed to be at large in Russia and thus unlikely to actually serve jail time. Nevertheless, Montenegrin officials have pointed to the court's ruling as evidence that the tiny Balkan nation is the latest target in Moscow's campaign to disrupt and subvert domestic politics in order to further its own strategic aims. (*New York Times*, May 9, 2019)

THE CHURCH AS A TOOL OF KREMLIN POLICY

Although ostensibly an independent organization, Russia's Orthodox Church today represents a crucial vector of Russian influence abroad. The Russian government is reportedly providing millions of dollars to the Russian Orthodox Church Moscow Patriarchate (ROC MP) to host religious conferences and events in neighboring countries in order to promote a more sympathetic image of the country. Most recently, the ROC MP received the equivalent of \$250,000 from the Kremlin to host a theology conference in Kazakhstan, and another \$360,000 for a similar event in Belarus to be held later this year. (*Window on Eurasia*, May 15, 2019)

MORE DATA ON THE SCOPE OF RUSSIAN DISINFORMATION

New evidence suggests that Russian businessmen with ties to Yevgeny Prigozhin - a close Putin ally who played a central role in Russia's interference in the 2016 U.S. presidential election - sought to inflame U.S. racial tensions during the election in bizarre ways. *NBC News* obtained copies of communications between Prigozhin's associates about the "Development Strategy of a Pan-African State on U.S. Territory": a plan to target the African American community and radicalize their views. The documents, which were provided to NBC by an investigative group funded by Kremlin opponent Mikhail Khodorkovsky, paint a more sinister picture than the mere propagation of misinformation on social media; Prigozhin's associates suggest a strategy to recruit African Americans for "combat prep and training in sabotage" at secret camps in Africa.

While there is no evidence that these plans were actually implemented, other documents show that Prigozhin's team compiled data from multiple sources that would help them target African Americans for race-baiting purposes, and expressed the intent to simultaneously create propaganda that would sour African and European public opinion toward the United States. Former FBI assistant director of counterintelligence Frank Figliuzzi remarked that "regardless of whether or not these plans are an amateurish thought experiment, the fact that these people are talking about doing this should disturb Americans of all stripes." (*NBC News*, May 20, 2019)

AN A2/AD BUBBLE OVER THE ARCTIC

The Russian military is rapidly strengthening its capabilities in the Arctic. With the newly completed Center for Radio-Electric Warfare, Russia's Northern Fleet now has the ability to jam foreign ships, aircraft, and satellite communications along the entire Northern Sea Route. The Center is equipped with three powerful radio electric systems: the *Murmansk-BN*, the *Krasukha*, and the *Divnomorye*, all of which can effectively disrupt shortwave communications for thousands of kilometers. The Russian military has already begun training on these systems, causing periodic GPS signal loss for other northern countries along the way: in November 2018, Norway lodged a formal complaint that Russian jamming testing was affecting Norwegian air space and security. (*The Moscow Times*, May 22, 2019)