



## RUSSIA REFORM MONITOR

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

# Russia Reform Monitor No. 2472

July 2, 2021 **Matt Maldonado, Ilan I. Berman, Timothy Blinnikov**

**Related Categories:** Democracy and Governance; Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues; International Economics and Trade; Global Health; Middle East; Russia; Ukraine

## A CONFRONTATION OFF CRIMEA

Diplomatic controversy is brewing in Europe after a British naval vessel was confronted by Russian ships and aircraft off the coast of the occupied Crimean peninsula. The *HMS Defender* was transiting from the Ukrainian port of Odessa to the Georgian coast when it entered the 12 nautical mile zone claimed by Russia off Cape Fiolent, Crimea. Reports of the ensuing incident from the Russian and British Defense Ministries contradict one another, with Moscow claiming that its vessels and aircraft fired warning shots and dropped bombs nearby, while London denies such measures were taken. In an interview with Britain's *Channel 4 News*, Russian Ambassador to the UK Andrei Kelin claimed the British vessel "did not respond to several warnings," and had "gone deep, about three kilometers from, or deep into, the territorial waters [of the Russian Federation]." (*The Guardian*, June 23, 2021)

## TORTURE ON THE PENINSULA

Ukrainian news sources and advocacy groups are sounding the alarm over human rights violations in Crimea, disseminating firsthand accounts of victims of alleged torture on the peninsula. According to the Union Information Society, human rights monitors have documented over two hundred cases of abuse in the Russian-occupied territory, a quarter of which involve instances of torture. The episodes include instances of beating, sexual violation, electric shock and genital mutilation carried out by members of Russia's internal security service, the FSB. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has warned that Russian authorities are using torture to extract confessions for show trials as the Kremlin continues to consolidate its hold over Crimea, while denying human rights advocates access to the territory. (*The Sun*, June 24, 2021)

## FORGERY INDUSTRY BOOMING OVER VACCINATION REQUIREMENTS

Forgers who operate on the darknet and on platforms such as Telegram are experiencing increased demand for their services as Moscow continues its summer drive to vaccinate 60 percent of the city's service industry. For prices ranging from \$28 to \$400, those who are unwilling to receive Russia's Sputnik V vaccine can obtain paper documents to the effect that they have in fact gotten the jab, while those who can afford to pay more can have their name and that status added to the government's official vaccination database.

The hesitancy to vaccinate stems from public distrust of Russian vaccines, despite widespread evidence regarding their effectiveness. Nearly a third of Russian doctors are said not to trust the Sputnik V treatment. (*The Moscow Times*, June 25, 2021)

## RUSSIAN MILITARY FLEXES ITS MUSCLES IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Russia has kicked off joint naval and aircraft drills in the Mediterranean, amid ongoing tensions with Great Britain. The missile cruiser *Moskva*, the frigates *Admiral Essen* and *Admiral Markov*, as well as two submarines will take part in the multi-day military drills. Numerous fighter aircraft will also be deployed, including a anti-submarine warfare plane and a pair of MiG-31k jets "capable of employing the latest Kinzhal hypersonic missiles," the Russian Defense Ministry has said. The drills are ostensibly being carried out to test the security surrounding the Hmeimim airbase and the Tartus naval facility in Syria, where Russia maintains a contingent of forces as part of an open-ended basing arrangement with the regime of Bashar al-Assad. (Itar-TASS, June, 25, 2021)

## MOSCOW VERSUS THE WESTERN ORDER

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov has criticized the Western "rules based order" and accused Western nations of unacceptable pressure. In a commentary piece published in the *Kommersant* newspaper, Lavrov laid out that, while the Geneva summit between Presidents Putin and Biden seemed generally positive, subsequent statements and moves by the U.S. and Europe indicate that "the West wanted it to be clear to everyone: it is united as never before and will do only what it considers right on the international arena, and force others - above all Russia and China - follow the course set by them." In particular, Lavrov warned, there now seems to be a general consensus in the West "for building a world order, but exclusively according to Western 'rules.'"

Needless to say, such a structure is not acceptable to Moscow. "By increasing sanctions and other measures of unlawful pressure on sovereign governments, the West inculcates totalitarianism in world affairs [and] takes an imperial, neo-colonial position in relation to other countries," Russia's Foreign Minister has written. The message that Russia has received, according to Lavrov, is clear: follow Western standards, "otherwise we will punish you." (*Kommersant*, June, 28, 2021)