



RUSSIA REFORM MONITOR

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Related Categories: Cybersecurity and Cyberwarfare; Democracy and Governance; Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues

LEAKED KREMLIN DOCS POINT TO PRO-TRUMP INFLUENCE CAMPAIGN

What appear to be official documents from a 2016 meeting of the Russian government's national security council outline a government-wide intelligence operation on the part of the Kremlin to help elect then-Republican candidate Donald Trump. According to the leaked documents, the Russians believed Trump's ascendancy to the U.S. presidency would "lead to the destabilization of the U.S.'s sociopolitical system" and weaken Washington's international negotiating power. Senior officials such as Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu, then-Prime Minister Dmitri Medvedev, and Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov all attended the meeting, according to a published photograph of the proceedings.

Intelligence experts have confirmed that the type of bureaucratic language used in the documents is consistent with Kremlin decisionmaking and micromanagement common in intelligence operations, while former British Ambassador to Russia Sir Andrew Wood described the material as "spellbinding." Kremlin spokesperson Dmitri Peskov and a representative for President Trump have dismissed the document as false, however. (*Guardian*, July 15, 2021)

THE FIGHT OVER MURAL SPACE IN SAINT PETERSBURG

The side panel of a transformer vault in Saint Petersburg has become the focus of a political struggle between local police and activists looking to use the public space to commemorate those who have been imprisoned or murdered for political activity in Russia. Last week, a painted banner appeared on the vault depicting several slain politicians and journalists, including Boris Nemtsov and Anna Politkovskaya. Within hours, the police had removed the banner from view. Earlier this year, the same panel housed a mural championing imprisoned Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny. That mural was painted over in hours, and authorities have opened a criminal investigation into the act of "political vandalism." (*Meduza*, July 15, 2021)

LIVESTREAM RESTRICTIONS FOR UPCOMING VOTE

With parliamentary elections less than two months away, Russia's Central Election Committee has decided to restrict access of ballot box livestream feeds to only candidates, parties, and its own members, keeping the public in the dark about what happens at polling locations. Similar to last year's referendum vote, September's parliamentary elections will take place over three days in order to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Activists believe the extended voting period and restricted access to livestream feeds will only facilitate ballot stuffing and election fraud. Webcams have been a fixture in Russian elections since 2012, when President Putin installed 95,000 of them at polling places nationwide in response to allegations of ballot stuffing in the 2011 Duma elections. (*The Moscow Times*, July 15, 2021)

MOSCOW OFFERS U.S. JOINT OPERATIONS IN AFGHANISTAN

Russia has expressed its willingness to cooperate with the United States in monitoring the ongoing situation in Afghanistan, even offering up the use of Russian military bases in nearby Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. Cooperation on the Afghan issue could also come about through the trading of intelligence information. According to *Kommersant*, the possibility of such cooperation was first floated by Russian President Vladimir Putin during his mid-June summit with President Biden in Geneva.

The Kremlin's overtures, however, reflect self-interest more than anything else. During a recent international conference in Tashkent, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov stated that the U.S. operation in Afghanistan had "fallen through" and that as a result of the current situation "there exist genuine risks of instability spilling over to neighboring countries" - a state of affairs that Moscow is now attempting to mitigate. (*Novaya Gazeta*, July 17, 2021; *Kommersant*, July 17, 2021)

RUSSIAN RIGHTS GROUP FORCED TO SHUT DOWN

Team 29, a Russian rights group made up of lawyers and journalists which specialises in cases of espionage, treason and freedom of speech violations, has ceased operations following accusations from Russian authorities that it was spreading information from an "undesirable" non-governmental Czech source. Team 29's website was blocked on Friday in a move which its lawyers feared would lead to more pressure and arrests of its members, prompting the decision to shut down. In a formal statement, the group declared that "In these conditions, continuation of Team 29's activities creates [a] direct and clear threat to the safety of a large number of people, and we can't ignore that risk." Team 29 had mentioned that it would take down all of its online content to avoid any risks to its lawyers and those it represents. (Associated Press, July 18, 2021)