



## RUSSIA REFORM MONITOR

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

# Russia Reform Monitor No. 2469

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**Related Categories:** Democracy and Governance; Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues; International Economics and Trade; SPACE; Iran

### NAVALNY NOT THE FIRST FSB TARGET

Investigative clearinghouse Bellingcat has uncovered evidence that, over a year before opposition critic Alexei Navalny fell violently ill on a Russian commercial flight and was evacuated to Germany, another Kremlin opponent, Dmitri Bykov, had been tailed by members of the same FSB team before himself falling ill and nearly dying. According to flight logs examined by the group, FSB agents tailed Bykov between 2018 and 2019 on speaking engagements in Ufa, Rostov, and Novosibirsk. While returning to Moscow from Novosibirsk, Bykov began vomiting and drifted in and out of consciousness. His flight made an emergency landing in Ufa, from where Bykov was medevaced to the Butenko Institute in Moscow. Bykov's recorded condition bears a close resemblance to that of Navalny a year later, with one crucial difference: doctors could not conclusively determine poisoning was the cause of Bykov's illness, because his condition was not fully examined in Ufa. (*Bellingcat*, June 9, 2021)

### NO REFUGE FOR VICTIMIZED WOMEN IN RUSSIA'S REGIONS

Last week, local police forces raided a crisis shelter outside the Dagestani capital of Makhachkala and detained Khalimat Taramova, a member of the LGBTQ community who had fled her native Chechnya due to domestic abuse. Taramova, her partner Anna Manylova, and several other women at the shelter were arrested by authorities. According to a video recorded by Taramova and distributed on social media app Telegram, the woman fled her home in Chechnya on June 6th and requested to not be placed on a wanted list for return to her home region. The Chechen political opposition, for its part, claims Taramova is the daughter of Ayub Taramov, a prominent member of the republic's political elite since 2000 - making the incident a political inconvenience. The Russian LGBTQ Network subsequently reported that Taramova and Manylova had been deported back to Chechnya after their arrest. (*Meduza*, June 11, 2021)

### MOSCOW'S SOFT LOCKDOWN

In a reversal from comments he made last week, Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyanin announced that the week of June 15th would be a paid holiday for workers in the Russian capital. Restaurants, bars, and stores are ordered to remain closed until June 20th, with only critical infrastructure such as the police and transportation authority functioning. Russia as a whole, and Moscow in particular, is experiencing a surge in COVID-19 cases; of the 13,510 new cases reported nationwide on June 12th, 6,701 of them came from Moscow (a 70% increase in one week). 78% of Moscow's 14,000 hospital beds are currently occupied. (Reuters, June 12, 2021)

### RUSSIA SELLS IRAN ADVANCED SPY SATELLITE

Russia is planning to sell Iran a *Kanopus-V* satellite, technology that would greatly increase Iran's spying capabilities. While the *Kanopus-V* is technically earmarked for civilian use, it has become a coveted prize for Iran's clerical army, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), which played an instrumental role in negotiating its purchase from Russia. The satellite will be built and launched by two Russian companies, NPK BARL and VNIIEP, in partnership with the Iranian Space agency.

Observers are viewing the sale with alarm. According to Christopher Ford, who served as Assistant Secretary of State for International Security and Non-Proliferation in the Trump administration, "[h]aving this kind of on-call data feed may open up technical and operational possibilities that the Iranians previously didn't have." (*Washington Post*, June 10, 2021)

### RUSSIA CARRIES OUT MASSIVE NAVAL DRILLS IN THE PACIFIC

Just days before the summit between President Biden and Russian President Vladimir Putin in Geneva, the Russian Pacific fleet has carried out massive military drills. According to Rear Admiral Konstantin Kabantsov, one of the Fleet's commanders, nearly 20 ships, submarines and support vessels travelled a distance of 4,000 kilometers to take part in the military exercises, which focused on things like tracking and detecting enemy submarines. The exercises were notable for their scale; According to Admiral Viktor Kravchenko, the former Chief of staff of the Russian Navy, "[i]n the post-Soviet period, there have been no comparable exercises involving such a large number of forces." (Itar-TASS, June, 13, 2021; *Daily Mail*, June, 13, 2021).

## **ANOTHER FORMER EUROPEAN OFFICIAL TACKS TOWARD RUSSIA**

Ex-French Prime Minister François Fillon may soon join the ranks of other European officials who, after leaving office, went on to claim seats on the boards of Russia's various energy companies. Fillon was nominated last week to join the board of Russian state-controlled oil firm Zarubezhneft. If Fillon accedes to the board, he will join the likes of former German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder (now working for Russian state gas giant Gazprom) and former Austrian Chancellor Wolfgang Schüssel, who is now on the board of Lukoil. The former French Prime Minister is a logical choice for such a post; since leaving office in 2012, Fillon has been critical of western sanctions on Russia over its aggression toward Ukraine, and has participated in the Saint Petersburg Economic Forum. (*EU Observer*, June 14, 2021)