



RUSSIA REFORM MONITOR

The American Foreign Policy Council's Review of
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Related Categories: Democracy and Governance; Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues; International Economics and Trade; Global Health; Russia

OPPOSITION LEADER NAVALNY IN COMA AFTER ALLEGED POISONING

Alexei Navalny, Russia's main opposition figure, is in a coma after drinking a cup of tea that his spokeswoman suspects was deliberately laced with poison. Kira Yarmysh said that Navalny started to feel ill during a flight to Moscow from the Siberian city of Tomsk, leading the pilot to make an emergency landing where he was taken to a hospital and placed on a ventilator. Navalny had traveled to Tomsk to meet with activists and opposition candidates for regional elections next month. Navalny and his allies have encouraged voters to back anti-Kremlin candidates as a message of discontent over Russia's sagging economy and the unchecked power of Putin, who has the potential to stay in office until 2036 under constitutional changes approved earlier this year. (*Washington Post*, August 20, 2020)

EXPANDING STRATEGIC CAPABILITIES IN THE ARCTIC

The Kremlin is stepping up its military development in the Arctic. New satellite photos show runway expansion taking place at a remote Russian airbase in the region. Work is being conducted at Nagurskoye airbase in the Franz Josef Land Archipelago. The images show the existing runway being extended to 11,500 feet in length, capable of accommodating tactical military aircraft, including the MiG-31 *Foxhound* interceptor. Development at this site has advanced significantly in just a few short years. As recently as 2016, Nagurskoye hosted a dirt runway of only 5,575 feet. The facility has also undergone other upgrades. The installation of a radar station allows personnel to better monitor the area, while plans for an air defense system have additionally been suggested. (*The Drive*, August 21, 2020)

RUSSIANS QUIETLY FILLING MEDIA RANKS IN BELARUS

The groundswell of public support for opposition protests in Belarus has led to hundreds of the country's journalists resigning their positions at state-run news agencies for moral or patriotic reasons. In their stead, Russian journalists with experience in Russia's propaganda apparatus have arrived to fill the void. According to a local source, two planeloads of Russian replacements entered the country less than two weeks after President Lukashenko's disputed election on August 9th. The content being produced by these transplants is much more stark, confrontational, and reminiscent of journalism practiced by state-run outlets in Russia. Protestors are being written off as "paid-off scum" who are secretly agents of the West. All of this is taking place as journalists from Western countries are being denied entry into Belarus, and those already there are targeted for deportation. (*Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, August 24, 2020)

NEW RADAR COMING TO SCANDANAVIAN FRONTIER

Zapolyarny, a Russian town located only a few kilometers from the borders of Norway and Finland, is getting a new white cupola built by the Russian Armed Forces -- designed to protect against a supersonic attack. Zapolyarny is home turf for Nornickel, a mining and metallurgy company that employs most locals. Over the last few years, the area has seen a significant upgrade in military capacities, including the deployment of the *Bal* missile system and the *Tor-M2DT* surface-to-air missile system. The newest edition is a *Rezonans-N* system, which is believed to be capable of discovering aircraft and low-observable cruise missiles that fly at twenty times the speed of sound.

According to Ivan Nazarenko, head of the military research center that developed *Rezonans*, groundwork in Zapolyarny is already being laid. The radar complex will be the fifth of its kind in the Russian Arctic. Sources in the Russian General Staff have previously indicated that five more systems of the same kind are to be deployed along the country's Arctic coast, in the area between Novaya Zemlya and the Bering Strait. According to the developers, the *Rezonans-N* can spot aerodynamic targets at up to 600 km distance, while ballistic missiles can be identified from 1200 km out. (*The Barents Observer*, August 24, 2020)

RUSSIA EXPECTS TO PRODUCE SIX MILLION MONTHLY VACCINE DOSES

Industry Minister Denis Manturov has claimed that Russia expects to step up production of its potential coronavirus vaccine to around 6 million doses a month, according to the state-run news agency RIA. The current production is expected to be between 1.5 million and 2 million doses per month. Large-scale testing of the vaccine, developed by Moscow's Gamaleya Research Institute of Epidemiology and Microbiology, is due to start in Russia next week. (*Fox News*, August 24, 2020)

