



RUSSIA REFORM MONITOR

The American Foreign Policy Council's Review of
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Related Categories: Cybersecurity and Cyberwarfare; Democracy and Governance; Economic Sanctions; Europe Military; Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues; International Economics and Trade; Europe; Russia; Ukraine

NAVALNY SUES PRISON... FOR AN UNEXPECTED REASON

Alexey Navalny has filed a lawsuit against Pokrov's Penal Colony No. 2, where he has been serving his 2.5 year sentence, for withholding his copy of the Quran. According to an Instagram post released earlier that day, the opposition activist has been seeking to "deeply study and understand" the Muslim religious text as one of the many self-improvement goals he has set out for himself while in prison. He had brought a copy of the Quran with him into the penal colony, along with some other books, but all were withheld by authorities to be inspected for extremism - a process which could take up to three months. The development is surprising, insofar as the opposition activist has garnered criticism in the past for comments deemed nationalist and Islamophobic. The only book that he has been allowed to read in the first three weeks of his detention, Navalny said, was the Bible. (*Meduza*, April 13, 2021)

SHOIGU: TROOP BUILDUP NEAR UKRAINE A RESPONSE TO NATO

Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu has stated that the country's military buildup near neighboring Ukraine is part of readiness drills that are taking place in light of threatening military moves by the NATO alliance. According to Shoigu, the "combat training exercises" are meant to be a response to nearby military activities by the U.S. and other NATO members, which Moscow views as hostile. Around 40,000 servicemen and 15,000 units of weapons and military gear, including strategic aviation, are said to be involved in the mobilization. The military maneuvers have been coupled with an official warning to the U.S. from the Kremlin for American warships to avoid going near Crimea "for their own good." (Associated Press, April 13, 2021)

ANOTHER PHYSICS PROFESSOR ARRESTED FOR TREASON

Authorities in Moscow have arrested theoretical physicist Valery Golubkin on suspicion of high treason. Golubkin, who works on aerodynamics at a Moscow research institute, has been accused of improperly sharing classified information in a case involving a fellow physicist, Anatoly Gubanov, who was arrested back in December. The Russian government has accused Golubkin of passing secret information to a NATO member state, while Gubanov is charged with passing materials on the development of hypersonics to a European country. Golubkin's lawyer, Alexander Timoshenko, has denied the charges against his client. (Reuters, April 13, 2021)

URALS ENVOY AIDE SENTENCED

An assistant to Nikolai Tsukanov, President Vladimir Putin's former envoy to the Urals region, has been sentenced to 12.5 years in a high-security penal colony and two years of probation after being found guilty of treason. Alexander Vorobyov was sentenced on April 14th by the Moscow City Court after a closed door trial. According to the Urals-based *ura.ru* website, Vorobyov was found guilty of passing classified information to Polish security services. At the time of his arrest back in 2019, a year after being appointed as Tsukanov's chief of staff, investigators found a Polish passport and a recording device in Vorobyov's possession. Soon after he was detained, Vorobyov was stripped of his official rank and kicked out of the ruling "United Russia" party. (*Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, April 14, 2021)

BIDEN SANCTIONS RUSSIA

In mid-April, the Biden administration levied sweeping new sanctions on Russia in retaliation for last year's SolarWinds hack and Moscow's alleged interference in the 2020 U.S. Presidential election. The sanctions include restrictions on six Russian companies that support the Kremlin's cyber efforts, as well as 32 individuals and entities, including Putin confidant Evgeni Prigozhin and former intelligence agent Konstantin Kilimnik. Washington is also expelling 10 Russian diplomats, some of whom have been identified as spies working under diplomatic cover, from their postings in the United States. Further American retaliatory measures are expected, but will likely go unannounced for national security reasons. In response, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov warned Washington of a swift response. "[A] series of retaliatory measures will come in the nearest time," he said. (Associated Press, April 15, 2021; Associated Press, April 15, 2021)

PRAGUE BLAMES GRU FOR 2014 SABOTAGE

Diplomatic relations between Russia and the Czech Republic are in turmoil after the government of Prime Minister Andrej Babis in Prague accused Russia's military intelligence agency, the GRU, of perpetrating a series of explosions within the country in 2014, one of which took place at a state munitions depot and killed two workers. In response to the revelations, Czech authorities expelled 18 Russian diplomats stationed in the country. The Russians quickly retaliated by expelling 20 Czech diplomats from Russia.

In a statement, the Czech Prime Minister specifically accused Unit 29155 of the GRU of being behind the operation. Unit 29155 is the same group that is believed by Western governments to have facilitated a coup attempt in Montenegro in 2016, as well as the attempted assassination of ex-spy Sergei Skripal in the United Kingdom in 2018. GRU operatives Alexander Petrov and Ruslan Boshirov are known by Czech authorities to have been in the country on the day of the first explosion. (*New York Times*, April 18, 2021)