



## RUSSIA REFORM MONITOR

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

# Russia Reform Monitor No. 2408

August 24, 2020 **Matt Maldonado, Ilan I. Berman, Sydney Duckor**

**Related Categories:** Cybersecurity and Cyberwarfare; Democracy and Governance; Europe Military; Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues; Intelligence and Counterintelligence; Corruption; Global Health; Europe; Russia

### PLURALITY OF RUSSIAN DOCTORS DISTRUST COVID-19 VACCINE

In a recent poll conducted by RBC, more than half of Russian doctors said they were unwilling to inoculate themselves with their country's new "Sputnik V" coronavirus vaccine. The vaccine, which was "approved" by government authorities earlier this month, has only now entered Phase III testing and is just beginning to be administered to volunteers. Among those surveyed regarding the vaccine, 66% of respondents were doubtful of the treatment's effectiveness, given the breakneck speed of its development.

For their part, Russian officials are attempting to reassure the populace. According to Deputy Health Minister Oleg Salagay, fears surrounding the vaccine are unfounded because "one shouldn't confuse trust with the official assessment of safety and efficiency." And, notwithstanding popular skepticism, the Kremlin has developed a national plan to roll out the treatment domestically, with teachers and healthcare workers set to receive their doses in late August, well in advance of Phase III testing completion. (*The Moscow Times*, August 14, 2020)

### RUSSIA PROMISES MILITARY AID TO A BELEAGUERED LUKASHENKO

Embattled Belarusian president Aleksander Lukashenko, now facing mounting protests to his rule in the wake of that country's August 9th election, has reached out to Russian President Vladimir Putin for assistance. Putin, in turn, has reportedly agreed to assist Lukashenko militarily - within certain parameters. The Russian government has signalled that it is prepared to assist Belarus, a fellow member of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), in the event of foreign intervention or outside attempts to erode Belarus' sovereignty. Lukashenko, meanwhile, is laying the predicate for those conditions; he has claimed that NATO forces are amassing on his borders in an attempt to coerce authorities in Minsk into holding another election, something that he has equated to political manipulation. (Reuters, August 16, 2020)

### ESPIONAGE ACCUSATIONS IN NORWAY AND THE NETHERLANDS

Spy games are back in the news, with Russia both on the giving and receiving end. In Oslo, a Norwegian man was arrested by the country's security service, the PST, for allegedly delivering sensitive intelligence to a Russian agent. If convicted, the accused spy faces a sentence of up to 15 years in prison. In the Netherlands, meanwhile, an aide to one of Russia's military attaches to the country discovered surveillance equipment planted in their car, prompting a reprimand of the Dutch Charge d'Affaires in Moscow. Tensions between the two countries have been strained since 2014, when a Russian missile supplied to Ukrainian separatist militants brought down Malaysian Airlines flight 17, killing nearly 200 Dutch nationals on board. A trial of the alleged perpetrators is currently ongoing at the Hague. (*Deutsche Welle*, August 17, 2020)

### AMERICANS SUSPECT INTERFERENCE IN UPCOMING ELECTIONS

As the 2020 presidential campaign heads into its final stretch, a growing share of Americans say that it is likely Russia or other foreign governments will attempt to influence the outcome. At the same time, confidence in the federal government's ability to prevent election interference by foreign governments has declined. Three-quarters of U.S. adults now say it is very or somewhat likely that Russia or other foreign governments will attempt to influence the presidential election, with 44% maintaining that it is very likely, according to a Pew Research Center survey conducted July 27-August 2nd.

In both parties, the shares of adults who expect foreign governments to try to influence the nation's election are higher than two years ago. Today, 62% of Republicans and Republican-leaning independents say it is very or somewhat likely that foreign governments will attempt to influence the election this November - a jump of eight percent over 2018 polling surrounding the midterm elections. Nearly nine-in-ten Democrats and Democratic leaning respondents (88%) now expect foreign governments to try to influence the presidential election, up from 80% who said so in 2018. Meanwhile, Americans have become less confident that the federal government is making serious efforts to protect U.S. elections from hacking and other technological threats. Confidence in the government's efforts to protect election systems has declined among members of both parties, though Republicans remain far more likely than Democrats to express confidence that the voting will be adequately protected (65% vs. 32%). (Pew Research, August 18, 2020)