



RUSSIA REFORM MONITOR

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Related Categories: Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues; Military Innovation; Science and Technology; Global Health; Russia

THE CURIOUS CASE OF KIRILL ZHALO

A Russian diplomat who was found dead outside the Russian embassy in Berlin has been identified by investigative news outlets Bellingcat and *The Insider* as undercover FSB agent Kirill Zhalo. While the Russian embassy has described the event, which happened in mid-October, as a "tragic accident," they have not commented further and have not yet authorized an autopsy. Zhalo's father, Lt. General Alexei Zhalo, is deputy director of the FSB's Second Service, which has been linked to secret operations against opposition figures within Russia, as well as overseas assassinations. Exiled Russian journalist Roman Dobrokhtov has voiced suspicions that the younger Zhalo was in possession of sensitive information, and was murdered as a result, although there is no concrete evidence to support the claim. (*The Guardian*, November 8, 2021; *Daily Mail*, November 8, 2021)

MOSCOW BUSINESSES STRUGGLE WITH LOCKDOWN CLOSURES

In an attempt to stem rampant COVID infections in the Russian capital, Moscow authorities have begun a crackdown on businesses that remained open illegally during the city's "non-working week" in early November. Business leaders, however, are firing back. Company owners say that, due to a lack of governmental support, they have no choice but to stay open or risk permanent closure. One business owner lamented that "the state is putting us in a dead end. It forces all small entrepreneurs like us to close down, and the only thing we can hope for is the loyalty of guests and our landlord." The Russian government does not see things this way, however. Violators have been threatened with fines up to 1 million rubles (\$14,000) or a 90-day forced closure, and businesses that have been operating legally have been rigorously inspected. (*The Moscow Times*, November 3, 2021)

RUSSIA SAYS U.S. PRESENCE IN BLACK SEA PROVOCATIVE

On Sunday, Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu called the presence of the U.S. Navy in the Black Sea a provocation after another ship entered the region. "This is an almost constant attempt to test us, to check how ready we are," Shoigu said in comments carried by the press. He also alluded to other countries committing similar actions, though failed to specify which ones. The Black Sea has become a contentious area in Russian-Western relations since the 2014 annexation of Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula. The move allowed Russia clear access to the Black Sea coast, which is bordered by several NATO countries. For its part, the U.S. often holds naval training exercises in Black Sea waters with allies and partners, and also regularly patrols the area. (*Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, November 7, 2021)

RUSSIA PLOWS AHEAD WITH SUBMARINE MODERNIZATION

In August, Russia marked the beginning of construction on two *Borei*-class nuclear-powered ballistic-missile submarines, bringing the total number of such vessels to five. This class of boat is fairly new; although designed during the Cold War, it wasn't commissioned until 2013. They are considered the most advanced SSBNs that Russia has ever built.

The building of *Borei*-class subs is not the only way in which Moscow is expanding its submarine capabilities. Russian Navy officials recently announced that the *Yasen*-class cruise missile submarines *Novosibirsk* and *Krasnoyarsk Yasen-M* will enter service in the Pacific Fleet in late 2021 and 2022, respectively. Like the development of the *Borei* class, the *Yasen* class of vessels is part of a modernization drive on the part of the Russian military that is intended to phase out aging Soviet-era attack submarines. (*Business Insider*, November 7, 2021; *The National Interest*, November 4, 2021)

"NON-WORKING DAYS" EXTENDED IN FIVE RUSSIAN REGIONS

Although Russia's "non-working week" officially ended on November 7th, the regions Novgorod, Tomsk, Chelyabinsk, Kursk, and Smolensk all opted for extended lockdowns, with end dates ranging between November 10th to November 14th. For regions that are no longer under lockdown, some restrictions have continued while new ones have been introduced, including QR Code requirements for visiting certain businesses that remain open. (*Meduza*, November 8, 2021)

POLISH PM ACCUSES PUTIN OF MASTERMINDING MIGRANT CRISIS

Poland's Prime Minister, Mateusz Morawiecki, has publicly accused both Belarusian leader Alexander Lukashenko and President Vladimir Putin of orchestrating the current migrant crisis taking place at the Polish-Belarusian border. "This attack which Lukashenko is conducting has its mastermind in Moscow," said Morawiecki. "The mastermind is President Putin." Around 2,000 migrants - men, women, and children, mainly from the Middle East and Asia - have been stuck at the border, experiencing freezing temperatures that have resulted in several deaths. Morawiecki further alleged that Lukashenko is trying to destabilize the EU as revenge for recent sanctions against Minsk. Both Poland and Lithuania have deployed troops to their borders out of fear of Belarus provoking an incident. (*BBC*, November 9, 2021)