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U.S. Sanctions on Russia: An Overview

The United States has imposed sanctions on Russia in response to its invasion of Ukraine, election interference, other malicious cyber activities, human rights abuses, use of a chemical weapon, weapons proliferation, illicit trade with North Korea, and support to Syria and Venezuela.

Sanctions against Russian persons (defined to include individuals, entities, vessels, and aircraft) may include blocking of assets subject to U.S. jurisdiction; limits on access to the U.S. financial system, including transactions involving U.S. individuals and businesses; and denial of entry into the United States. The United States also tightly controls exports to Russia's defense and energy sectors. For more, see CRS Report R45415, *U.S. Sanctions on Russia*.

Invasion of Ukraine

Most U.S. designations of Russian persons to be subject to sanctions have been in response to Russia's 2014 invasion and occupation of Ukraine's Crimea region and parts of eastern Ukraine. The United States has imposed Ukraine-related sanctions on about 690 persons (totals throughout are current as of March 23, 2020).

A series of executive orders issued in 2014 (EOs 13660, 13661, 13662, and 13685), based on national emergency authorities and codified by the Countering Russian Influence in Europe and Eurasia Act of 2017 (CRIIEA; P.L. 115-44, Title II; 22 U.S.C. 9501 et seq.), establish a framework for Ukraine-related sanctions on those the President determines have undermined Ukraine's security, stability, sovereignty, or territorial integrity, or misappropriated state assets. The EOs also established sanctions against designated Russian government officials and persons who operate in the Russian arms sector, key sectors of the Russian economy, or occupied Crimea. They also prohibit U.S. business, trade, or investment in occupied Crimea.

Sectoral sanctions, in particular, apply to specific entities in Russia's financial, energy, and defense sectors. U.S. persons are restricted from engaging in specific transactions with these entities, which are identified as subject to directives issued by the Department of the Treasury. Restrictions apply to new equity investment and financing for specified entities in Russia's financial sector, and new financing for specified entities in Russia's energy and defense sectors. Sectoral sanctions also prohibit U.S. trade related to the development of Russian deepwater, Arctic offshore, or shale oil projects and such projects worldwide in which specified entities have an ownership interest of at least 33% or a majority of voting interests.

Malicious Cyber Activities

Sanctions imposed on Russian persons in response to malicious cyber activities are based on three authorities. EO

13694, as amended by EO 13757 (and codified by CRIIEA), targets those who engage in cyberattacks (1) against critical infrastructure, (2) for financial or commercial gain, (3) to significantly disrupt the availability of a computer or network, or (4) to interfere with U.S. election processes and institutions.

Second, CRIIEA, §224, requires the President to impose sanctions in response to a range of activities conducted on behalf of the Russian government that undermine "cybersecurity against any person, including a democratic institution, or government."

Third, EO 13848 authorizes sanctions against foreign persons that have "directly or indirectly engaged in, sponsored, concealed or otherwise been complicit in foreign interference in a United States election."

Under one or more of these authorities, the United States has designated for activities related to election interference at least 49 Russian persons, including Russia's leading intelligence and military intelligence agencies. Several designated persons also have been indicted by the Department of Justice for related crimes. About 50 Russian persons have been designated for malicious cyber activities unrelated to election interference (including six who have been designated for both).

Under Section 231 of CRIIEA, the Administration also has imposed sanctions on foreign entities engaged in "significant transactions" with the Russian defense or intelligence sectors. A Chinese defense agency and its director have been designated for taking delivery of combat aircraft and S-400 surface-to-air missile systems. In 2019, Turkey also took possession of S-400 missile systems and India reportedly made an advance payment for S-400 systems. As of March 2020, the Trump Administration has not imposed Section 231 sanctions on Turkey or India or issued a national security waiver to avert sanctions.

Human Rights Abuse and Corruption

The Sergei Magnitsky Rule of Law Accountability Act of 2012 (P.L. 112-208, Title IV; 22 U.S.C. 5811 note) requires the President to impose sanctions on those he identifies as having been involved in a "criminal conspiracy" uncovered by Russian lawyer Sergei Magnitsky and his subsequent imprisonment and death. The act also requires the President to impose sanctions on those he finds have committed human rights abuses in Russia against individuals fighting to expose the illegal activity of government officials or seeking to exercise or defend internationally recognized human rights and freedoms.

Fifty-five persons are designated under the Sergei Magnitsky Act. Two other Russian persons have been

designated under the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act (P.L. 114-328, Title XII, Subtitle F; 22 U.S.C. 2656 note) and EO 13818, which address human rights abuses and corruption more broadly. Four other Russian nationals have been denied entry to the United States under authority related to human rights abuses stated in annual foreign operations appropriations (popularly cited as Section 7031(c) authorities).

