



RUSSIA REFORM MONITOR

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THE WIDENING DEFINITION OF INTERNET EXTREMISM

In his hunt for a sovereign internet solution that isolates Russia from the larger World-Wide Web, Vladimir Putin is expanding censorship and state information control. The Russian president recently updated his government's *Strategy for Countering Extremism in the Russian Federation until 2025*, adding sweeping new guidelines regarding the regulation of "extremist material" on the internet to the document. Pursuant to the updated decree, any material can be classified as extremist if it in some way incites hate against ethnic, racial, religious, and other groups. In the past, the term has proven to be deeply problematic, and legal accusations of extremism have allowed political rivals of the Kremlin to be fined, arrested, or marginalized. (*D-Russia*, June 1, 2020)

RUSSIA'S COMING CONSTITUTIONAL VOTE

On July 1st, the Russian public will vote on a set of constitutional amendments that - if approved - would allow President Putin to stay in power through 2036. The vote, originally set for April 22nd, was pushed back due to COVID-19 concerns. Early voting on the measure will begin on June 25th, one day after the country's annual "Victory Day" military parade, which Putin postponed from its original date of May 9th as coronavirus cases peaked. Observers have noted the proximity of the two dates - a connection they say is intentional, and designed by the Kremlin to ensure high voter turnout.

The outcome, however, isn't truly in doubt. Polls, both state-run and independent alike, have registered that a majority - or at least a plurality - of Russians appear willing to vote in favor of the amendments. (*The Moscow Times*, June 1, 2020)

RUSSIAN, CHINESE STATE-RUN MEDIA SEEK TO AMPLIFY U.S. CHAOS

As demonstrations over race inequality continue to rage in many American cities, Russian and Chinese propagandists have taken to social media to fan the flames - and to take a shot at the United States' global standing in the process. The prevailing narratives being promoted by Moscow and Beijing are essentially twofold, portraying the U.S. as a nation on the verge of collapse while simultaneously emphasizing the excesses of American police conduct. For instance, *RT en Español*, the Spanish-language branch of the outward facing Russian state-run news agency, has been using its Twitter presence to disseminate some of the most violent imagery associated with the demonstrations. Experts believe that this sort of coverage of U.S. domestic divisions by foreign actors will only continue to grow as the 2020 election draws closer. (*Politico*, June 1, 2020)

COVID IMMUNE TROOPS SET TO MARCH IN RED SQUARE

New details have emerged as to how Russian military authorities plan on mediating the threat from the coronavirus during the newly-rescheduled Victory Day Parade. In order to avoid risking potentially wide transmission of the virus among participating troops - nearly 400 of whom were infected during early rehearsals for the event held in April - only soldiers who have developed immunity to the virus or are currently asymptomatic will be permitted to rehearse and take part in the festivities, now scheduled for June 24th.

The event is set to be a major one. According to Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu, some 14,000 soldiers will participate in the parade on Moscow's Red Square, while an additional 50,000 will take part in similar commemorations in cities across Russia. (*The Moscow Times*, June 2, 2020)

PREPARING FOR THE UNTHINKABLE

In a new policy directive, President Putin has endorsed a "first use" nuclear posture, which would permit Russia to use atomic weapons in response to a conventional strike from a foreign power that targets the country's critical infrastructure. The buildup of conventional forces near Russia's borders and the deployment of missile defense assets and space-based weapons are among the threats identified by Moscow as necessitating the change in deterrent posture. The document also declares that Russia has the option to utilize its nuclear arsenal if it obtains "reliable information" about enemy ballistic missile launches targeting Russian territory or that of its allies, or if an adversary succeeds in carrying out a strike "on critically important government or military facilities... the incapacity of which could result in the failure of retaliatory action of nuclear forces." (Associated Press, June 2, 2020)