



## RUSSIA REFORM MONITOR

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

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June 8, 2022 Ilan I. Berman

**Related Categories:** Warfare; Russia; Ukraine

### MOSCOW'S COSTLY CAMPAIGN

The death toll associated with Russia's Ukraine campaign continues to rise. In late May, Britain's Defense Ministry estimated that "no less than" 15,000 Russian soldiers had been killed in action since the start of the war on February 24th. That figure, the British government made clear, does not account for troops that had been captured by Ukrainian forces, or those incapacitated by injury or fatigue. "A combination of poor low-level tactics, limited air cover, a lack of flexibility and a command approach which is prepared to reinforce failure and repeat mistakes has led to this high casualty rate," the ministry said publicly. (*Forbes*, May 23, 2022)

### PUTIN FAST TRACKS CITIZENSHIP FOR SYMPATHETIC UKRAINIANS

Against the backdrop of the current war, the Kremlin is making a bid for the "hearts and minds" of willing Ukrainians – by offering them citizenship in the Russian Federation. In late May, Vladimir Putin signed a Presidential decree formally simplifying the procedure for Ukrainians from the southern regions of Zaporizhzhia and Kherson to become Russian nationals. The order builds on a 2019 edict that mapped out the same "fast track" procedure for residents of eastern Ukraine's breakaway regions of Donetsk and Luhansk. Under it, those applying for Russian citizenship are not required to have lived in the Russian Federation, while the existing economic and linguistic requirements (having sufficient funds for relocation, and demonstrating fluency in Russian) are likewise waived.

The strategic objective of the new order is to demonstrate the permanence of Russia's interest – and its open-ended presence. "The simplified system will allow all of us to clearly see that Russia is here not just for a long time but forever," Kirill Stremousov, the Moscow-appointed deputy leader of the Kherson region, has told Russia's official RIA Novosti news agency. (Associated Press, May 25, 2022)

### ASSESSING PUTIN'S HEALTH

Russian president Vladimir Putin's health has been the subject of widespread speculation for weeks, as Western officials and analysts attempt to glean a sense of the Russian leader's decision-making and rationality. The consensus from the U.S. intelligence community, it has been revealed, is that the Kremlin chief is far from healthy. A classified U.S. report released in late May reportedly concludes that Putin received treatment for advanced cancer in April, after surviving an assassination attempt a month earlier.

The precarious state of Putin's health is a cause for concern in some quarters, because "Putin is increasingly paranoid about his hold on power" and this "makes for a rocky and unpredictable course in Ukraine," *Newsweek* reports. However, it could also be a harbinger of change. "Putin's grip is strong but no longer absolute," *Newsweek* cites one senior intelligence officer as saying. "The jockeying inside the Kremlin has never been more intense during his rule, everyone sensing that the end is near." (*Newsweek*, June 2, 2022)

### THE FRUITS OF PUTIN'S WAR: A UKRAINIAN GUERRILLA MOVEMENT

As Russia's war against Ukraine has dragged on, it has produced a "full-scale guerrilla movement" – one responsible for "the traditional forms of resistance: sabotage, assassinations, and propaganda," writes Alexander Motyl of Rutgers University in policy website *19fortyfive*. Currently, the partisan activity is concentrated in and around the city of Melitopol in southern Ukraine. But, Motyl suggests, the activity is growing and could soon become a real force multiplier for Ukraine's standing military. "The real impact of the partisan movement will be felt if it spreads to most of southern Ukraine, intensifies its efforts, and—most important—coordinates its activities with the counter-offensive the Ukrainian armed forces, bolstered by deliveries of western heavy weaponry, are expected to launch in late July or August," he notes.

If that happens, it could be a game changer. "The Ukrainians expect their counter-offensive to be successful: they believe that their soldiers are better than their Russian counterparts and that their Western-made weapons will also be better than most of the increasingly outdated Russian equipment," Motyl explains. "If the guerrillas can strike the Russian lines from behind, while the army attacks from the front, the effect could be tantamount to an encirclement of the Russian armed forces." (*19fortyfive*, May 29, 2022)