



## RUSSIA REFORM MONITOR

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

# Russia Reform Monitor No. 2421

October 21, 2020 **Matt Maldonado, Amanda Hardy, Ilan I. Berman**

**Related Categories:** Cybersecurity and Cyberwarfare; Democracy and Governance; Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues; International Economics and Trade; Missile Defense; Japan; Russia; Turkey

### MOSCOW AND NUR-SULTAN RENEW DEFENSE COMMITMENTS

Last week, Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu travelled to Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan, to renew military arrangements with the former Soviet republic. Shoigu met with Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev and Defense Minister Nurlan Ermerbaev during his visit. The new military cooperation agreement inked by the two sides replaces a 1994 pact signed in the wake of the Soviet collapse, and addresses arms exchanges, military exercises, and other defense issues. Kazakhstan is a key military ally of Russia, serving as a member of the Moscow-dominated Eurasian Economic Union and Collective Security Treaty Organization, and Shoigu lauded the "broad military cooperation" between the two countries during his visit. (*Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, October 16, 2020)

### PUTIN TAKES AIM AT SAME-SEX MARRIAGE

Russia's president is working to close a domestic legal loophole pertaining to same-sex marriage. Under existing Russian law, same-sex couples who get married abroad have the ability to receive legal recognition of their union upon their return to Russia, due to international agreements on marriage that are currently in force. However, a new proposal put forth by President Putin and rooted in the constitutional amendments approved this summer, would allow the Russian Constitutional Court to nullify what he terms "immoral interpretations" of international treaties. The proposal still needs approval from the Russian parliament before it can take effect. (*The Moscow Times*, October 16, 2020)

### TURKEY TESTS RUSSIAN ANTI-MISSILE SYSTEM

American military brass and diplomatic personnel are condemning an alleged Turkish test of Russian anti-missile technology off its Black Sea coast. The air defense system in question is the S-400, which was purchased by Turkey back in 2017 against the wishes of the United States. The S-400 is believed to be an operational threat to the U.S.-made F-35 fighter, a program in which NATO member Turkey was once a participant. When Ankara received the S-400 from Moscow in 2019, however, the U.S. dismissed Turkey from the program and cancelled its orders of the fighter. According to Pentagon spokesman Jonathan Hoffman, Turkey's alleged test of the S-400 "risks serious consequences for our security relationship." (*CNBC*, October 16, 2020)

### THE GRU GEARS UP TO SABOTAGE THE TOKYO OLYMPICS

British and American intelligence agencies believe that Russia's military intelligence agency, the GRU, is making plans to disrupt the upcoming Tokyo Olympic Games. The allegation is a result of a joint U.S.-UK intelligence operation into the GRU's recent activities around the world. The GRU is allegedly using spearphishing and other techniques to conduct reconnaissance regarding digital vulnerabilities ahead of the postponed summer Games, which will now take place next year. This is not the first time Russia has targeted Olympic events. British intelligence is practically certain that the GRU was behind website and wifi network crashes that prevented fans from printing their tickets for the opening ceremony of the 2018 Pyeongchang Winter Olympics, a move viewed by many as retaliation for the banning of Russian athletes from the competition due to mass doping allegations. (*Guardian*, October 19, 2020)

### MILITARY CUTS ON THE TABLE

*Izvestia* has reported that, as a part of a cost optimization initiative, Russia is considering cutting up to 10 percent of posts in its army, or approximately 100,000 servicemen. It is expected that the lion's share of the posts to be eliminated will be related to roles unrelated to combat, and the personnel currently performing them will be transferred to civil service positions. The initiative has also proposed the elimination of inflation adjustments for military pensions. The proposal has been sent to the country's National Security Council, which will make the final decision regarding whether to implement the cuts. (*Gazeta.ru*, October 20, 2020)

## **U.S. CHARGES RUSSIAN INTELLIGENCE OFFICERS**

The Department of Justice has indicted six Russian military intelligence officers on charges related to a series of cyberattacks. These include attacks targeting American businesses, a French election, and the 2018 Winter Olympics in South Korea. The group is also believed to have targeted the U.S. 2016 election cycle, however the current charges are unrelated to those intrusions and activities. The attacks in question resulted in billions of dollars in damages and severe disruptions of the health systems, power grids, and electoral systems in several countries. Although the charges were levied *in absentia*, U.S. officials hope that the indictment will serve as a deterrent for future attacks. (*Politico*, October 20, 2020)