



## RUSSIA REFORM MONITOR

The American Foreign Policy Council's Review of  
Russian Government Actions and U.S. Policy

# Russia Reform Monitor No. 2390

June 5, 2020 **Matt Maldonado, Ilan I. Berman**

**Related Categories:** Cybersecurity and Cyberwarfare; Democracy and Governance; Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues; Intelligence and Counterintelligence; International Economics and Trade; Corruption; Middle East; North Africa; Russia

### VICTORY DAY PARADE RESCHEDULED

Over a month after being initially postponed due to the coronavirus, Moscow's famous Victory Day parade in Red Square has been rescheduled for June 24th. The new date holds special significance; Victory Day is celebrated in Russia and other former Soviet states on May 9th, the anniversary of the defeat of Nazi Germany, but the first Victory Day parade in Red Square was held weeks after the German surrender, on June 24, 1945. Russian President Vladimir Putin has ordered strict safety and sanitation measures at the event, in order to avoid virus transmission among the parade's participants and spectators. The leaders of Moldova and Kazakhstan have both agreed to attend the festivities. (Reuters, May 26, 2020)

### MORGAN STANLEY EYES THE EXITS

In late May, financial giant Morgan Stanley had its Russian banking license revoked, effectively immediately. The move was not retaliation on the part of the Russian government, but part of a planned retreat by the U.S. firm from Russia, and part of its efforts to scale back its presence and operations in the country. The cancelation of Morgan Stanley's license, which has been active since 2005, was carried out by the Central Bank of Russia. The company has also filed to have its securities market license revoked as part of the planned scaledown. (*Finance Magnates*, May 27, 2020)

### THE KREMLIN'S NEW BASE IN SYRIA

Russian forces are hard at work erecting a new military base in Syria's volatile northeastern reaches. The facility, located near the city of Al-Malikiyah, sits just south of the Turkish border and only a few kilometers from Kurdish-held Iraqi territory. Due to its key geographic positioning, the Russian, American, and Turkish militaries all maintain a presence in the area. Additionally, the Syrian Democratic Forces, a coalition of fighters from Kurdish, Yazidi, and other groups, also continue to operate in the region. (*Al-Monitor*, May 28, 2020)

### NSA SOUNDS THE ALARM OVER THE GRU

As the 2020 general election creeps closer, the National Security Agency is sounding the alarm over Russia's ability to target the United States with cyberattacks. Russia's military intelligence service, the GRU, has already demonstrated its offensive abilities in cyberspace, crippling infrastructure in Ukraine and Georgia in 2017 and 2019. More recently, Russian military intelligence targeted the Exim email server, commonly used in the UK, in a bid to gain broad access to networks around the world. In addition to identifying the GRU as the force behind the recent attacks, the NSA has also worked to push back against the threat; the U.S. intelligence community has succeeded in shutting down at least some of the agency's networks, and exposing the organizers behind Russia's notorious "troll farms," which help to manipulate social media platforms. (*New York Times*, May 29, 2020)

### RUSSIAN SUPPORT AND LIBYAN DIRTY MONEY

Maltese authorities recently impounded a shipment of alleged counterfeit Libyan currency printed in Moscow with an approximate value of \$1.1 billion. For its part, the Russian Foreign Ministry insists that the bills are legal tender, and has claimed their seizure is a violation of international law. Moscow has been supporting Libyan strongman Khalifa Haftar with funds and materiel in his bid to conquer the Libyan capital of Tripoli and solidify his rule over the entire country. The State Department has charged that Russia is helping prolong Libya's nearly decade-long civil war by flooding the country with counterfeit currency. Russia is known to have shipped \$3 billion in funds (presumably forged) to the North African country in the first half of 2019 alone. (Reuters, May 30, 2020)

### RUSSIA'S SPACE CHIEF CRIES FOUL

Russia's space chief recently sounded off on entrepreneur Elon Musk's unorthodox plan to make Mars habitable for human life. Viewed by many as simply a joke or a meme, the SpaceX founder has taken to Twitter in the past to propose using nuclear weapons to melt Mars' polar ice caps, releasing high levels of carbon dioxide into the planet's atmosphere, thereby creating a greenhouse effect and heating up the atmosphere. The head of Russia's space agency, Dmitry Rogozin, publicly proclaimed in a recent interview that Musk's plan was simply a Western ploy to militarize space at the expense of Russia. (*The Moscow Times*, May 31, 2020)