



## RUSSIA REFORM MONITOR

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

# Russia Reform Monitor No. 2542

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### **RUMBLINGS IN THE MILITARY RANKS...**

Despite the Russian government's crackdown on internal dissent over President Vladimir Putin's Ukraine campaign, more and more domestic opposition is emerging, both to the invasion itself and to Putin's fatal mismanagement of the country's armed forces. Some of the most active critics of the government include former members of the Russian military. One such individual, a former lieutenant colonel in the Russian Air Force, Vitaly Votansky, has spent considerable time stirring debate in the city of Krasnodar. Votansky and other veterans like him have come under fire not only from the censorship laws in place regarding Russia's "special military operation," but also from other veterans who decry their perceived lack of patriotism. But the number of veterans who are speaking out against the war in Ukraine is growing. Some of the core critics are veterans of the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan, as well as more recent wars in places such as Chechnya, where poor tactics led to the slaughter of both soldiers and civilians. Votansky sums up the feelings of those disgruntled former servicemen, stating, "Putin destroyed the country's military mobilization resources with his own hands and now this idiot has gotten himself into a war with the entire world... he created circumstances in which we cannot win." (*The Moscow Times*, October 3, 2022)

### **...AS ETHNIC MINORITIES PROTEST CONSCRIPTION**

While on paper the "partial mobilization" authorized by President Putin in late September is supposed to apply to Russian citizens equally, in practice ethnic minorities have been disproportionately targeted in Moscow's draft – a state of affairs that has bred growing resentment throughout Russia's republics, and generated increasingly prominent displays of dissent. Ethnic minorities, including from the North Caucasus republic of Dagestan, the Siberian republic of Buryatia, as well as North Ossetia, Bashkortostan, and others, feel that they are being unfairly singled out by the draft. Some have even argued that the Russian government is attempting to drive down their population numbers, as men – already few in number – are being sent away, many to their deaths.

This perception is leading Russia's minorities to mobilize. Despite their comparatively modest numbers, ethnic minorities from all over the country are putting up a fight. "Ethnic minorities have played a prominent role in anti-mobilization protests — often led by women — in recent days, with videos emerging of demonstrators blocking roads, scuffling with police and calling for peace," *The Moscow Times* reports. (*The Moscow Times*, September 27, 2022)

### **EXPLOITING AFRICA TO FUND THE UKRAINE CAMPAIGN**

As the material costs of the Ukraine war increasingly weigh on the Russian government, Moscow has sought out new and untapped sources of funding for its military campaign, and attempted to circumvent the extensive sanctions levied against Moscow by Western nations to date. One of those sources appears to be in Africa. U.S. officials have accused Russia's notorious Wagner Group of mercenaries of orchestrating the "illicit trafficking of natural resources through Africa." It's a claim that Russian policymakers refute. Russia's ambassador to the UN, Vassily Nebenzia, has charged that the true goal of the U.S. was to undermine the stability of the countries that Russia "supports" on the African continent. (Reuters, October 7, 2022)

### **NATIONALIZING EASTERN ENERGY**

With Russia's once-robust energy output dwindling, the Kremlin is moving to nationalize some of the country's most prominent oil and natural gas projects. President Putin has signed a decree that will have Russia effectively take control of Exxon Mobil's stake in the Sakhalin-1 oil and gas project. The plant is co-owned by Exxon (which held a 30% operator stake) along with Russia's Rosneft, India's ONGC Videsh, and Japan's SODECO. Now that Exxon's shares have been seized, however, Russia will be able to determine whether it will allow the other foreign investors to remain in the project.

The energy grab is, in some ways, welcome news for the American multinational, as Exxon has been attempting to divest itself of cooperative ownership with Russian firms since the start of the Kremlin's Ukraine war in February. The recent decree also serves as a shot at the Japanese government via SODECO, a Japanese public-private venture, which may lose a significant amount of money from its investment. Putin's seizure of Sakhalin-I comes on the heels of a similar move in July, when Russia seized full control of sister project Sakhalin-II. (Reuters, October 7, 2022)

## **PUTIN'S NEWEST CONCRIPITS**

Despite being citizens of Russia for less than a decade, Crimea's Tatars are being forced to fight against their former homeland, Ukraine, as a result of Putin's "partial mobilization" of forces to bolster his war effort. The Russian military has been accused by ethnic minorities all over Russia of disproportionately issuing them conscription papers, and nowhere is this practice more glaring than in Crimea. According to an independent human rights group, CrimeaSOS, "More than half and possibly up to 90% of people currently drafted from the peninsula are Crimean Tatars, despite making up no more than 13% of the population." Russian military officials – who have been struggling with personnel issues for months – have grown desperate in their recruitment efforts, reportedly handing out conscription papers at public markets, checkpoints, schools, hospitals, mosques, and even to "people calling for emergency help" in the region. Mustafa Dzhemilev, a Crimean Tatar leader who previously served as a Ukrainian parliamentarian (as well as a Soviet political prisoner) ascribes nefarious intentions to the singling out of Tatars, arguing that "the current mobilization recalls his territory's ethnic cleansing 80 years ago." (*Wall Street Journal*, October 4, 2022)