



## RUSSIA REFORM MONITOR

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

# Russia Reform Monitor No. 2530

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**Related Categories:** Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues; Warfare; Japan; Russia; Ukraine

### RUSSIA'S INCREASINGLY CRIMINAL WAR

Failing to replenish its beleaguered forces in Ukraine with conventional methods, Moscow is now recruiting convicts, including those convicted of serious crimes, in exchange for pardons and financial compensation. According to emerging reports, the Kremlin-linked Wagner private military contractor and the FSB are offering deployments to convicts who, after training, will be sent either to the front lines or to work on restoration and demining of the occupied territories. Wagner's contracts promise full amnesty upon completion of the 6-month contract, along with a £3,000 payment, or a £64,000 payout to the family if the convict dies. *Metro* reports that, "At least one convicted murderer is known to have been sent to the frontline in Donbass." According to Ukrainian intelligence, "Up to 10,000 volunteers are planned to be recruited within the next two months... After that, the composition of the PMC will be redeployed to the territory of Donbas. One of the main tasks will be to establish control over the roads in the Izyum—Sloviansk—Bakhmut area." (*Metro*, July 9, 2022)

### MOSCOW'S "TWIN CITIES" PROGRAM A SOFT ATTEMPT AT INTEGRATION

In the latest effort to solidify Russia's administrative rule over the Donbass, and to ingratiate the occupation to the Ukrainian population, Russian regions are being tied to "twin cities" in Ukraine, where they will fund and facilitate reconstruction and recovery initiatives. Unveiled in May, the program has so far matched 40 Russian regions with Russian-controlled cities in the Donbass. The program promises to dispatch "construction workers, teachers and officials with administrative experience" to rebuild and to develop economic and cultural ties between the cities. However, the source of funding for this ambitious endeavor, which will require a Russian investment of about 3.5 trillion rubles over two years according to the leadership of the self-proclaimed Donetsk and Luhansk Peoples' Republics, remains unclear.

According to political analyst Ivan Preobrazhensky, the program is intended to decentralize and disburse funding for Ukraine to hide the expenses in "an attempt to shift responsibility for additional costs from the Kremlin to regional governors." However, Abbas Gallyamov, a political analyst and former speechwriter for Russian President Vladimir Putin, predicts that the program will backfire. According to him, "Most Russian regions say their expenses are greater than their income, and this is just another headache for them." Instead of ingratiating the Kremlin domestically and in occupied Ukraine, he predicts, the "twin cities" program will only "increase negative attitudes toward the regime." (*The Moscow Times*, July 8, 2022)

### HOW PUTIN PLANS TO RESHAPE RUSSIAN SOCIETY IN HIS IMAGE

Despite a years-long crackdown on media freedom and political dissent, one which has rapidly intensified since the launch of its "special operation" in Ukraine, the Putin government has so far been unsuccessful at completely rooting out political opposition, especially among the youth. With the war moving into its sixth month and recruitment drives flagging, the Kremlin is codifying a new education program aimed at disrupting the liberalizing effect of the internet and militarizing society – starting with Russia's youngest generation. In a proposed decree released in June, the Russian Education Ministry laid out a new curriculum that will teach patriotic ideology once per week to students beginning in the first grade. The program will begin this September, and includes plans for a complementary updated history curriculum to teach students to "defend historical truth" and "uncover falsifications in the Fatherland's history."

The new patriotism course will cover topics such as "the geopolitical situation" and "traditional values," alongside virtual tours in Crimea and virtual guest-lectures from figures like Chechen strongman Ramzan Kadyrov. The updated history curriculum includes mandatory lessons on "the rebirth of Russia as a great power in the 21st century," "reunification with Crimea," and "the special military operation in Ukraine." It also features lectures covering "hybrid conflicts being carried out against Russia," which seeks to undermine any sources of information not approved by the Kremlin, with exercises presenting *BBC* reporting on Russian attacks in Ukraine and statements by President Volodymyr Zelensky as examples of "fakes" meant to create discord and weaken Russian society.

The new decree will solidify efforts in place since the invasion began in February to re-program Russia's youth to block out any and all narratives that run counter to the official line of the Kremlin. "We need to know how to infect them with our ideology," stated senior Kremlin bureaucrat Sergei Novikov, referring to Russia's youth. "Our ideological work is aimed at changing consciousness." Another senior Kremlin official, Aleksander Kharichev, echoed these convictions, explaining the program's goal as indoctrinating a generation to hold as their highest value the "readiness to give one's life for the Motherland." (*DNYUZ*, July 16, 2022)

### **TOKYO TAKES A STAND**

Since the start of the Ukraine war, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida has joined with his country's G7 partners to impose aggressive sanctions against Russia. The Prime Minister's commitment to this stance is fueled both by the concern that Russia's actions would encourage Chinese aggression in Taiwan and by his own widespread popular support, which has provided him political cover in the face of gas price hikes and waning interest in Ukraine. The Japanese stance has not been cost-free, however. In May, the Kremlin retaliated by banning entry to 63 Japanese officials, including the Prime Minister, and on July 1st, it transferred Japan's stake in the Sakhalin-2 oil and gas pipeline to a domestic operator. On July 15th, the Kremlin took its pressure tactics a step further by banning 384 Japanese lawmakers from entering its territory. The Russian foreign ministry listed each banned official on its website, accusing them of "adopting an unfriendly, anti-Russian position notably by expressing unfounded accusations against our country concerning the special military operation in Ukraine." (*Al-Arabiya*, July 15, 2022)