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## **RUSSIA: In the shadow of the war, what is next for the Russians?**

### **RUSSIA: In the shadow of the war, what is next for the Russians?**

HRWF (13.02.2023) – Beyond the pictures of Putin's war in Ukraine, there are current realities and future dangers threatening Russian society: the persistence of the secret political governance of the country, the demographic weakening of the peoples of the Russian Federation and the increase in societal violence to be perpetrated by war veterans back in society.

## Half of all Putin's decrees since start of war in Ukraine have been secret, researchers say

Paul Goble

Window on Eurasia (04.02.2023) – One of the anomalies of Kremlin administrative practice is that all of Vladimir Putin's decrees are numbered, but many of these are never released, allowing researchers to count just how many of his orders are in fact secret. Since the start of his war in Ukraine, the share of secret orders has risen to 50 percent, the *Holod* news portal says.

Putin has always issued many secret decrees ([zona.media/article/2022/05/05/topsecret](https://zona.media/article/2022/05/05/topsecret)), but since the start of the war in Ukraine, their number has risen to 50 percent. Some of the increase reflects decree about casualty reports that are now kept secret or orders involving the military ([holod.media/2023/02/04/ukazy-putina/](https://holod.media/2023/02/04/ukazy-putina/)).

But it is likely, even certain, that many of the now secret decrees Putin has been issuing involve other issues, *Holod* says. They may be about awards to his friends or the shifting of ownership of property from one group to another, neither subject of which he or those involved want to become public knowledge.

If that is in fact the case, then the war in Ukraine is providing the opportunity to move in an ever more totalitarian direction and thus casting an ever darker shadow on Russian governance than many had thought, with the Kremlin giving orders on all kinds of things that have little or nothing to do with Ukraine.

And such secrecy is unlikely to disappear after the conflict in Ukraine ends unless Putin departs the scene and is succeeded by someone more committed to open governance than he

has been, something that unfortunately history suggests is less likely than would be good for Russian society as a whole.

## **War in Ukraine hitting Russia's numerically smallest nations especially hard, Berezhkov says**

Paul Goble

Window on Eurasia (04.02.2023) – Putin's war in Ukraine is harming the numerically smallest nations of the Russian Federation especially hard in five serious ways, according to Dmitry Berezhkov, the editor of the *Russia of the Indigenous Peoples* portal. And those hits have been compounded by the falsification of census data about their numbers and languages.

First of all, he says, mobilization has fallen disproportionately on them, not because they have been targeted but because they have less information and fewer resources to resist; and deaths in combat even if small in absolute numbers are often enormous for the peoples involved ([storage.googleapis.com/istories/stories/2023/01/30/narodi-na-grani-ischeznoveniya/index.html](https://storage.googleapis.com/istories/stories/2023/01/30/narodi-na-grani-ischeznoveniya/index.html)).

If a nation of a million loses 100 men in combat, that is one thing, Berzhkov points out; but if a nation numbering a hundred or less loses even two, that can cast an enormous shadow on the demographic survival of that community, something that is happening all too often among the 47 nations of the Russian Federation who have fewer than 50,000 people each.

Moreover, the deaths are of men who in traditional societies like those of the numerically small peoples of the North and Far East are the portions of the community that do the most to keep traditional forms of economic activity alive, forms that are the basis for the limited subsidies these nations receive.

Second, the war has had a serious negative economic impact on peoples who live far from major cities. As the economy has worsened, businesses have cut back deliveries to smaller markets and that means that the numerically small peoples now have fewer supplies than they did only a year ago.

Third, the exit of foreign firms has hit these peoples hard as well. When Western firms depart, standards at the remaining Russian ones invariably fall; and the employees at these firms suffer as well. Forth, the Russian government has cut government subsidies to these peoples and thus isn't able to compensate for the economic decline in their areas.

And fifth, Berezhkov says, the war has cut Russia's northern peoples off from the chance to tell their stories in international forums and sometimes get help. Earlier, representatives of these peoples could tell their stories in Geneva or New York, but now they can't; and as a result, Moscow "no longer devotes attention to international demands, letters and appeals."

Compounding all these problems, he continues, was the falsification of the latest Russian census. Everyone knows that its figures for national identity aren't reliable given how many people were listed as not having a nationality. But in the case of the numerically small peoples, this falsification has taken two forms.

In some cases, officials boosted the number of people in some nationalities far beyond the level of plausibility lest anyone say these nations are on the edge of dying out. But in others, they reduced the number to below 50,000 so Moscow could say the 47 numerically smaller nations were doing well rather than admitting many in that category should be moved out of it.

**Putin's war in Ukraine seen really coming home to Russia with rise in family violence**

Paul Goble

Window on Eurasia (04.02.2023) – Russian veterans of the war in Ukraine are returning home, something that is certain to produce an increase in violence against women as these men continue to “fight” their war but now not against Ukrainians but rather against their own wives and children, Mariya Khankhunova says.

The more soldiers who do return, the founder of the I am Freedom women’s rights group in Buryatia, says, the worse the situation is likely to become. While it may be the case that “a critical mass” has not yet been reached, there is a great danger that it soon will be and the authorities aren’t ready ([baikal-journal.ru/2023/02/04/posledstviem-speczoperaczii-stanet-vsplesk-agressii-v-semyah/](http://baikal-journal.ru/2023/02/04/posledstviem-speczoperaczii-stanet-vsplesk-agressii-v-semyah/)).

In Buryatia, a republic which has sent a disproportionate number of men to the front and suffered a disproportionate number of combat losses as a result, she points out, there is not a single women’s shelter or even a hot line women can use to report abuse or get help. The only place many can turn to are Buddhist lamas, who do in fact offer help.

Khankhunova organized her own group to try to provide women with a place to share their experiences and thus gain confidence that they can escape to a better future. She and the psychologists who work with her have had some success. But there may not be any more meetings at precisely the time they are needed.

That is because, she tells People of Baikal, she has run out of money and can’t rent facilities for meetings or pay for the work of specialists.

*Photo: wallpapersdsc.net*

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