



RUSSIA REFORM MONITOR

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

Russia Reform Monitor No. 2579

April 20, 2023 **Ilan I. Berman, Sydney Duckor, Ian Cameron**

Related Categories: Economic Sanctions; Energy Security; Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues; Military Innovation; Warfare; Japan; Russia; Ukraine

A CARVE OUT FOR TOKYO ON RUSSIAN CRUDE

Back in December, in an effort to draw down Russian revenues and make its war in Ukraine more costly, the G-7 imposed a price cap of \$60 on purchases of Russian oil. But a global economic downturn and expected production cuts by the OPEC+ cartel have created hardship for the group's members – and led to a loosening of at least some of the restrictions on a case-by-case basis. Thus, Japan (which is deeply reliant on Russian energy) has successfully lobbied for an exemption to the rule, allowing Tokyo to negotiate bilaterally with Moscow for energy purchases at a price higher than the agreed-upon sum of \$60 per barrel. (Wall Street Journal, April 2, 2023)

[EDITORS' NOTE: Japan, though supportive of Ukraine, has been slow to back Kyiv fully in its fight against Russia – in no small measure because of its dependence on Russian supplies of energy. The G-7 exception reflects a desire by Western governments (chief among them the United States) to maintain a unity of purpose in their economic pressure against Moscow. The hope in Washington and other Western capitals is that, with more latitude to acquire much-needed energy supplies, Tokyo will become a more significant stakeholder in Ukraine's fight. However, it is unclear whether Moscow will make limits on the extent of Japan's involvement in Ukraine a condition of its energy sales to the country.]

THE REAL POSSIBILITY OF A WIDER WAR

A new trove of leaked Pentagon documents contains some illuminating – and disturbing – revelations about Russian risk-taking behavior amid mounting hostilities with the West. According to the leaked files, a Russian fighter jet nearly downed a British aircraft last year off the coast of Crimea. The incident, during which a Russian jet came within 15 feet of a British surveillance plane, occurred on September 29, 2022. Both NATO and Russia have sought to prevent the war in Ukraine from becoming a direct conflict between the two sides. However, had the British plane been brought down, the incident could have triggered NATO's Article 5 collective defense protections, precipitating direct hostilities between Moscow and the Alliance. (The Washington Examiner, April 9, 2023)

SANCTIONS FLIP RUSSIA'S TECH STRATEGY ON ITS HEAD

While Russia's economy has proven more resilient to sanctions than expected, there is at least one area in which the country has been hit exceedingly hard: advanced technology. Russia is now paring back ambitious goals for technological advancement due to the country's loss of access to certain high-tech parts, sales of which to Russia have become proscribed as a result of its aggression in Ukraine. Previously, the Kremlin had mapped out plans for technological breakthroughs in thirty separate areas – including drug manufacturing, aviation and energy services – by the year 2030. But late last year, the Russian government revised this list downward – and the focus of the document, which is expected to be presented to Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin next month, has become catching up to Western competitors and replacing foreign technology now inaccessible to Russia. (The Moscow Times, April 10, 2023)

MOSCOW TURNS TO E-SUMMONS

Since the start of its war in Ukraine, the Kremlin has struggled to keep its military supplied with troops and prevent conscripts from fleeing the country to avoid what has become an increasingly unpopular conflict. Now, the Russian parliament is looking to technology for a solution. The State Duma, Russia's lower house of parliament, has approved the final reading of legislation that legalizes electronic military summons. An electronic summons will carry the same weight as draft orders issued via mail, and anyone who fails to respond will be legally prohibited from driving vehicles, buying or selling real estate, and applying for loans. Moreover, amendments to the legislation ban any Russian citizens "liable for military service" from leaving the country once they receive the e-summons. The legislation further authorizes the creation of a unified registry of citizens eligible for military service, which will receive inputs and pertinent information from medical institutions and governmental agencies. (Meduza, April 11, 2023)

NAVALNY'S CONDITION DETERIORATES FURTHER

Alexei Navalny, one of the Putin regime's most dogged critics, is once again being subjected to solitary confinement and "extremely hellish" conditions. Navalny, who is currently serving an eleven-and-a-half year sentence in a high security penal colony on fraud charges which he denies, was recently freed from solitary confinement. But, nearly immediately, he was given another 15 days in solitary after his supporters published evidence detailing corruption in the Russian prison system. Since his imprisonment, Navalny's health has worsened significantly, and during his most recent 15-day period of solitary confinement he reportedly lost 18 pounds. (Reuters, April 11, 2023)