



RUSSIA REFORM MONITOR

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Related Categories: Democracy and Governance; Energy Security; Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues; Russia

RUSSIA OPPOSES U.S. DEMOCRACY SUMMIT

At a recent UN ministerial session, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov decried U.S. plans to hold a "Summit for Democracy" in coming months. According to Lavrov, the summit, intended to "rally international support to fight corruption, combat authoritarianism and promote human rights," would deepen existing divisions between nations instead of promoting unity. "[I]n recent times, we have witnessed attempts to establish an international order... to impose upon everyone new rules that have been drawn up in non-inclusive bodies and circles," the Russian foreign minister said. "Of course, it will be Washington that puts together the list of states to be invited to this summit." (*The Moscow Times*, May 7, 2021)

A SHOT IN THE ARM FOR RUSSIA'S SUB FLEET

After decades of post-Soviet decline, the Kremlin is augmenting its submarine fleet with a new addition. The *Kazan*, a brand new 885M *Yasen-M* class submarine, was commissioned earlier this month. The new sub, just the second *Yasen*-class vessel in operation, is capable of firing *Oniks* supersonic and *Kalibr* subsonic cruise missiles. It is outfitted with advanced nuclear reactors, as well as vertical launch silos and extensive payload capabilities that would allow it to strike targets on the U.S. East Coast from a vantage point in the North Atlantic in the event of a conflict. (*The Drive*, May 7, 2021)

U.S. PROSECUTORS SEEK 17-YEAR SENTENCE FOR RUSSIAN SPY

As part of his plea bargain with U.S. federal prosecutors, former Green Beret Peter Debbins is facing a possible 17-year prison sentence on charges of spying for Russia over a span of 15 years. Debbins was allegedly recruited by Russian intelligence in 1996, while studying abroad as a University of Minnesota student. Debbins' wife is a Russian national, and his father-in-law is a Colonel in the Russian Air Force. During his military career, Debbins was stationed in Azerbaijan and Georgia, and worked as a military contractor thereafter. According to the indictment, Debbins is accused of passing information on his fellow special forces operators to Russian intelligence handlers, as well as his assessment of which of them would likely be willing to spy for Russia. (*Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, May 8, 2021)

U.S. PIPELINE HIT BY RUSSIAN HACKING GROUP

Over the weekend, the Colonial energy pipeline was hit by a ransomware attack, cutting off oil transportation to much of the U.S. East Coast. On Monday, the FBI confirmed the attack had been carried out by DarkSide, a known hacking group based in Russia. The group operates a website that offers a small window into its operations and motives. In misspelled English, it reads: "We are apolitical, we do not participate in geopolitics, do not need to tie us with a defined goverment [sic] and look for other our motives... Our goal is to make money."

Russian security forces have collaborated with independent hacking groups to target foreign adversaries in the past. However, Kremlin spokesman Dmiri Peskov issued a blanket denial of official involvement in any hacks on Tuesday. "Russia has nothing to do with these hacker attacks, and had nothing to do with the previous hacker attacks," he said. (*NBC News*, May 10, 2021; *U.S. News & World Report*, May 11, 2021)

SCHOOL SHOOTING ROCKS KAZAN

At least nine people are dead and nearly two dozen wounded in Kazan after a gunman went on an armed rampage at a local school. The suspect, a 19-year-old registered gun owner, a rarity in Russia, is in custody after being apprehended at the scene. According to Russian media, the gunman was a former student of the school and announced his attack on social media ahead of time. Among the dead were seven eighth-graders, at least two of whom died while trying to flee by jumping from a third story window. (*NPR*, May 11, 2021; *Deutsche Welle*, May 11, 2021)

[EDITORS' NOTE: School shootings are infrequent in Russia, given the country's strict gun laws. However, they do happen. In 2018, for instance, a student at a technical school in Crimea killed 20 people and injured a further 50. In response to the Kazan shooting, President Putin has ordered a legal review of his country's gun laws.]