



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; International Economics and Trade; China ; Russia; Ukraine

SINO-RUSSIAN MILITARY COOPERATION ON THE RISE

The Chinese Ministry of Defense released a new white paper at the end of July rejecting U.S. influence in Asia and promising a more aggressive stance abroad, something it plans to accomplish in part through closer cooperation with Moscow. The paper, the first such document published since 2015, also calls for a tougher stance on domestic unrest (including the willingness to use force if necessary to prevent Taiwanese independence) and confirms its intention to establish and upgrade overseas facilities to defend Chinese interests abroad. As part of this posture, Beijing intends to strengthen its cooperation with Moscow, although a senior colonel commenting on the paper clarified that China wants "partnerships, not alliances." The paper's publication coincided with an incident in which the first Chinese-Russian joint air patrol over the Sea of Japan drew warning shots from South Korea after one of the Russian planes violated South Korean airspace. (*Wall Street Journal*, July 24, 2019)

RUSSIA'S GUNS OF SUMMER

The 49th and 58th armies of Russia's Southern Military District commenced large-scale exercises at the end of July, just as NATO geared up for similar exercises in nearby Georgia. Colonel General Aleksandr Dvornikov (the district commander in charge) confirmed that the exercises were designed to involve all formations in the district, which is considered Russia's top strategic military command. The exercise appears timed to preempt the "Agile Spirit" NATO exercises hosted just across the border, which involve 14 member states and more than 3,000 troops. (*Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, July 24, 2019)

A STORM IS BREWING IN THE EAST

While public dissatisfaction is on the rise throughout Russia, the problems appear to be the most concentrated in the country's far-flung east. According to a new poll by the Public Opinion Foundation, 73 percent of respondents in the Far Eastern Federal District and 66 percent of those polled in Siberia report feeling "unhappy with the conditions where they live," compared to the national average of 53 percent. Analysts hypothesize that the failure to transform the region's rich natural resource endowments into infrastructure improvements, higher wages, and a better quality of life compound a deeply felt sense of injustice and a higher propensity to move away in search of a better life. Resentment has grown as President Vladimir Putin's promises to improve living conditions have not materialized and multiple federal development projects in the region consistently fail to receive the full funding they are promised. (*Window on Eurasia*, July 25, 2019)

SENATE REPORT ON RUSSIAN HACKING LEAVES QUESTIONS UNANSWERED

The Senate Intelligence Committee has released the first volume of its investigative report on Russia's election meddling in 2016. Although the report is heavily redacted, it indicates that investigators found no evidence that Russia manipulated the physical tallying of votes cast. However, it suggests that at least 21 states – and potentially all 50 – were targeted by Russian hackers between 2014 and 2017, and the election infrastructure of at least two states was actually penetrated.

While the 36-month investigation has generally avoided the politicization that has accompanied the concurrent Mueller Report, former officials have expressed concern that data collection may have been hampered due to distrust on the part of states toward what they suspect is a federal effort to take over administration of the elections. The final report also warns that many of the vulnerabilities that plagued election infrastructure in 2016 remain present at this time, but legislative efforts to mandate election security reform have not yet made it through Congress. (*Foreign Policy*, July 25, 2019)

U.S. THINK TANK BANNED IN RUSSIA

The Atlantic Council, a prominent U.S. think tank focusing on political, security, and economic affairs, is the latest organization to be hit with an "undesirable" designation by the Russian government. The statement from the Russian Attorney General's office claims that the Atlantic Council's activities "pose a threat to the fundamentals of the Russian Federation's constitutional system and security," without providing further details or explanation. The designation means that Russian citizens working for or collaborating with the organization would be subject to misdemeanor and felony charges. (*Meduza*, July 25, 2019)