



# Russia Reform Monitor No. 2519

April 11, 2022 Ilan I. Berman, Sydney Duckor, Vlada Kirilenko

**Related Categories:** Economic Sanctions; Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues; International Economics and Trade; Warfare; Russia; Ukraine

## HOLODOMOR 2.0

In the early 1930s, the Soviet Union under Joseph Stalin used a policy of systematic mass starvation to subjugate and pacify Ukraine. Between 1932 and 1933, the Holodomor, as those tragic events came to be known, claimed an estimated 3.9 million souls as a result of Soviet decisions to isolate Ukrainian villages and prevent them from receiving food. Now, Russian President Vladimir Putin is reviving that approach as part of his new war. "Russian troops have laid waste to farmland, destroying agricultural equipment and planting landmines in the rich soil where crops should grow," reports *Politico*. "Ukraine's traditional supply routes have been wrecked, its ports now under Russian control. In the besieged city of Mariupol — where 170,000 people are still struggling to survive — food had virtually run out by March 13. Aid convoys have not made it through."

"The only interpretation is that [the Russians] want to create hunger and to use this method as a method of aggression," the EU's agriculture commissioner, Janusz Wojciechowski, has said. "It is [a] similar method that was used in [the] 1930s by [the] Soviet regime against [the] Ukrainian people." (*Politico*, April 1, 2022)

## INVESTIGATING (ITS OWN) WAR CRIMES IN UKRAINE

Russia's Investigative Committee has announced that it will be launching a probe into the Ukrainian government's role in disseminating news of civilians who had been murdered by Russian forces in Bucha. The statement, issued on the Committee's official *Telegram* channel, frames the videos of the civilians killed as "untrue" and possessing "a provocative nature," and designed to "discredit" Russia's military. The Committee has "instructed the investigators to take comprehensive measures to expose all the persons involved," which it said had violated Russia's criminal code. (*Telegram*, April 4, 2022)

**[EDITORS' NOTE:** The goal of the new Committee action is to prevent discussion of, or reporting about, Bucha within Russia itself. If the incident is officially deemed "fake," then coverage of it would subject reporters or correspondents to punishment under Russia's new treason law, which carries a penalty of up to 15 years behind bars for those who disseminate unapproved information regarding the war in Ukraine.]

## ORTHODOX CHURCH BOOSTS UKRAINE CAMPAIGN

During the decades of the Cold War, the Russian Orthodox Church became a significant source of political backing for Soviet leaders - and an important legitimating force for the USSR's domestic and foreign policies. Today, it is playing the same function for Russian President Vladimir Putin, and throwing its support behind his Ukraine campaign. In his *Window on Eurasia* blog, Paul Goble notes that a recent missive from the church's Moscow Patriarchate posted on social media platform Facebook has told the country's armed forces that "Your task is to wipe the Ukrainian nation off the face of the earth." The message, Goble points out, is dangerous, because "many Russian soldiers will see [it] as giving them carte blanche as far as violence against the Ukrainian people are concerned." (*Window on Eurasia*, April 5, 2022)

## WHERE ARE RUSSIA'S OLIGARCHS HEADED?

The war in Ukraine, and the West's response to it, has proved disastrous for Russia's ultra-rich. In the face of travel bans, asset freezes and ostracism, Russia's billionaire oligarchs are now desperately searching for safe havens - both for themselves and for their assets. And they appear to have found one, in the Gulf emirate of Dubai. "Displaced by sanctions and unwelcome in the West, Russian billionaires are on the hunt for luxury properties in Dubai, lured by the Emirate's glitzy beaches, flexible visa program and pledged neutrality on Ukraine," reports *Forbes*.

The wealthy Gulf kingdom may be attracting Russia's oligarchs for another reason as well. "Russians moving to Dubai may be looking to take advantage of the United Arab Emirates' 'golden visa' program, which provides long-term residency for foreigners if they invest at least 10 million dirhams (\$2.7 million) in a local company or investment fund," *Forbes* suggests. That program, launched by Dubai authorities in early 2021, is designed to encourage "investors, professionals, special talents and their families" to relocate there. (*Forbes*, April 8, 2022)

