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Related Categories: Democracy and Governance; Economic Sanctions; Europe Military; Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues; Intelligence and Counterintelligence; International Economics and Trade; Warfare; Russia; Ukraine

THE STRANGE CASE OF DARYA DUGINA

On August 20th, a car bombing in Moscow took the life of Darya Dugina, an outspoken Russian nationalist and chief editor of the disinformation website United World International. Dugina's most distinguishing attribute, however, was that she was the daughter of Alexander Dugin, the notorious far-right philosopher and "Eurasianist" ideologue whose views about Russian empire and confrontation with the West are popular within the Kremlin's corridors of power. Both Dugina and her father had been sanctioned earlier this year by the U.S. and British governments.

Most coverage of the incident, both in Russia and abroad, has depicted Dugina's killing as a failed attempt to eliminate her father, who is a vocal proponent of Russian President Vladimir Putin's war in Ukraine. The perpetrators, however, are less obvious. Russia's intelligence services have blamed Ukraine for having organized the killing, and have identified a Ukrainian citizen named Natalya Vovk as the assassin. At the same time, former Duma deputy Ilya Ponomarev has assumed the role of *de facto* spokesman for the National Republican Army, an "underground resistance movement" operating within Russia itself which has claimed responsibility for the killing. (Reuters, August 22, 2022; *The Daily Beast*, August 29, 2022)

[EDITORS' NOTE: While the particulars likely will not be known for some time, the Dugina killing carries enormous potential consequences. The Kremlin has been quick to blame Kyiv for the incident, potentially laying the groundwork for a further escalation of hostilities in its current war. Alternatively, the bombing could signal a growing capability and boldness by Ukraine's government to strike at targets on Russian soil. It might mean that domestic opposition to Vladimir Putin's war is rising, with his political opponents now prepared to take action in ways they were not before. A fourth possibility is that the killing was carried out by the Kremlin itself, in anticipation of opposition from ideologues like Dugin to a potential de-escalation of the current conflict. Time will tell which, if any, of these theories is correct.]

WESTERN TECH FUELS RUSSIA'S FIGHT

Russia's aggression against Ukraine has been at least partially enabled by Western technology, a new British defense study has found. The report, by the UK's Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), discovered that more than 450 different components used in the munitions and hardware employed by the Russian military against Ukraine originate from Western firms. The tech transfers, from companies like Texas Instruments and Analog Devices, took place before the start of Russia's Ukraine war in February, and included components for cruise missiles and other offensive weapons. "Russian weapons that are critically dependent upon Western electronics have resulted in the deaths of thousands of Ukrainians," RUSI's Jack Watling has told Reuters. The study's findings, the news agency details, "show how Russia's military remains reliant on foreign microchips for everything from tactical radios to drones and precision long-range munitions, and that Western governments were slow to limit Russia's access to these technologies particularly after President Vladimir Putin's invasion of Crimea in 2014."

Since the start of the current war, the United States and its allies have imposed further, sweeping restrictions on the sale of microchips and key technological components to Russia, largely choking off the flow of these parts to the Kremlin. Moscow is now actively looking for alternate sources to provide it with key Western components which would enable continued production of the lethal munitions and materiel being used against Ukraine. As a result, "Russia's military could be permanently weakened if Western governments strengthen export controls, manage to shut down the country's clandestine procurement networks and prevent sensitive components being manufactured in states that support Russia," the RUSI study concludes. (Reuters, August 8, 2022)

TARGET: WAGNER

In what amounts to a tactical victory for Ukraine, as well as another instance of poor operational security for Russia, the Ukrainian military struck and leveled the headquarters of Russian private military corporation Wagner Group in Popasna, Luhansk in mid-August. A Russian journalist is thought to have inadvertently disclosed the location of the headquarters by posting photos of the building, included a sign with its address as well as images of the head of the Wagner Group, oligarch Yevgeny Prigozhin, on his Telegram channel. The strike was also long on symbolism, because private military corporations, especially Wagner, have become central to the Kremlin's continued war effort against Ukraine amid a serious lack of military morale, significant troop losses, and rampant desertions. (*New York Times*, August 15, 2022)

THE KREMLIN LOOKS FOR REINFORCEMENTS

Russia's war in Ukraine isn't going well, in human terms. Six months into the Russian "special military operation," the country's military is estimated to have lost in excess of 60,000 troops in Ukraine so far — more than the total losses suffered by the Soviet Union during a decade of war in Afghanistan in the 1980s. Now, the Kremlin is seeking to beef up the strength of these rapidly-dwindling forces. Russian President Vladimir Putin has issued a decree ordering the country's armed forces to expand by 137,000 troops. The executive order takes effect January 1st, and if fully implemented — either via stepped-up conscription or greater reliance on contract soldiers — would see the size of the Russian military expand to 1.15 million souls. (Associated Press, August 25, 2022)