



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; Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues; Missile Defense; SPACE; Central Asia; Russia

POLICE BRUTALITY AGAINST MIGRANT WORKERS SPIKES

Human Rights Watch has reported a disturbing trend of police violence against migrant workers all over Russia. In one particularly egregious mid-December raid, 80 victims – mostly Kyrgyz, Tajik, or Uzbek nationals working as bus drivers in Khabarovsk – were rounded up and detained for identity checks. One of the victims told the media that once they arrived at the police station, they were beaten severely, with two men later hospitalized for the injuries they sustained.

In the aftermath of the raid, the Kyrgyz embassy in Moscow issued a formal protest after 18 of its citizens filed complaints. HRW asserts that the incident violated Russian law, which only permits identification check detentions if there are grounds to believe the individual has been involved in a criminal offense. Other similar raids have been reported with increasing frequency since November, typically targeting people with "a non-Slavic appearance." HRW has called on Russian authorities to "stop their practice of racial profiling and arbitrary detentions. They should effectively investigate alleged police brutality and appropriately discipline or prosecute those responsible." (Human Rights Watch, December 24, 2019)

MEMORIAL RECEIVES ITS 19TH FINE

Russia's controversial foreign agent law has been levied once again against one of its most frequent targets: human rights organization Memorial. Since 2012, Russian law has mandated that any group that accepts foreign funding must self-identify as a "foreign agent" or face severe legal penalties. Memorial, a civil rights organization devoted to raising awareness of human rights issues in Soviet history as well as in modern-day Russia, has been fined 18 previous times for alleged violations of the law. On December 25th, Moscow's Tverskoi district court handed down a \$5,000 fine to the group – along with an additional \$1,610 penalty for its director – as punishment for not having included the "foreign agent" label on its website, bringing Memorial's total fines under the law to 3.5 million rubles, or \$57,000. In the run-up to the court's decision, the European Parliament adopted a non-binding resolution criticizing the foreign agent law as "deliberately aimed at forcing [human rights and media organizations] to focus their resources on paying fines and judicial defense, and thus limits freedom of expression." (*Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, December 26, 2019)

THE AVANGARD DEPLOYS

On December 27th, the Russian military officially deployed its highly anticipated new "Avangard" missile system, an achievement lauded by the Ministry of Defense as a "landmark event." Indeed, throughout its development, the advanced boost-glide "Avangard" – which is designed to travel at hypersonic speeds and maneuver unpredictably along its flight path – has been flaunted by Vladimir Putin as impervious to U.S. missile defenses. In public statements after the Ministry's announcement, Putin emphasized that he considers the deployment to be a major achievement, forcing other nations to play "catch up" with Russia, since "not a single country possesses hypersonic weapons, let alone continental-range hypersonic weapons." U.S. officials did not dispute Russia's assertion that the deployed weapons are operational, although some experts continue to debate how effective the system actually is, given its lack of a successful test record. (Reuters, December 27, 2019)

UN VICTORY PAVES THE WAY FOR GREATER CYBER-REPRESSION

A hard-fought campaign by Russia's delegation to the United Nations may have just won Moscow the power to shape the world's approach to cybercrime and Internet usage. In December, Russia sponsored a resolution in the UN General Assembly proposing the creation of a new international convention on cybercrime. With vocal support from China, the resolution passed a December 28th vote, with 79 nations in favor, 60 opposed, and 33 abstaining.

Although the expert committee responsible for designing recommendations for the convention will not convene until August 2020, the resolution's opponents are joining human rights organizations in voicing fears that the treaty will be weaponized by Russia and others as a tool of censorship and repression online. The U.S., for example, has pointed to the results of the vote as a sign of deep international division on this issue that would render a treaty ineffective while simultaneously undercutting the Budapest Convention, currently the only global accord on cybercrime – and one that Russia has staunchly opposed. Human Rights Watch issued a statement calling the resolution's sponsors "a rogue gallery of some of the earth's most repressive governments... if the plan is to develop a convention that gives countries legal cover for internet blackouts and censorship, while creating the potential for criminalizing free speech, then it's a bad idea." (*South China Morning Post*, December 28, 2019)

U.S. ASSISTANCE MAKES RUSSIA SAFER

A direct tip from Washington may have helped the Russian security services thwart a terrorist attack planned for the Orthodox New Year. The Federal Security Service (FSB) confirmed that the shared information led to the detention of two Russian suspects plotting an attack that would have struck St. Petersburg during the city's holiday festivities. The case marks the second time in recent months that information sharing between the U.S. and Russia has helped prevent acts of terror. While the Kremlin declined to provide further details about the tip or about the plot it helped disrupt, it confirmed that President Vladimir Putin had thanked President Trump personally for the information, and that both presidents agreed to continue joint counterterrorism efforts. (London *Guardian*, December 29, 2019)