



RUSSIA REFORM MONITOR

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

Russia Reform Monitor No. 240

July 31, 2020 Ilan I. Berman, Matt Maldonado, Sydney Duckor

Related Categories: Democracy and Governance; Europe Military; Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues; International Economics and Trade; Military Innovation; Missile Defense; Science and Technology; SPACE; Russia; Ukraine

DONBASS CEASEFIRE TAKES EFFECT

The latest iteration in a long list of ceasefires between Ukrainian forces and rebel groups in the Donbass took effect in late July. The agreement, which was signed during trilateral negotiations between Kyiv, Moscow, and the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe, endeavors to bring stability to the eastern Ukrainian region, which has been battered by conflict ever since Russia's 2014 invasion of Ukraine and annexation of Crimea touched of separatist tendencies there. Those tendencies, in turn, have been nurtured by Russia, which has provided material aid and support to separatist elements in their now six-year-old fight against the Ukrainian state.

Since his election last year, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has attempted repeatedly to make good on his campaign promise to end the conflict - the ceasefire being the most recent example. But lingering issues remain, among them the disarmament of rebel groups, border issues, and the reintegration of the separatist enclaves of Donetsk and Luhansk in the context of Ukraine's Fall 2020 elections. Nor is the current truce guaranteed to hold; previous ceasefires, signed in 2014 and 2015 and known respectively as Minsk I and Minsk II, have both fallen apart over time as a result of infractions and violations. (*Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, July 26, 2020)

A NEW FRONT FOR WEAPONS TESTING

U.S. and British military experts are confident that Russia recently tested anti-satellite weaponry for use in space. The test, which the State Department described as "what would appear to be actual in-orbit anti-satellite weaponry," took place in mid-July amid the backdrop of an intensifying international policy debate over the militarization of space. Nor is this Russia's first provocation in space this year; back in February, a pair of Russian satellites reportedly "stalked" a U.S. satellite through orbit, alarming its operators. Policymakers in Washington were quick to condemn Russia's most recent move, which they said belies the Kremlin's hostile intent. "Moscow aims to restrict the capabilities of the United States while clearly having no intention of halting its own counter-space program," noted Christopher Ford, the State Department's Assistant Secretary for International Security and Nonproliferation. (*BBC*, July 23, 2020)

BELORUSIAN OPPOSITION CANDIDATE FLEES TO RUSSIA

Belarusian leader Alexander Lukashenko is running for a sixth term in his country's upcoming August 9th election, and his regime has cracked down on the opposition ahead of the ballot, detaining protesters and would-be candidates. The crackdown has caused leading anti-Lukashenko activists to seek shelter outside the country. For instance, Valery Tsepkalo, who was not allowed to register as a candidate, has "gone to Moscow with his children, fearing for his safety," said Alexei Urban, a spokesman for the former diplomat. Tsepkalo told Belarusian news site Tut.by that he left after friends in law enforcement agencies warned "an order had gone out for my arrest." Tsepkalo said he planned to give news conferences in Russia, Ukraine, Western Europe and the United States to expose "the true nature of the Belarusian regime." (*The Moscow Times*, July 24, 2020)

RUSSIAN NAVY TO GET HYPERSONIC NUCLEAR STRIKE WEAPONS

Russian President Vladimir Putin has said that the Russian Navy would soon be armed with hypersonic nuclear strike weapons and underwater nuclear drones, which the country's defense ministry said were in their final phase of testing. He did not specify when the Russian armed forces would receive the new weapons, but suggested that day was drawing closer. The weapons, some of which have yet to be deployed, include the *Poseidon* underwater nuclear drone, designed to be carried by submarines, and the *Tsirkon* hypersonic cruise missile, which can be deployed on surface ships. Putin last year threatened to deploy hypersonic missiles on ships and submarines that could lurk outside U.S. territorial waters if the United States moved to deploy intermediate-range nuclear weapons in Europe. Washington has not deployed such missiles in Europe, but Moscow remains worried it might. (*Reuters*, July 26, 2020)

BERLIN DENIES MOSCOW A PLACE IN THE G7

Germany has rejected a proposal by President Donald Trump to invite Russia back into the Group of Seven (G7) bloc of countries. Trump recently raised the prospect of expanding the G7 to again include Russia, which was expelled in 2014 following its annexation of Crimea. German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas, however, has said that he did not see any chance of allowing Russia back into the G7 as long as there was no meaningful progress in solving the conflict in Crimea as well as in eastern Ukraine. Russia itself could make the biggest contribution to becoming part of the G7 format again by contributing to a peaceful solution in the Ukraine conflict, Maas said. (Reuters, July 26, 2020)