



RUSSIA REFORM MONITOR

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

Russia Reform Monitor No. 2312

June 10, 2019 Margot van Loon

Related Categories: Russia

RUSSIA'S AGENCIES POSE TEMPTING CYBER TARGETS

The passport data of hundreds of thousands of Russians has been stolen and posted online in one of the country's largest recent cyber breaches. Reportedly, the data was obtained primarily from the Federal Treasury as well as at least seven other government websites. Among the 360,000 victims were several high-profile government officials, including a former deputy chairman of the State Duma and two former deputy prime ministers. Russian privacy expert Ivan Begtin has blamed the breach on "officials' reluctance to do anything, although they are aware of the... lack of professionalism in the development of IT systems." (*The Moscow Times*, May 15, 2019)

ISLAMIC STATE FUNDER DETAINED

Russian authorities have arrested an individual on suspicion of providing financial assistance to the Islamic State terrorist group. 26-year-old Georgy Guyev was detained in mid-May in North Ossetia-Alania by the Federal Security Service (FSB), after the joint efforts of the Russian Investigative Committee, the Interior Ministry, and the Federal Financial Monitoring Service uncovered evidence of criminal activity. According to the FSB, Guyev transferred 50 million rubles (roughly \$770,000) to members of the Islamic State over the last four years, accumulating the funds through bank cards and converting them into cash before sending them abroad. Guyev will now face trial on charges of supporting terrorist activity. (Itar-TASS, May 16, 2019)

MORE ON THE KREMLIN-CHURCH CONNECTION

Patriarch Kirill, the leader of the Russian Orthodox Church, has long been the beneficiary of Kremlin political support and economic largesse. Now, however, Moscow is taking this backing to a new level. The Kremlin's property management department is spending 2.8 billion rubles (\$43.4 million) to renovate a former imperial mansion outside St. Petersburg and transform it into a massive personal residence – complete with a private church, library, pool hall, and elevator – for Kirill. The patriarch's spokesman, Alexander Volkov, confirmed that the government is indeed funding the renovation and that the church has "no immediate connection" to the project. (*The Moscow Times*, May 21, 2019)

RUSSIA VERSUS THE RAP GAME

Rap music is enjoying unprecedented popularity in Russia, and the trend has the Kremlin on edge. Online streaming platforms have allowed Russian rap artists to make their music available and amass a following while avoiding the government cultural censors who serve as gatekeepers for the country's radio and television channels. The preferred topics of the genre are generally more relatable and appealing for Russia's youth than the traditional cultural themes promoted by the government.

Yet politics are inextricably intertwined with the nascent industry. Rap is most popular among Russians aged 24 and younger – a cohort that has also demonstrated greater willingness to criticize the Kremlin than older age groups – and the government appears to still be searching for a strategy to win back this demographic. However, after the government shut down a number of concerts last year, many artists adopted a stronger public political stance, with one rapper whose concert was canceled vowing to "do a fierce punk record that would destroy the government, like N.W.A. or Public Enemy did." (*New York Times*, May 21, 2019)

RUSSIA BUZZES THE ARCTIC, AGAIN

Last month, several Russian aircraft provocatively skirted U.S. airspace in what was likely intended as a show of military strength. On May 21st, two Russian Tu-95 bombers entered the Alaskan Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ), an area that extends from Alaska's west coast for approximately 200 miles. While the bombers were intercepted and escorted out by four U.S. F-22s, they later re-entered the ADIZ, this time accompanied by Russian fighter jets. The North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) issued a public statement about the incidents and noted that the Russian aircraft remained in international airspace throughout the entire encounter. (CNN, May 22, 2019)