



RUSSIA REFORM MONITOR

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CRACKS IN THE RUSSIAN RELIGIO-POLITICAL ALLIANCE

When, earlier this year, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church broke off from the Russian Orthodox Church to become an independent entity, it represented the culmination of a long power struggle within the Church and among its political patrons. A new report from the *Financial Times* outlines the Church's role in the turbulent geopolitics of the last two decades, highlighting the relationship between religious and political officials and illustrating the schism's effect on these dynamics. Key among them is the dynamic between Russian President Vladimir Putin and the institution of the Russian Orthodox Church. For years, Putin and the Church have maintained a somewhat symbiotic relationship; the Church and its patriarch, Kirill, have reaped the benefits of patronage by Putin's wealthy inner circle, while Putin in turn has embraced the Church's traditional values to appeal to Russian voters and entrench his hold on power. Now, however, the schism has forced all Orthodox jurisdictions to pick sides between Moscow and the seat in Constantinople, straining the bond between Patriarch Kirill and Vladimir Putin. Simultaneously, Kirill's inability to keep the Ukrainian Church in line has revealed a vulnerability that may reduce the Church's overall attractiveness to the Kremlin as a tool of influence. (*Financial Times*, August 19, 2019)

THE KREMLIN'S RESPONSE TO PROTESTS UNFOLDS

In late August, Russian President Vladimir Putin offered his first public comment on the unrest that has rocked Moscow in recent weeks. The exclusion of opposition candidates from the city's then-upcoming September 8th elections brought more than 120,000 Muscovites to the streets in multiple protests, but Putin refrained from acknowledging them for almost five weeks. Finally, during a meeting with French President Emmanuel Macron, Putin told reporters that the protestors have "the right to peaceful protests... [but not to] bring the situation to absurdity or to a clash with the authorities." Comparing the protests unfavorably to France's "yellow vest movement," Putin defended the heavy-handed tactics used by Russian law enforcement and warned that riots would not be tolerated.

Meanwhile, the State Duma has convened a commission to investigate the protests on the grounds that they were incited by foreign interference. A "United Russia" party MP pointed to social media posts made by a German paper and an online U.S. Embassy travel advisory that included the time and location of the protests as evidence of this alleged interference. (*Financial Times*, August 19, 2019; Associated Press, August 19, 2019)

MAPPING RUSSIA'S FOOTPRINT IN AFRICA

As Russia spars with the West and warily eyes a rising China, the Kremlin is looking to Africa as a source of valuable influence, power, and partnership. A new report released by the Institute for the Study of War (ISW), a DC think tank, analyzes Russia's African campaign, which it says is designed to amplify Moscow's geopolitical, military, and soft power clout while generating revenue and evading Western sanctions. To accomplish these objectives, Russia embraces both legitimate tactics – including trade agreements to increase Russian exports and access to Africa's natural resources – and illegitimate ones (namely, money laundering and sweetheart deals for Vladimir Putin's closest associates). The ISW report outlines the key Russian individuals, companies, and non-profits involved in the campaign, with particular emphasis on efforts to corner the African nuclear energy market and expand Russia's military presence through basing, arms sales, and new cooperation agreements.

Yet, although the Kremlin is already touting the early successes of this campaign (including the inaugural Russia-Africa Summit to be held in Sochi this October), ISW's report predicts this strategy is likely to be successful only in the short-term and in the absence of real competition. Ultimately, China can offer more valuable partnership to most African states, while Russia's current strategy is inherently vulnerable in the long-term because its monetary and human capital investments are superficial and spread too thin across too large an area. Moreover, the potential for blowback from failed operations (like the uncovered attempts to influence recent elections in Libya and Madagascar) is high, while the value of potential gains remains limited. (Institute for the Study of War, August 2019)

RUSSIA BUYS IN TO BEIJING'S 5G VISION

When it comes to the introduction of fifth generation network technology, Russia's military is carving out a defiant position - one that is likely to deepen Russian strategic collaboration with China while complicating its connectivity with the rest of the world. During a recent interview with *Vedomosti*, Deputy Defense Minister Yuri Borisov confirmed that the 3.4-3.8 GHz frequency that most developed countries intend to use for civilian fifth generation purposes will instead be reserved in Russia for military satellite communications. Russia's non-military fifth-generation networks will have to operate at a higher frequency, likely in the 4.4-4.9GHz range. Borisov acknowledged that Huawei is the only vendor equipped to operate at these higher frequencies, but lauded the benefits for Russian industry of collaborating with the Chinese telecommunications firm as the fifth generation network expands. (*Vedomosti*, September 1, 2019)