



## RUSSIA REFORM MONITOR

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

# Russia Reform Monitor No. 2526

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

### MOSCOW PLANS TO CONSOLIDATE CONTROL...

Even as it continues to make incremental territorial gains in eastern Ukraine, Russia is moving to consolidate its control over territories it has seized. New reports indicate that the Kremlin is planning to annex occupied areas of Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson, and Zaporizhzhia as part of a new Russian federal district. The step, covered by *Meduza*, will reportedly follow referendums in those territories similar to the one that preceded the annexation of Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula by the Kremlin. "The district should appear after referendums on joining Russia are held in these territories. Ukrainian territories will not accede to existing districts [in Russia]," *Meduza* cites a source close to the Kremlin as saying. Those referendums could happen as soon as mid-July, or alternatively on a "more realistic timeline" of sometime in early September.

Staffing for the plan is apparently already underway. *Meduza* reports that the Kremlin is gathering political strategists who will serve as "political officers" in the new federal district, where their responsibilities would include, "[s]upervising politics, public life, media, preparations for referendums [and] even social programs." A senior Kremlin official, Boris Rapaport, has reportedly been tapped to supervise the creation of the new Russian federal district. (*International Business Times*, June 10, 2022)

### ...AS RUSSIAN LAW ENFORCEMENT ENTERS

The planning apparently does not stop there. According to Russian news website 161.ru, Russian police officers from the Rostov Oblast are now being sent into the occupied Donbass region. The website, citing sources within Russian law enforcement, reports that officers from Rostov have been sent to the largest cities in the region – Luhansk, Donetsk, Makeyevka, and Gorlovka – to take over basic law enforcement tasks and respond to day-to-day calls. "Nobody will say exactly for how long [the MVD officers are being sent to the Donbass], because nobody really knows... It is possible that this is due to the fact that the majority of the militia officers of the LPR and DPR are participating in the special operation and nobody is available to protect the city," an unnamed Russian security officer tells the news outlet. (161.ru, June 13, 2022)

### RUSSIA'S CRUEL OCCUPATION

Thousands of Ukrainian civilians seeking to escape the violence on the front lines of the Russian invasion, have evacuated to the self-proclaimed "Donetsk People's Republic" [DPR], an occupied, separatist-controlled enclave in eastern Ukraine. However, reports continue to emerge that, before evacuees are permitted to move freely within the DPR, they are subjected to interrogation, strip-searches, and detention by separatist forces seeking to hunt down anyone with ties to the Ukrainian military or "nationalist" organizations. Although the Kremlin denies all ties to these so-called "filtration centers," in reality they function "with assistance from Russia," says Tanya Lokshina of Human Rights Watch.

Civilians who have passed through these centers report that their passports were confiscated and not returned, sometimes for over a month. Without passports, they were confined in inhumane conditions, without proper shelter, sanitation, food, or clean water. Based on testimonies from such detainees, Lokshina explained that "[t]he entire area was literally crawling with military, and trying to leave those villages without a passport would be completely suicidal. Although they're not kept under lock and key as such, the villages basically turn into internment camps." (*France24*, June 9, 2022)

### PUTIN IS STRIKING BY HIS ABSENCE

Since Russia began its invasion of Ukraine in February, Vladimir Putin has canceled or postponed several routine events, adding fuel to the rumors that the Russian president is seriously ill or incapacitated in some fashion. The latest such incident came on June 8th, when Putin indefinitely postponed his popular "Direct Line" phone marathon, in which Russian citizens can call in and ask questions of their president. The cancellation marked the first time in 18 years that the session is not being held. It follows Putin's failure to appear at a hockey game in Sochi, where he was expected to play, as well as the indefinite postponement of his April address to the Federal Assembly, Russia's upper chamber of parliament. (*Business Insider*, June 9, 2022)

## DISSENT IN THE (RELIGIOUS) RANKS

In recent years, Putin has been able to count on Russia's Orthodox Church as a reliable backer for his foreign policy initiatives, and as an amplifier of his increasingly expansionist, imperial national rhetoric. This has made instances of dissent within the Church – as well as the official reaction to them – all the more noteworthy. Such is the case of Ioann Kurmoyarov, a Russian Orthodox priest who was arrested on June 7th after he released a ten minute video claiming that, "according to Christian dogma, those who unleashed the war will go to hell." Kurmoyarov has actively criticized the Main Cathedral of the Russian in the past and was officially defrocked by the Church in April for "[a]ctive media activities in support of Ukraine's nationalist regime." Thereafter, Kurmoyarov appears to have disappeared into the Russian judicial system. According to *Meduza*, Kurmoyarov's lawyer was unable to get in contact with his detained client. He reported that he "visited two separate remand prisons and a temporary detention center, only to be told by prison staff that the priest was not in custody at any of these facilities." (*Meduza*, June 13, 2022)