



# Russia Reform Monitor No. 2538

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**Related Categories:** Democracy and Governance; Economic Sanctions; Europe Military; Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues; International Economics and Trade; Warfare; Europe; Russia; Central Asia; Ukraine

## SOVIET QUEEN OF POP TURNS ANTI-WAR ACTIVIST

For decades, Alla Pugacheva reigned supreme as a pop starlet and cultural icon within the USSR and subsequently Russia. Even today, at age 73, she remains one of the country's best known public figures. And throughout her career, Pugacheva has remained largely in the good graces of the Kremlin, and received high honors from the USSR and the Russian government as a result. In recent days, however, she has emerged as the newest and most visible critic of Vladimir Putin's Ukraine war.

In mid-September, Pugacheva went public to denounce the war and to ask the Kremlin to classify her as a "foreign agent" for her opposition. Her stance comes after her husband, the comedian Maxim Galkin, was included on the Russian government's most recent sanctions list for his outspoken opposition to Russia's aggression against Ukraine. In her statement, Pugacheva called for an "end to the death of our boys for illusory aims" – a reference to Vladimir Putin's imperial ambition to unite Ukraine with Russia. (Reuters, September 18, 2022)

## HARSH PENALTIES FOR RUSSIA'S SOLDIERS

In an attempt to shore up its flagging Ukraine campaign, where Russia's troops are increasingly on the back foot, the Kremlin is resorting to a familiar tactic: fear. Russia's lower house of parliament, the State Duma, has passed a new bill dramatically increasing penalties for the country's servicemen for military-related infractions. Under the new legislation, voluntary surrender and looting are infractions punishable by up to a decade-and-a-half in prison, while desertion will land soldiers in jail for 10 years. The measure also introduces the concepts of "mobilization, martial law and wartime" into the country's Criminal Code for the first time in a step that some observers say presages a general mobilization of the country's population. (*The Moscow Times*, September 20, 2022)

## CENTRAL ASIA CLOSES UP SHOP

As Russia's war effort has faltered, Moscow has increasingly looked abroad for potential reinforcements. Central Asia is a logical place for the Kremlin's recruitment drive, owing to the high percentage of Russian-language speakers in those nations as well as their generally cozy relationships with Russia. But it's increasingly clear that additional troops for Russia's military won't come from there. Although the Russian government has sought to entice foreign fighters with promises of fast-tracked citizenship, Kyrgyz, Kazakh, and Uzbek nationals have all received warnings from their respective governments that they would face legal repercussions should they "take part in armed conflicts on foreign territories." Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan maintain this stance even though they are members of the Russia-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), while all three nations participate in the Moscow- and Beijing-led bloc known as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). (*Jerusalem Post*, September 22, 2022)

## THE TRUE IMPACT OF SANCTIONS AGAINST RUSSIA

Are Western sanctions having a real effect on Russia's economy? To hear Kremlin officials, economic pressure from Europe and the United States has had a negligible effect on the country's financial fortunes. Dig a bit deeper, however, and it's clear that the picture is more nuanced – and that the economic measures levied on Moscow by Washington and European capitals will have significant medium- to long-term effects on the country's health and stability. According to Oleg Vyugin, a former top official at Russia's Finance Ministry, Western sanctions have only been 30-40% effective – but significant damage may be in the offing. The Russian economy was projected to grow by 6% in 2022, he notes, whereas it is now set to experience an 11% contraction. In other words, "the main result of sanctions is that the economic growth process in Russia has been interrupted for several years." And "serious harm" could be in the offing if Russia's exports continue to be crimped, and if the country is still barred from accessing key technological exports from the West, as it currently is. (*Business Insider*, September 21, 2022)

## **PUTIN SACKS MORE MILITARY BRASS AMID WAR STUMBLES**

The Kremlin's sputtering Ukraine campaign is claiming more and more political casualties, as Russian President Vladimir Putin seeks to assign blame for the botched war effort. The latest is Deputy Defense Minister Dmitry Bulgakov, who was recently removed from his post and "transferred to a new role," according to media reports. The move is significant, insofar as it reflects the Russian government's efforts to fix deficiencies in its military campaign after seven months of stagnation. Bulgakov had been the Russian Defense Ministry's chief logistician since 2008, and in that role oversaw support for the country's foreign military efforts for years – including its incursion into Syria beginning in 2015. Bulgakov's replacement is said to be Col. Gen. Mikhail Mizintzev, who gained notoriety (and became the target of British sanctions) for his role in the Russian seizure of the Ukrainian port city of Mariupol this spring. (*iNews*, September 24, 2022)