



# Russia Reform Monitor No. 2485

September 7, 2021 **Matt Maldonado, Ilan I. Berman, Timothy Blinnikov**

## RIYADH TURNS TO RUSSIA

In a rare move, Saudi Arabia's Deputy Defense Minister, Prince Khalid bin Salman, has signed a new military cooperation agreement with his Russian counterpart, Alexander Fomin. The deal, inked at the International Military-Technical Forum outside Moscow, is aimed at developing joint military coordination between the two countries. During his visit to the trade show, Prince Khalid also met with Russia's Defense Minister, Sergey Shoigu, who emphasized his high hopes for a growth of the Russo-Saudi relationship, saying: "We aim for a progressive development of cooperation in military and military-technical fields on the entire spectrum of issues that pose mutual interest." (*The New Arab*, August 24, 2021)

## RUSSIA'S MILITARY EQUIPMENT GETS A FACELIFT

The Russian Armed Forces have signed new contracts worth a cumulative \$7.6 billion with an array of arms manufacturers as part of an extensive modernization plan. According to Deputy Defense Minister Alexei Krivoruchko, the contracts included the purchase of about 1,300 new models of armaments and weapons, as well as the modernization of the Russian army's existing fleet of nuclear-capable Tu-95MS strategic bombers. Russia is also in the process of building new *Belgorod*-class nuclear submarines, which will be capable of carrying a new type of nuclear torpedo known as the *Poseidon*. (*Bulgarian Military*, August 25, 2021)

## THE LEGAL FIGHT OVER WATER IN CRIMEA

The Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation has opened a criminal case against Ukraine, citing the latter for "ecocide" under Article 358 of the Russian Criminal Code. The Committee has alleged that "unidentified individuals in the territory of Ukraine... decided to inflict harm on the economic, social, and environmental situation of the Crimean peninsula by blocking the North Crimea canal." Specifically, Russia claims that a dam constructed in the Kherson region on the Ukrainian mainland has, since 2014, blocked water supply from the Dnipro River and led to the destruction and extinction of various forms of flora and fauna in the region. For its part, Ukraine rejects the charges and alleges that the water scarcity in the region is due to a variety of causes, including the evolving agricultural sector, local industry, and the hydrological demands of Russian army units stationed on the territory. (*Ukrinform*, August 25, 2021)

## RUSSIA EVACUATES 500 FROM AFGHANISTAN

In late August, the Kremlin ordered the Russian Defense Ministry to evacuate more than 500 people from Afghanistan. The evacuees include Russian nationals as well as nationals from Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Ukraine. Four military transport planes were dispatched to carry out the evacuation, carrying drinking water, food rations and blankets. A brigade of military doctors was also expected to be sent. (*Meduza*, August 25, 2021)

## NAVALNY BEING SURVEILLED, FORCE FED STATE PROPAGANDA

In recent weeks, imprisoned Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny has communicated with western news outlets such as the *New York Times* and the *Guardian* regarding conditions in the Pokrov correctional colony, located about 60 miles east of Moscow in Vladimir Oblast. In his own words, Navalny described the experience at the facility where he is being detained as similar to modern Chinese labor camps, "where everybody marches in a line and where video cameras are hung everywhere. There is constant control." Additionally, Navalny claims his guards force him to watch hours of state propaganda every day. Additional charges were brought against Navalny in August by Russian authorities. If convicted, the opposition leader will see his imprisonment extended until at least the upcoming Russian presidential election in 2024. (*Guardian*, August 25, 2021)

## STALIN-ERA GRAVESITE DISCOVERED IN UKRAINE

Last month, authorities in Ukraine announced the discovery of a series of mass graves in Odessa containing thousands of bodies likely belonging to the victims of Stalin-era purges and killings. Experts estimate there to be between 5,000 and 8,000 human remains in the graves, ranking the area among the largest such site ever discovered in modern Ukraine. According to one estimate, the years 1938-1941 saw the Soviet secret police execute some 8,600 people in Odessa alone, and many of the bodies found in the graves are believed to belong to these individuals. However, identifying those victims will be impossible without records and documents kept in Russia. Meanwhile, those doing the excavation believe that additional bodies may be discovered in areas adjacent to the Odessa site. The largest Soviet-era mass grave in Ukraine is believed to be at Bykivnia, just east of Kyiv, where the bodies of as many as 200,000 individuals killed by Stalin's secret police lie. (*BBC*, August 26, 2021)

