



## RUSSIA REFORM MONITOR

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

# Russia Reform Monitor No. 2321

July 23, 2019 **Margot van Loon**

**Related Categories:** Democracy and Governance; Energy Security; Europe Military; Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues; Intelligence and Counterintelligence; International Economics and Trade; Public Diplomacy and Information Operations; Resource Security; Russia; Southeast Asia

### PENTAGON WARNS OF RUSSIAN DISINFORMATION, HYBRID WARFARE

As part of its ongoing efforts to examine the future of global competition and conflict, the U.S. Department of Defense has issued a 170-page white paper analyzing Russia's strategic intentions. In the study, over twenty contributing authors offer their insights into Russia's designs on the international system, its underlying geopolitical insecurities, its strong advantage in hybrid warfare activities, and its prolific use of these tactics across the globe to compensate for its inferior conventional capabilities and counter the influence of America and its allies. Central to these grey zone activities are disinformation campaigns and propaganda designed to destabilize Western democracies. In his preface to the paper, Joint Staff Deputy Director for Global Operations Rear Admiral Jeffrey L. Czerewko notes that "Russia's grey zone tactics are most effective when the target is deeply polarized or lacks the capacity to resist and respond effectively to Russian aggression." (U.S. Department of Defense, May 2019)

### A RUSSIAN FOOTHOLD IN THE AMERICAN ENERGY MARKET?

Despite major increases in the production of its own natural gas, the United States continues to import natural gas from Russia. Former State and Defense Department official Debra Cagan writes that a decades-old law may be to blame: she asserts that continued failure to waive the Jones Act – a piece of 1920s legislation that requires any vessel moving cargo between two U.S. ports to be American-built, owned, and operated – is disincentivizing U.S. shipbuilders from producing domestic LNG carriers, thus creating an opening for Russian competition. As Russian tankers continue to dock and unload their cargo in New England, Cagan warns that Moscow is simultaneously obstructing U.S. energy independence and reaping substantial monetary benefits. (*Chron*, June 19, 2019)

### PUTIN SPINS RUSSIAN MALAISE

On June 20th, Vladimir Putin held his annual phone marathon, known as "Direct Line," where citizens are given the opportunity to call in or text their questions to the Russian president. The majority of this year's questions reflected concerns with the state of the country's economy and domestic discontent, but stopped short of leveling direct criticism at the Russian government or Putin's leadership of it. For his part, Putin remained implacable throughout the show, offering only his reassurances that the positive results of changes made since he came to power should kick in "next year, soon." Aleksei V. Makarkin, deputy president of Moscow's Center for Political Technologies, described the evening as "the phenomenon of the good czar... you can turn to him and he might find time, he might solve your issue." (*New York Times*, June 20, 2019)

### A STEP TOWARD JUSTICE FOR MH17 VICTIMS

Four members of Russian-led forces currently operating in eastern Ukraine have been indicted for their role in the shootdown of Malaysia Airlines Flight MH17, a passenger jet that was destroyed as it passed through Ukrainian airspace in July 2014. U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo offered his support for the indictments, applauding it as "an important milestone in the search for truth," and called on Russia to assist law enforcement efforts to bring the four indicted individuals to justice. (UNIAN, June 20, 2019)

### MOSCOW'S CARIBBEAN VOYAGE

The *Admiral Gorshkov*, one of the Russian navy's most advanced warships, docked last month in the harbor at Havana. Prior to its arrival in Cuba, the vessel made additional port calls made in China, Djibouti, Sri Lanka, and Colombia. Since the *Admiral Gorshkov* is part of Russia's Northern Fleet, which is based at the Arctic port of Severomorsk, its long journey to the Caribbean was widely interpreted as a power projection mission, particularly given its timing amid recent deployments of Russian bombers and cruisers to the region as part of Moscow's backing for embattled Venezuelan president Nicolas Maduro. (*Navy Times*, June 24, 2019)

### LAW ENFORCEMENT ABUSE ON A STAGGERING SCALE

Criticism of Russian law enforcement escalated dramatically last month after a new survey suggested that one in every ten Russians has been tortured by officials in the system. Independent pollster Levada Center released the survey's results on June 26th, the International Day in Support of Victims of Torture. The poll also indicated that Russians' general attitudes toward torture are mixed: 60 percent of respondents believed torture is impermissible under any circumstances. Yet in the last year alone, multiple cases have come to light via victim testimony or photographic and video evidence showing policemen and guards abusing prisoners in their custody.

When confronted with the poll results at a subsequent press conference, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov remained flippant, daring the journalists present to "name themselves" if they had ever been tortured. He also sought to downplay the significance of an ongoing court case in which a group of young Russians accused of terrorism claim to have been forced to confess under torture. (*Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, June 26, 2019; *Meduza*, June 26, 2019)