



RUSSIA REFORM MONITOR

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

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Related Categories: Cybersecurity and Cyberwarfare; Democracy and Governance; Europe Military; Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues; Intelligence and Counterintelligence; International Economics and Trade; Warfare; Caucasus; Russia

BED, DOCTOR SHORTAGES TAKING THEIR TOLL

Russia's more rural regions are beginning to run short on doctors, oxygen, and hospital beds as COVID-19 cases in Russia continue to skyrocket. The Kremlin has acknowledged the crisis, and promised that resources are being deployed quickly. However, while some regions have received support, many others have not. Deputy Prime Minister Tatiana Golikova announced that 16 Russian regions are now in critical need of more hospital beds, with facilities at over 90% capacity in those places. Ambulances are also in short supply, with waits of up to 15 hours for emergency medical aid and transport in some regions. Golikova has advised local governments to deploy personal vehicles in the absence of available ambulances. Medical staff and families of those infected have documented their struggles, revealing hospital corridors filled with patients and sharing stories of avoidable deaths on social media. The disparity in healthcare quality between Russia's rural regions and the country's major cities represents yet another point of social friction and grassroots discontent. (Reuters, October 30, 2020)

RUSSIANS CHARGED IN SWEDEN OVER BLOGGER KILLING

Swedish authorities have charged two foreign nationals with the attempted murder of an outspoken blogger and critic of Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov. The Swedish Security Service (SAPO) suspects that the attack on the critic, Tumso Abdurakhmanov, is linked to the Russian republic of Chechnya. The suspects have not been formally identified by authorities, but a Swedish news agency reported that the pair was a Russian man and woman. SAPO mentioned that the attack corresponds with an uptick in foreign intelligence activity within Sweden. Several other Chechen critics of Kadyrov have been targeted in Europe since 2019. (*Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, October 30, 2020)

FANCY BEAR STRIKES AGAIN

Microsoft has determined that Russian military intelligence hackers targeted several American think tanks, as well as the state Democratic parties of Indiana and California, earlier this year. The think tanks targeted include the Center for American Progress, the Council on Foreign Relations, and the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, among others. All targets involved have stated that, to their knowledge, the attacks were not successful. Russia has called Microsoft's assessment of the hacks "fake news," and claimed that it does not interfere in American affairs and has no connection to Fancy Bear. (Reuters, October 30, 2020)

CONTROVERSIAL RUSSIAN RESOLUTION SHOT DOWN AT UN

The UN Security Council has rejected a Russian resolution over concerns that it would weaken women's rights. The resolution in question would have altered the language of a 2000 measure promoting women's rights in conflict, as well as limit their involvement in conflict resolution. U.S. Ambassador to the UN Kelly Craft has said that the proposal "was designed to undermine and reverse the progress of the past 20 years." Russia, China, South Africa, Vietnam, and Indonesia all supported the measure, while 10 other UNSC members abstained from voting on it. (Associated Press, October 30, 2020)

MOSCOW CONSIDERING MILITARY ASSISTANCE TO ARMENIA

Russia has promised to provide Armenia with military assistance should fighting between Armenia and Azerbaijan expand further and reach internationally-recognized Armenian territory. The Russian Foreign Ministry issued the statement in response to a letter by Armenian president Nikol Pashinian formally requesting the aid from Russia. In his request, Pashinian cited Russia's obligation to provide assistance to other Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) members, of which Armenia is one, if they are under threat.

Other members of the CSTO, including Belarus and several Central Asian states, may also be obligated to provide assistance should Armenia's territorial integrity be threatened. Armenia and Azerbaijan have accused each other of shelling residential areas and targeting civilians, and Russian estimates have placed the war's death toll at around 5,000. Russia's attempts to mediate the conflict have resulted in concessions regarding prisoners of war and three short-lived ceasefires to date. (*Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, October 31, 2020)

U.S. CYBER COMMAND HUNTS FOR RUSSIAN HACKERS

U.S. Cyber Command has expanded its efforts to prevent Russian hacking and disinformation campaigns abroad. The program was initiated back in 2018, when Cyber Command sent teams to North Macedonia, Montenegro and other European countries to monitor Russian cyber operations. During the 2018 elections, the teams issued warnings to Russian trolls and hackers and even took troll farms offline during and after the election. A cornerstone of the initiative involves assisting allied countries with their own cybersecurity. General Charles Moore, deputy head of Cyber Command, said that finding malware and vulnerabilities in the networks of allied nations helps the U.S. to improve its own cybersecurity. In response to intelligence reports, Cyber Command also expanded similar efforts relating to China and Iran in the weeks prior to this month's election. (*New York Times*, November 2, 2020)