



RUSSIA REFORM MONITOR

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Related Categories: Democracy and Governance; Science and Technology; Corruption; Africa; Russia

NEW RUSSIAN FIGHTER CAPTURED ON FILM

Images and video of the new Russian Su-35S fighter jet have been published by *TV Zvezda*, the official media channel of the Russian Ministry of Defense. The test flight took place in Karelia, north of Saint Petersburg and near the Russian border with Finland. The video depicts the fighter fueling, taxiing, and taking off. The aircraft is said to be capable of carrying both air-to-air and air-to-surface weapons systems, but future payload tests still need to be carried out, officials have said. (*TV Zvezda*, January 29, 2020)

RUSSIA MAKES HEADWAY IN AFRICA

The last three years have seen a significant increase in official and covert Russian military activity in various countries across the African continent. The heightened presence comes even as the United States has reconsidered its regional footprint, shifting manpower and resources to other parts of the world as part of its growing focus on "strategic competition" with both Russia and China. Russia's deepening focus on the continent was showcased last October, when President Vladimir Putin hosted the inaugural Russia-Africa Economic Forum in the Black Sea resort town of Sochi. The meeting brought together dozens of African heads-of-state for strategic talks, and paved the way for a further expansion of Russian involvement in continental affairs. Moscow is now said to be eyeing Somalia and Eritrea as suitable spots for Russian military bases on the continent, while members of the mercenary Wagner Group have been spotted in Libya and Mozambique, where they are helping leaders consolidate their power against local insurgencies. (*New York Times*, January 28, 2020)

CROOKED COPS CHARGED IN GOLUNOV CASE

The legal fallout stemming from a Russian investigative reporter's arrest has made its way into a Moscow courtroom. Igor Lyakhovets and four other former members of the Moscow police force have been charged with drug trafficking, evidence tampering, and abuse of power for their sham arrest of Ivan Golunov in June of 2019. Golunov is a writer for *Medusa*, an investigative website based in Latvia that publishes stories on Russian politics in both English and Russian. The charges against him were subsequently dropped in response to public outcry over the particulars of his arrest, in which Golunov had drugs planted on him and was beaten, resulting in a broken rib and concussion.

Immediately after Golunov's arrest, however, heads did in fact roll in Russia. President Vladimir Putin himself personally intervened in the case and fired Yuri Devyatkin and Andrei Puchkov, officials in the Moscow police bureaucracy who served as the superiors of five ex-officers currently on trial. (*Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, January 30, 2020)

THE FIGHT OVER FACIAL RECOGNITION IN RUSSIA

A coalition comprised of Amnesty International, Navalny campaign organizer Vladimir Milov, and members of last summer's Moscow demonstrations are challenging Moscow's usage of facial recognition cameras at mass gatherings in court. According to Alyona Popova, the case's plaintiff, facial recognition was used to identify and fine her and others after their participation in marches opposing the electoral handling of municipal elections. The Russian capital currently has 160,000 CCTV cameras that are, according to Moscow Mayor Sergey Sobyenin, operating "on a mass scale" as part of the crime-fighting efforts of city police.

This development has made many within Russia fearful of how facial-recognition data collected will be used in the future for retribution and deterrence at future demonstrations. The head of Amnesty International Russia, Natalia Zviagina, worries that such technology "enables the widespread and bulk monitoring, collection, storage and analysis of sensitive personal data without individualized reasonable suspicion." She notes that, "[i]n the hands of Russia's already very abusive authorities, and in the total absence of transparency and accountability for such systems, it is a tool which is likely to take reprisals against peaceful protest to an entirely new level." (*BBC News*, January 31, 2020)