



RUSSIA REFORM MONITOR

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

# Russia Reform Monitor No. 2397

July 6, 2020 **Ilan I. Berman, Matt Maldonado, Sydney Duckor**

**Related Categories:** Democracy and Governance; Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues; Intelligence and Counterintelligence; Islamic Extremism; Public Diplomacy and Information Operations; Corruption; Global Health; Afghanistan; Russia

## MORE RUSSIAN PROBES OF AMERICAN AIRSPACE

The North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) said in an official statement that F-22 jets intercepted four Russian reconnaissance aircraft entering the Alaskan Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) on Saturday, June 27th. The interception was at least the fourth such incident in June. In March and April, the U.S. military also intercepted Russian aircraft off the Alaskan coast, though the latest interceptions have occurred closer to U.S. airspace. NORAD commander General Terrence O'Shaughnessy stated, "This year alone, NORAD forces have identified and intercepted Russian military aircraft including bombers, fighters, and maritime patrol aircraft on ten separate occasions when they have flown into the ADIZ." Gen. O'Shaughnessy added that "Despite COVID-19, we remain fully ready and capable of conducting our no-fail mission of homeland defense." (*The Hill*, June 27, 2020)

## RIGHTS COUNCIL GIVES REFERENDUM VOTE A CLEAN BILL OF HEALTH

Members of Russia's Presidential Council for Civil Society and Human Rights have visited 80 polling stations and found no serious violations during the vote on amendments to Russia's constitution. The council's Chairman, Valery Fadeyev, pointed out that the council members focused their attention on epidemic safety but also failed to find any violations. Nationwide voting began on June 25th and has been extended through July 1st due to the coronavirus. Along with the extended voting period, people can cast their votes outside polling stations at specially organized voting areas, including outdoors, or use contactless voting at home or via the Mobile Voter application. Additionally, residents of Moscow and the Nizhny Novgorod region have the ability to vote online. (*TASS*, June 27, 2020)

[EDITORS' NOTE: The Council's finding belies evidence that the Kremlin was heavily involved in ensuring voter turnout (see the last issue of the *Russia Reform Monitor*) and the broad consensus among Russia-watchers and citizens alike that it was responsible for shaping the results to its liking.]

## RUSSIAN CASH FOR TALIBAN KILLS

According to reporting originally published by the *New York Times*, U.S. intelligence agencies have acquired evidence of Russian bounties paid out by the GRU to Taliban-linked fighters for kills of U.S. and Coalition forces in Afghanistan. President Donald Trump, Director of National Intelligence John Ratcliffe, and others have denied being briefed on the matter, but the Administration has made no comment on the validity of the actual intelligence detailed in the report. Congressional leaders on both sides of the political aisle are demanding answers regarding the credibility of the intelligence and why lawmakers and Executive Branch officials were not briefed on developments. (*Washington Post*, June 28, 2020)

## MOSCOW DENIES NUCLEAR INCIDENT

The Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO), which monitors for evidence of nuclear weapons tests around the world, has said that one of its stations picked up unusually high levels of radioactive isotopes produced by nuclear fission. The agency tweeted out a map showing where the material was likely to have originated, which included parts of several Baltic and Scandinavian countries as well as a swathe of western Russia. Russia, however, announced on Monday, June 29th that it had detected no sign of a radiation emergency. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said: "We have an absolutely advanced radiation levels safety monitoring system and there are not any emergency alarms; we do not know the source of this information."

The International Atomic Energy Agency stated that roughly 30 countries - not including Russia - had informed it "that there were no events on their territories that may have caused the observed air concentrations." The variations were low and had no impact on radiation protection. What instead stands out is the unusual combination of the substances that were detected. (Reuters, June 29, 2020)

## **CORONAVIRUS AND THE VICTORY PARADE**

Despite strong precautions taken by the event organizers, coronavirus still managed to make its way into Moscow's Red Square Victory Day Parade via its invited guests. In attendance at the June 24th event were the leaders of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Belarus, as well as representatives from the United States, France, China, India, and other nations. In the days that followed, word leaked out that at least two delegations had been impacted by the virus. Aleksandar Vulin, Serbia's Minister of Defense, tested positive for the virus after meeting with Serbian troops the day before they were set to participate in the parade. The Minister sat the parade out, but Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic attended as planned. Kyrgyz President Sooronbay Jeenbekov sat out the parade entirely after members of his country's delegation tested positive upon arrival and in subsequent days. (*The Moscow Times*, June 30, 2020)