



RUSSIA REFORM MONITOR

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

Russia Reform Monitor No. 2420

October 16, 2020 **Matt Maldonado, Ilan I. Berman, Amanda Hardy**

Related Categories: Arms Control and Proliferation; Democracy and Governance; Europe Military; Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues; Missile Defense; SPACE; NASA; Europe; Russia

KHABAROVSK PROTESTORS BEATEN AND JAILED

The Kremlin is cracking down on demonstrations in Russia's Far East. For 92 days, residents of Khabarovsk Krai took to the streets to protest the arrest of the popular former governor of Khabarovsk, Sergei Furgal, on several counts of murder. Protestors believe that the arrest was unfounded and politically motivated. Furgal became Khabarovsk's governor after winning against the candidate nominated by United Russia, Vladimir Putin's party. While the demonstrations were previously tolerated, this weekend police were reported to have arrested 25 protestors and beat other participants. It is unknown what triggered the change in stance toward the protests. (*Novaya Gazeta*, October 10, 2020)

RUSSIA DENIES CYBER ATTACK ON NORWAY'S PARLIAMENT

Norway has determined that the Russian Federation was behind a cyber attack conducted on the email server of the country's parliament this August. Moscow said the claim was not supported by evidence, and considers the announcement a "serious and wilful provocation." Several email accounts were compromised and sensitive materials were allegedly stolen in the breach. However, the full extent of the attack is as yet unknown. The incident comes amid already-deteriorating Russian-Norwegian relations. In August, Norway expelled a Russian diplomat on accusations of spying. Earlier this year, Norway also warned the public of Russian disinformation campaigns "aimed at weakening public trust in the government, election processes and the media." (*BBC*, October 13, 2020)

JOINT SPACE MISSIONS COMING TO AN END

This Wednesday marked the last time NASA will pay ROSCOSMOS, Russia's space agency, to transport an American astronaut to the International Space Station (ISS). NASA will soon begin transporting Americans to the ISS via a commercial option: the "Crew Dragon" capsule of SpaceX, billionaire tech entrepreneur Elon Musk's company. The transition was sped along by deteriorating U.S.-Russia relations and diverging interests in space between the two countries. But collaboration may resume in the future; it is expected that Russians will eventually be eligible for transport to the ISS with NASA via the Crew Dragon. (*NBC News*, October 14, 2020)

NEW START NEGOTIATIONS STALL

New START, the bilateral arms control arrangement limiting the nuclear arsenals of the U.S. and Russia, is poised to expire in February unless renewed. Moscow and Washington have, in recent months, engaged in on-again, off-again talks over its extension, but significant differences remain - chief among them the Trump administration's desire to widen the agreement to include China. U.S. officials have waxed optimistic on prospects for extension, and maintained that the Kremlin has "in principle" agreed to new terms. However, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov has refuted this claim, and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said he did not expect to renew the agreement. The Kremlin does, however, plan to continue talks. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo would also like to continue talks, and believes that renewing the agreement would be mutually beneficial to both countries. (Reuters, October 14, 2020)

MOSCOW PULLS OUT OF MH17 TALKS

More than six years after a Russian-made *Buk* anti-aircraft missile brought down Malaysian Airlines flight 17 over Eastern Ukraine, Russian authorities have announced that they are ending their cooperation with international investigators regarding the matter. Trilateral talks between Russia, the Netherlands, and Australia had been ongoing since 2018. Russia initially joined the format in order to set the record straight on its suspected involvement. Moscow claims MH17 was shot down by Ukrainian military forces, while Kyiv maintains that the airliner was hit by separatist elements operating in Ukraine's Donbass region who were supplied with weaponry by the Kremlin. Russia's withdrawal from trilateral talks came as a response to Dutch authorities taking three Russian nationals to court *in absentia* for their alleged involvement earlier this year. (*Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, October 15, 2020)

EYEING RUSSIA, SWEDEN REARMS

Heightened Russian military activity in the Baltics has captured the attention of leaders in nearby Sweden. Stockholm recently announced its intention to hike military spending over the next five years by just over \$3 billion, a forty percent increase for the non-NATO member. The Nordic nation also intends to double the number of young men and women drafted every year for military conscription to 8,000 annually.

The new policies constitute a significant reversal. After the Cold War, Sweden unilaterally slashed its defense budget and military capabilities. But repeated Russian incursions into Swedish territorial waters and airspace in recent years have persuaded the country to change course. The funding hikes are expected to pay for naval fleet and artillery upgrades. (London *Guardian*, October 15, 2020)