



## RUSSIA REFORM MONITOR

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

# Russia Reform Monitor No. 2424

November 5, 2020 **Matt Maldonado, Ilan I. Berman, Amanda Hardy**

**Related Categories:** Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues; Global Health; Arctic; Middle East; Russia

### **RUSSIAN AIRSTRIKE: A PRECURSOR TO NEW SYRIA VIOLENCE?**

Russia's military remains active in Syria in support of the Assad regime. A recent Russian airstrike there has killed an estimated 78 people in Idlib, the country's last rebel-controlled province. The target appears to have been a training base for *Faylaq al-Sham*, an Islamist group that has been carrying out anti-regime military operations. The attack is believed to be the deadliest since Turkey and Russia jointly agreed to a ceasefire this past March. It could also herald a new phase in the long-running Syrian civil war, which has ebbed in intensity in recent months. Analysts now fear that the attack puts the ceasefire, which halted the Syrian government's advance into new territory, at risk. (*BBC*, October 26, 2020)

### **THE SIDE EFFECTS OF SPUTNIK V**

The Gamaleya Research Institute, developer of Russia's much-promoted Sputnik V vaccine for COVID-19, has reported that 15% of recipients have experienced side effects related to the treatment. These reportedly include fever, muscle aches, and headaches. The figures are consistent with earlier trials of the vaccine, which also reported that some 15% of recipients complained of weakness, fever, and muscle pain. An executive at the Gamaleya Research Institute estimated that approximately 6,000 Russians have received both doses of the vaccine to date, and another 13,000 have received the first. Those individuals, however, appear to be outliers. Polls indicate that over more than half of all Russians have no intention of getting vaccinated with Sputnik V. (*The Moscow Times*, October 26, 2020)

### **A NEW OUTPOST IN AFRICA**

Russia has donated 10 armored vehicles to the Central African Republic (CAR) and opened a Defense Ministry office in the country as part of a larger effort by the Kremlin to restore its Soviet-era influence on the African continent. Russia has previously given the CAR small arms and supplied military trainers to help the country continue its fight against assorted militia groups active on its soil. Russian defense firms are also currently advising CAR military leaders on counterinsurgency strategy, with the goal of strengthening the country's military and helping its struggling government establish control over the country's restive regions. (*The Moscow Times*, October 26, 2020)

### **A REPLACEMENT FOR THE INF?**

Russian president Vladimir Putin has proposed that Russia and NATO member nations conduct joint weapons inspections. As envisioned, the cooperative checks would take the place of provisions contained in the 1987 Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty with the United States, which was abandoned by the U.S. last year as a result of serial Russian violations. If Putin's proposal is accepted by the bloc, NATO would gain access to Russia's missile base in the Baltic enclave of Kaliningrad, while Russia would get entry into American missile bases across Europe. (Associated Press, October 27, 2020)

### **FINALLY, A RUSSIAN MASK MANDATE**

In a bid to slow the spread of COVID-19 without reinstating forceful closures of the country's economy, Russian leaders have implemented a national mask mandate in recent days. The move comes as the Russian Federation smashes through a series of pandemic milestones. Over a fifth of the Russian State Duma, the country's 450 seat lower house of parliament, has contracted the disease to date, and Russia recently recorded its deadliest day since the start of the pandemic earlier this year, with over 300 deaths and some 16,000 new cases. The specific details around the mandate and its enforcement are still unclear, but the *New York Times* reports the announcement was made by ROSPOTREBNADZOR, the Russian state agency on consumer rights protections and human wellbeing. (*The Hill*, October 27, 2020)

## **CLIMATE CHANGES IN THE RUSSIAN ARCTIC**

An international research team aboard a vessel in the Russian Far North recently discovered large pockets of frozen methane gas melting under the Laptev Sea that have the potential to speed up climate change if they reach the surface. Methane is a greenhouse gas that traps heat at a rate eighty times greater than carbon dioxide over a twenty-year period. The researchers have determined that, although much of the methane is dissolving into the water before it reaches the surface, measurements indicate methane levels entering the atmosphere in the area are 4-8 times greater than normal. In a related development, temperatures in the Arctic are now estimated to be rising at twice the speed of those in other regions. (*Guardian*, October 27, 2020)