



# Russia Reform Monitor No. 2520

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**Related Categories:** Europe Military; Public Diplomacy and Information Operations; Warfare; NATO; Corruption; Russia; Ukraine

## KADYROV BACKS UKRAINE CAMPAIGN

In recent years, Chechnya's Kremlin-approved strongman, Ramzan Kadyrov, has become a reliable source of support and backing for Russian President Vladimir Putin. Predictably, therefore, the regional leader has thrown his weight behind the current war in Ukraine, and the Russian government's war aims there. According to him, Russia's military – which has been unexpectedly bogged down in a protracted ground campaign on Ukrainian territory – is just getting started. "There will be an offensive... not only on Mariupol, but also on other places, cities and villages," Kadyrov announced in a video on his Telegram channel. "Luhansk and Donetsk - we will fully liberate in the first place... and then take Kyiv and all other cities." "I assure you: not one step will be taken back," he said. (Reuters, April 10, 2022)

## RUSSIA'S SHIFTING WAR AIMS

The original aim of Russia's war in Ukraine was the "demilitarization" and "de-Nazification" of the country's government. More than a month on, and in spite of unforeseen difficulties, the Kremlin is thinking even bigger. Russia's "special military operation" is being waged partly to bring an end to the "total dominance" and "reckless expansion" of the United States on the world stage, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov has said. "Our special military operation is designed to put an end to the reckless expansion and the reckless course toward the total dominance of the United States — and the rest of the Western countries under them — in the international arena," Lavrov laid out in a new interview with state television channel Rossiya 24. (*The Moscow Times*, April 11, 2022)

[EDITORS' NOTE: Lavrov's comments, while clearly propagandistic, are nonetheless significant. They reflect how the Kremlin is now seeking to reshape the narrative surrounding its Ukraine campaign into a wider conflict with the West – and by doing so shore up support for it at home.]

## KREMLIN CRITIC REGAINS HER VOICE

Marina Ovsyannikova, the Russian broadcaster who gained notoriety for her on-air protest against the Ukraine war, has been hired by the parent company for German publication *Die Welt*. Ovsyannikova famously interrupted a broadcast by Channel One, her old employer, last month, holding a placard with anti-war sentiments. She was subsequently detained and fined by a Russian court. In her new role, Ovsyannikova will serve as a roving correspondent for *Die Welt*, reporting from both Ukraine and Russia – although it's not immediately clear how she can accomplish the latter, given that she could face further prosecution under Russian law for reporting critical of the current conflict. (BBC, April 11, 2022)

## MOSCOW FRETS OVER A REINVIGORATED NATO

Russia's campaign of aggression against Ukraine has served as a boon to NATO, reviving interest in membership in the Atlantic Alliance – much to Moscow's chagrin. Both Finland and Sweden have expressed interest in joining the bloc as a hedge against future hostilities with Russia, and both Nordic countries are expected to begin the process of becoming NATO members by as early as June. The news has unnerved Russian officials, who have warned of dire consequences should the Alliance expand further. If Finland and Sweden move forward with plans to join NATO, Russia will need to "rebalance the situation" with its own countermeasures, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov has said. What those countermeasures might be remains to be seen, but Moscow has already moved missile systems closer to its common border with Finland in a show of force intended to intimidate both nations. (BBC, April 11, 2022; *Metro*, April 12, 2022)

## THE KREMLIN SEARCHES FOR SCAPEGOATS

Russia's war effort in Ukraine has run into unforeseen difficulties in the form of stiffer-than-expected Ukrainian resistance, unprecedented Western resolve, and larger strategic miscalculations. In the face of these setbacks, Russian President Vladimir Putin has begun searching for people to whom to assign blame. According to the UK's *Times* newspaper, the Kremlin has to date purged some 150 officers from its main intelligence service, the FSB, over poor or erroneous information provided to authorities regarding Ukraine. "All of those ousted were employees of the Fifth Service, a division set up in 1998, when Putin was director of the FSB to carry out operations in the countries of the former Soviet Union with the aim of keeping them within Russia's orbit," the paper reports. (*Times*, April 11, 2022)

## DOMESTIC OPPOSITION MOUNTS

As Russia's military campaign in Ukraine drags on and the casualties mount, opposition to the incursion is growing among ordinary Russians. The *Daily Mail* notes that rising anti-war sentiment is visible among Russian social media users, amid growing awareness of the true costs of the campaign. "Russians are for first time expressing their open outrage at death toll of soldiers," the paper notes. "They are speaking out online despite threats of severe punishment for doing so." Ukraine's government estimates that some 19,000 Russian soldiers had been killed in the conflict as of April 11, 2022. (*Daily Mail*, April 11, 2022)

