



## RUSSIA REFORM MONITOR

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

# Russia Reform Monitor No. 2281

August 13, 2021 **Matt Maldonado, Timothy Blinnikov, Ilan I. Berman**

**Related Categories:** Democracy and Governance; Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues; Intelligence and Counterintelligence; International Economics and Trade; Military Innovation; Science and Technology; Resource Security; China; Europe; Russia

### PUNDITS IRATE OVER OLYMPIC LOSSES

The comparatively poor performance of Russia's athletes at the Summer Olympics in Tokyo has sent the country's political pundits and officials into a frenzy. Much of the abuse was directed at Israeli athlete Linoy Ashram, who narrowly beat out Dina Averina of Russia for gold in the women's all-around gymnastics event. The following day, the Russian team came up short to Bulgaria and claimed the silver medal in the team event, marking the first time Moscow did not win gold in the event since 1996. Commentators and officials see a Western conspiracy behind those results. On the state broadcast news program *60 minutes*, commentator Olga Skabeeva claimed that, "[a]t the behest of Americans, the International Olympic Committee took away two gold medals from Russia." Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova took to her Telegram account to claim much the same, in more strident terms. "Russophobic bastards... resorted to fraud in front of the entire world," she wrote. (*The Daily Beast*, August 10, 2021)

### MILITARY DRILLS AND SINO-RUSSIAN ALIGNMENT

Over 10,000 Russian and Chinese troops are currently taking part in a major military exercise being held in China's northwest Ningxia Hui autonomous region. The five-day Zapad/Interaction 2021 drills kicked off on August 10th and are intended, according to Russian officials, "to strengthen the development of Russian-Chinese relations, comprehensive partnership and strategic cooperation." Russia has sent motorized rifle units, SU-30M fighters and management personnel to participate in the drills, although Russian press outlets are reporting that - for the first time in history - Russian soldiers will be utilizing Chinese-made weapons as well.

Politically, the exercises come amid deteriorating relations with the U.S. on the part of both countries, as well as growing concerns in global capitals over a potential Taliban takeover of Afghanistan following America's military exit from the country. This is reflected in the official Russian statement about the drills, which also emphasizes that the exercises are designed to "increase the level of military cooperation and friendship between the armed forces of the two countries, demonstrate the determination and ability of Russia and China to fight terrorism and jointly protect peace and stability in the region." (*The Moscow Times*, August 10, 2021)

### DISPUTE OVER SCALE OF BLACK SEA OIL SPILL

A Russian oil terminal on the Black Sea experienced a leak last weekend during a routine fill-up that resulted in 100 metric tons of crude spilling into the body of water. The leak occurred near Novorossiysk, a mid-sized Russian port city in Krasnodar Krai, due east of the Crimean Peninsula. Details released by the Caspian Pipeline Consortium (CPC), the terminal's operator, conflict with reporting from the World Wildlife Foundation (WWF) and other scientists, however. Official estimates released by the CPC in the hours after the spill described its size as only 200 square meters. Not long after, though, the WWF came back with its own observations and reported the spill to be 94 square kilometers in size and a possible threat to both wildlife and a nearby nature reserve. (Phys.org, August 11, 2021)

### RUSSIAN SPY ARRESTED IN GERMANY

German authorities have detained a British citizen accused of spying for Russia while working for the British Embassy in Berlin. The man, identified as David S., was detained in Potsdam after a joint investigation by British and German agencies. Britain's Metropolitan Police released a statement confirming that "the man was arrested in the Berlin area on suspicion of committing offences relating to being engaged in 'Intelligence Agent activity.'" German prosecutors said the suspect received an unspecified amount of cash in exchange for passing documents to Russia. For their part, Russian authorities have yet to comment publicly on the case. (*TRT World*, August 11, 2021)

### RUSSIA'S BUDDING DRONE COMMANDERS

Russia is planning to launch specialized drone warfare training for its military officers beginning next year. As part of that effort, the country's military personnel will be trained to handle unmanned offensive and surveillance platforms, in order to keep pace with the growing significance of drones to the country's naval and aerospace forces. To that end, the Ryazan Guards Higher Airborne School (RVVDKU) will begin an experimental five-year course in drone specialization. After completion of the training, cadets will be commissioned as officers in "unmanned commanding." (*The Defense Post*, August 11, 2021)

## **CEO OF HYPERSONICS FIRM ARRESTED FOR TREASON**

Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB) has detained Alexander Kuranov, the CEO and chief designer of the Scientific-Research Enterprise of Hypersonic Systems, a public company. He is being accused of high treason under Article 275 of the Russian Criminal Code. Kuranov, a former Professor of the Department of Management Systems and Technologies of St. Petersburg State Polytechnic University, has been detained for a period of two months, until formal charges against him can be brought. (Itar-TASS, August 12, 2021; *Novaya Gazeta*, August 12, 2021)