



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; Resource Security; Global Health; Latin America; Russia

LOCKDOWN PUTS RUSSIA'S VULNERABLE AT RISK

Russia's coronavirus lockdown, which began on Monday, March 30th, could have the unintended consequence of creating a surge of spousal and domestic violence in the country. Domestic abuse is widespread in Russia, and estimated to affect a fifth of all households. That figure, observers worry, could rise as the lockdown forces victims to remain shuttered indoors with their abusers for an indefinite amount of time. Moreover, if weeks turn into months and the Russian economy slips into recession, prices will rise and employment will fall, exacerbating pressures and tensions at home. Coronavirus fears have already forced Russia's few existing women's shelters and counseling centers to close, and the lockdown prevents abused women from taking refuge at the homes of relatives and friends. Nor is there the possibility of protection from law enforcement authorities, since domestic violence was effectively decriminalized by President Putin back in 2017. (*The Moscow Times*, March 30, 2020)

RUSSIA'S CORONAVIRUS PREPAREDNESS CALLED INTO QUESTION...

Experts are sounding the alarm over Russia's readiness for the coronavirus pandemic, and the potential strain the disease will put on its healthcare system. Metrics such as the number of available hospital beds and ventilators appear strong on the surface, but observers say that gaping holes exist in the country's health defenses. A January 2020 report by Russia's Audit Chamber found a whopping 30% of Russian hospitals to lack running water, while a further 40% did not have central heating. Similarly, while the nominal number of hospital beds is high, ICU capacity in Russia's hospitals is about half of what it is in the West. If these facilities get flooded with coronavirus patients, their inability to isolate the infected will facilitate the spread of the disease to doctors and other patients. Lastly, the disparity between the quality and quantity of supplies and doctors is notoriously high when comparing Moscow to other parts of the country. (*The Moscow Times*, March 19, 2020)

...AS RUSSIAN AID ARRIVES IN NEW YORK...

Sixty tons of Russian humanitarian aid landed at JFK International Airport last week to help in the U.S. fight against the coronavirus. The acquisition of the aid, officially a purchase, was made after a phone call between Presidents Trump and Putin. The cargo included critical medical supplies, such as ventilators and masks, both of which are in short supply in cities like New York. It is not yet known if any of the equipment meets FDA standards. Russia has already sent similar aid to Italy and China, two of the world's hardest hit countries. Industry experts, however, are skeptical of the move and its optics, while Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov has already signaled that the United States will reciprocate with similar aid in the future if needed. (Reuters, March 31, 2020)

...AND EXPORT CAPS ARE CONSIDERED

Russia's Agriculture and Economic Ministries have both signaled their support for a proposed cap on grain exports from the period spanning April to June of 2020. The cap is seven million tons, which nearly matches the total exported from January thru March of this year. The recommendation is precautionary, since experts do not expect totals to exceed seven million tons. However, the recommendation is being viewed as a signal regarding changing Russian import practices as the anticipated battle with coronavirus stretches into the summer months. Rye, wheat, and corn are all among Russia's agricultural exports. (Reuters, March 30, 2020)

ROSNEFT BACKS OUT OF VENEZUELA

As global oil prices continue to sag, Russian energy conglomerate ROSNEFT shook up its South American assets by selling off its Venezuelan operations and assets. The recipient company, known to be directly under Kremlin control, has not been formally disclosed. However, in announcing the move, ROSNEFT officials emphasized that their decision was made in the interest of shareholders. (Reuters, March 28, 2020)

[EDITORS' NOTE: The move signals what could be a substantial change in Kremlin strategy in Latin America. Russia has long served as a source of support for Venezuelan strongman Nicolas Maduro, with Russian firms allowing Maduro's regime to skirt U.S. sanctions and continue to trade oil on the world market. At least two ROSNEFT subsidiaries have been slapped with U.S. sanctions as a result. Moscow's pullback therefore suggests that policymakers in Moscow have begun to revise their risk calculus in continuing to do business with Caracas.]