



RUSSIA REFORM MONITOR

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Related Categories: Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues; Intelligence and Counterintelligence; Warfare; Russia; Ukraine

RUSSIA'S INTELLIGENTSIA OPPOSES WAR

Vladimir Putin's plans for war against Ukraine are not a popular undertaking. That was the message of a public statement issued in late January by more than 2,000 Russian intellectuals urging the Kremlin to avoid launching an "immoral, irresponsible, and criminal" war against its western neighbor. The pronouncement, put out by the Congress of Russian Intellectuals, argues that "Russia does not need a war with Ukraine and the West. Nobody is threatening us, nobody is attacking us. The policy based on promoting the idea of such a war is immoral, irresponsible, and criminal, and cannot be implemented on behalf of Russia's peoples."

Just days later, another group of luminaries, including prominent national figures like political scientist Andrei Piontkovsky, sociologist Lev Gudkov and politician Grigory Yavlinsky, made the same case in the pages of the *New York Review of Books*. The central point of the letter, which was signed by nearly 90 intellectuals, is damning: that war is being prosecuted by the Kremlin without the consent of the Russian people.

"There is no public debate. State television presents only a single viewpoint — that of the warmongers," they wrote. "Direct military threats, aggression and hatred are aimed at Ukraine, the US, and the West. But the most dangerous thing is that the war is being depicted not only as permissible, but as inevitable. This is an attempt to deceive the population, to impose upon them the idea of waging a crusade against the West, rather than investing in the country's development and improving living standards. The cost of the conflict is never discussed, but the price — the huge, bloody price — will be paid by the common Russian people." (*Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, February 1, 2022; *New York Review of Books*, February 4, 2022)

THE CONSEQUENCES OF A RUSSIAN INVASION

If the Kremlin decides to proceed with a full-scale invasion of neighboring Ukraine, the outcomes could be "grim," the White House has warned. In closed-door hearings in Congress, Administration officials have told lawmakers that Russia is capable of quickly surrounding the Ukrainian capital, Kyiv, and overthrowing the country's government. The potential human toll of such a strategic decision by Moscow could also be dire; according to U.S. estimates, a Russian invasion could result in as many as 50,000 civilian deaths, 25,000 military deaths, and lead to the exodus of millions of Ukrainians from the country to other nations in Europe. (*New York Times*, February 5, 2022)

A COURT VICTORY FOR DESCENDANTS OF POLITICAL PRISONERS

A Russian court has backed demands for housing on the part of Perm resident Nikolai Mitkin. Mitkin, a descendant of a prisoner of the Gulag during the Stalin era, had previously been refused housing in the Stavropol region, where his ancestor had lived before being deported. Local officials had deemed Mitkin ineligible to live in Stavropol, in spite of a 2019 ruling by Russia's Supreme Court that granted the children of former political prisoners the right to state housing in their parents' previous places of residence. However, a Stavropol court has disagreed, and ordered local authorities to place Mitkin on the waiting list for state housing.

The case is significant - and potentially precedent setting. "It's a small but important victory," notes Memorial lawyer Grigory Vaypan. "This is the first court ruling known to me where stubborn local authorities are required to recognize the 'Gulag children's' rights." Soviet authorities passed a law back in 1991 recognizing the rights of victims of Stalin-era repression and allowing them to seek compensation for property confiscated by the state. However, the issue has long festered in the Russian court system, with claims stalled amid stonewalling by authorities. (*The Moscow Times*, February 8, 2022)