



RUSSIA REFORM MONITOR

The American Foreign Policy Council's Review of
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Related Categories: Democracy and Governance; Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues; Russia; Ukraine

A VICTORY FOR ARKHANGELSK PROTESTERS

Residents of a small town in northern Russia have triumphed in their fight against an unpopular decision by the country's central authorities. On January 9th, a judge in a small town outside Arkhangelsk formally blocked the construction of a massive landfill meant to service waste disposal needs for the Russian capital – situated a full 1,000 kilometers away. The planned construction infuriated local residents, who took to the streets and blockaded the construction during the months-long legal battle. The town's plight is seen as representative of an apparent increase in social dissent, as dissatisfaction grows in Russia's far-flung regions over the poor quality of public services. (Reuters, January 9, 2020)

ANOTHER NEAR-MISS ON THE HIGH SEAS

The United States is decrying dangerous naval conduct by a Russian ship that "aggressively approached" a U.S. destroyer in the North Arabian Sea. The American vessel in question, the *USS Farragut*, is part of the Fifth Fleet; on January 10th, a spokesman for the fleet released a video of the approach and provided additional details about what had transpired. Reportedly, the *Farragut* was conducting routine operations when the Russian vessel approached. The *Farragut*'s crew issued several warnings before the Russian ship changed course. By ignoring the international "rules of the road," the U.S. Navy maintains, the Russian vessel had irresponsibly raised the risk of a collision. (*Times of Israel*, January 10, 2020)

MOSCOW SCORES ONE FOR ASSAD

Russia appears to have strong-armed its fellow UN Security Council members in the body's most recent decision on humanitarian aid for Syria. With authorization for such operations set to expire, the Council was required to vote to allow them to continue. However, Russian amendments to the final resolution shortened the authorized time frame from a year to just six months, and halved the number of permissible checkpoints from four to two. The amended resolution represented a clear political win for Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad, a key Russian ally, who has sought an end to such international aid altogether.

The move also sets the stage for further humanitarian suffering in the war-torn country. An estimated 1.4 million Syrians now will not receive aid as a result of the pared-down resolution. U.S. Ambassador Kelly Craft has called the outcome an example of the use of "deprivation as a weapon against the Syrian people" and labeled the likely crisis that results as one "of Russia's own making." (*Voice of America*, January 10, 2020)

TREASON CHARGES FOR MILITARY RESEARCHERS

Scientists from around the world are calling for justice in the case of three of their Russian colleagues, who appear to be the latest victims of Russia's deteriorating relations with the West. Victor Kudryavtsev, Roman Kovalev, and Sergei Meshcheryakov, former employees of the Central Research Institute of Machine Building, were recently arrested and charged with high treason as a result of work they did on international projects in the early 2010s. Kudryavtsev and Kovalev, for instance, both worked on *Transhyberian*, a collaborative effort with other European scientists on heat fluctuations at hypersonic speeds. At the time, their research on hypersonics was not considered sensitive and was even published in open-source journals; it was only in 2018 that the Russian military retroactively classified their efforts, creating a justification for the charge that the men leaked "hypersonic secrets to a 'NATO research center'" – despite the fact that their information sharing had been cleared by the appropriate authorities at the time. The plight of the three men has other Russian scientists fearing the dangerous precedent that their persecutions might set for other scientists working in "sensitive applications." (*Science Magazine*, January 10, 2020)

PUTIN'S NEW POLITICAL PROJECT?

In a recent news conference, President Putin used a curious political euphemism to describe Russia's claim over Ukraine's Black Sea territory: *Prichernomorie*. Translated from the Russian, *Prichernomorie* is a Tsarist-era term that describes the coastline of the Black and Azov Seas, extending from modern-day southwestern Ukraine to southern Russia. According to Putin's remarks, the entire territory has historically displayed Russian cultural characteristics, only being lumped together with Ukraine as a result of a political decision made by Vladimir Lenin in the early days of the Soviet Union. The reference has led to speculation about whether the Kremlin is stoking nationalist sentiment relating to Ukraine anew - the way it did in 2014, when it used the concept of *Novorossiia* ("New Russia") as the intellectual basis for its invasion of Ukraine and annexation of Crimea. (Jamestown Foundation, January 14, 2020)