The Support for the Sovereignty, Integrity, Democracy, and Economic Stability of Ukraine Act of 2014, as amended by §228 of CRIIEA (SSIDES; P.L. 113-95; 22 U.S.C. 8901 et seq.), requires sanctions on those responsible for serious human rights abuses in “any territory forcibly occupied or otherwise controlled” by Russia. The Administration has designated three persons for human rights abuses in Russian-occupied regions of Ukraine.

Use of a Chemical Weapon

The United States has determined that Russia used a chemical weapon in contravention of international law in relation to the March 2018 nerve agent attack on UK citizen and former Russian military intelligence officer Sergei Skripal and his daughter. This August 2018 finding triggered sanctions under the Chemical and Biological Weapons Control and Warfare Elimination Act of 1991 (CBW Act, P.L. 102-182, Title III; 22 U.S.C. 5601 et seq.).

The CBW Act sanctions on Russia include prohibitions on exporting many controlled goods and services, lending non-ruble-denominated funds to the Russian government, and participating in the primary market for non-ruble-denominated sovereign bonds. The Trump Administration has designated two military intelligence officers for the nerve agent attack. For more, see CRS In Focus IF10962, *Russia, the Skripal Poisoning, and U.S. Sanctions*.

Weapons Proliferation

Under the Iran, North Korea, and Syria Nonproliferation Act (P.L. 106-178; 50 U.S.C. 1701 note), state-owned arms exporter Rosoboronexport and several other Russian defense entities are denied most U.S. government procurement contracts, export licenses, and trade in U.S. Munitions List-controlled items. Rosoboronexport also is subject to Ukraine-related sectoral sanctions and other restrictions.

North Korea Sanctions Violations

The Trump Administration has designated at least 22 Russia-related persons for evading sanctions restricting trade and financial transactions with North Korea. Designations have applied to persons trading in oil and oil products, metals, and information technology.

Syria-Related Sanctions

In 2018, the Administration designated Rosoboronexport and an associated bank for their support to the Syrian government, adding to prior designations of two other Russian banks and related persons for the same reason. In 2018, the Administration designated four Russian persons as part of “a complex scheme Iran and Russia have used to bolster the Assad regime and generate funds for Iranian malign activity.” In 2019, the Administration designated

one entity (and associated persons) for serving as a front company in a “scheme to facilitate the [illicit transfer] of jet fuel to Russian forces operating in Syria.”

Venezuela-Related Sanctions

In 2019, the Administration designated a bank jointly owned by Russian and Venezuelan state-owned companies for providing support to Venezuela’s state-owned oil company, Petroleos de Venezuela, S.A. In early 2020, the Administration designated two subsidiaries of state-owned oil company Rosneft and a related person for operating in the oil sector of the Venezuelan economy.

Energy Export Pipelines

The Protecting Europe’s Energy Security Act of 2019 (P.L. 116-92, Title LXXV; 22 U.S.C. 9526 note) requires sanctions on foreign persons who the President determines have sold, leased, or provided subsea pipe-laying vessels for the construction of Russian natural gas pipelines Nord Stream 2 and TurkStream, or any successor pipeline, since December 20, 2019. The company laying the pipeline suspended its activities, but Russian officials have said that Russia should be able to finish construction of Nord Stream 2 on its own. TurkStream was inaugurated in January 2020.

Other Sanctions and Restrictions

The Department of Commerce imposes export-licensing restrictions on Russian persons in response to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, as well as to other Russian persons that engage in activities considered contrary to U.S. national security and/or foreign policy interests.

As in past years, FY2020 appropriations for defense, energy, and foreign operations programs restrict assistance to the Russian government. The State Department identifies Russia as a nation that fails to meet minimum standards for the elimination of human trafficking (Tier 3); this designation requires limits on aid and U.S. support for multilateral development loans.

About three dozen Russian persons are designated under global sanctions regimes related to terrorism and transnational crime.

Other Available Sanctions

As of March 2020, the Administration has not made designations under other CRIIEA authorities related to pipeline development, privatization deals, or support to Syria (§§232-234). The Administration also has not made other designations under SSIDES or the Ukraine Freedom Support Act of 2014 (UFSA; P.L. 113-272; 22 U.S.C. 8921 et seq.; as amended by CRIIEA, §§225-228) related to weapons transfers abroad, certain oil projects, corruption, and secondary sanctions against foreign persons that facilitate significant transactions or sanctions evasion for Russia-related designees. Some Members of Congress have called on the President to make more designations based on CRIIEA’s mandatory sanctions provisions.

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