RUSSIAN RELIGIOUS NEWS CHANNEL REMOVED FROM YOUTUBE
Tech giant Google, the parent company of YouTube, has permanently suspended the account of popular Orthodox Christian news station Tsargrad TV, based in Russia. The site was founded by Konstantin Malofeev, a media mogul with close ties to the Russian Orthodox Church who is commonly known as "God's Oligarch." Google's official rationale for the ban was that it was based on "violations of legislation on sanctions and trade rules." Malofeev has been under U.S. sanction since 2014 for his involvement with pro-Russian separatist rebels in Ukraine's Donbass region. However, the station's operations have been able to continue up until this point. Tsargrad TV has signalled that it plans to fight YouTube's decision in court. (Meduza, July 28 2020)

WAGNER MERCENARIES ARRESTED IN BELARUS
Nearly three dozen Russian nationals accused of membership in the Wagner mercenary force were arrested by Belarusian security services in Minsk in late July. The state is accusing the group of planning provocations in the run up to the country's election, which takes place on August 9th. Wagner mercenaries are infamous for participating in conflicts all over the world, providing the Kremlin with plausible deniability in hotspots like Syria, Ukraine, Libya, and Sub-Saharan Africa. The group is funded by Evgeni Prigozhin, a Russian oligarch indicted in the U.S. for supporting the notorious Internet Research Agency in its meddling in the 2016 U.S. election. Footage and images of the raid show evidence indicating the group was heading to Sudan. Some experts, however, are skeptical of the situation, and believe the entire incident was staged in order to bolster President Lukashenko's domestic support ahead of the election. (London Guardian, July 29 2020; The Kyiv Post, July 30 2020)

RUSSIAN COVID-19 SHOT TO BE READY IN AUGUST
Russia plans to register a coronavirus vaccine by August 10th-12th, which would make it the world's first official approval of a vaccine against the novel coronavirus. The drug in question was developed by Moscow's Gamaleya Institute and the Russian Direct Investment Fund, and may be approved for civilian use within three to seven days of registration by regulators.

The Gamaleya vaccine is expected to get conditional registration in August, meaning it will still need to conduct trials on another 1,600 people; mass production of the drug should begin in September. Scores of Russia's business and political elite were given access to the experimental vaccine as early as April, according to news reports. Russia has also begun clinical trials for a second vaccine, developed by the Vector laboratory in Novosibirsk, and another two will get permission to test soon.

Russian officials see the rapid pace of their vaccine development as a health sector victory - and a political one. "Americans were surprised when they heard Sputnik's beeping. It's the same with this vaccine. Russia will have got there first," Kirill Dmitriev, the head of RDIF, has said. (BBC, July 29, 2020)

ANOTHER AMERICAN SENTENCED
Twenty-nine-year-old Trevor Reed, a former U.S. Marine and tourist in Russia at the time of his arrest last year, has been sentenced to nine years in prison for resisting arrest, assaulting a police officer, and "creating a hazardous situation on the road." Reed had been out drinking with his Russian girlfriend when he was arrested for an alleged public disturbance. The police claim that while Reed was in a squad car, he fought for the wheel, causing it to swerve dangerously. However, Reed's girlfriend, family, and U.S. diplomats in Russia all claim the charge is baseless and sentence unjust. U.S. Ambassador to Russia John Sullivan called the proceedings a "theater of the absurd." Earlier this year, James Wheeler, another ex-Marine, was sentenced to 16 years in prison on espionage charges. Experts believe Russian authorities are building up human capital to trade for Russian nationals who are currently being held in U.S. prisons on drug and arms charges. (CNN, July 30, 2020)