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## Martial Law And Its Elements

President Vladimir Putin held a [videoconference](#) with Russia's Security Council on 19 October, devoted to migration. However, Russia's leader used the opportunity to announce new measures aimed at protecting Russia from “Ukrainian neo-Nazis,” whom he accused of “using plainly terrorist methods [against Russia], plotting sabotage on [Russian] critical infrastructure and attempting to murder local officials”.

Putin placed primary responsibility for implementing these new measures on regional governors, who are expected “to ensure people's safety, to protect critical infrastructure facilities, to maintain public order, and to launch and increase the manufacturing of products necessary for the special military operation”.

Putin's declaration marks a new stage of Russia's war against Ukraine with two main priorities: (1) to officially mobilise economic resources for military needs (unofficially, this started in July with appointment of Denis Manturov as deputy Prime Minister and the Cabinet signing a special [decree](#) (Rus) on 1 August, creating the conditions for shifting industries into war mode) and (2) to grant the *siloviki*, primarily the defence ministry and the FSB, additional prerogatives to exercise their powers. Civil authorities, both regional and federal, have been pushed into becoming a part of the war and acting in Russia's military interests.

### *Special Regimes In The Regions*

During the Security Council meeting, Putin [announced](#) that he was introducing martial law in four Ukrainian territories that Russia recently annexed – the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics (DNR and LNR), as well as in the Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions. Special regimes have also been introduced in mainland Russia, with three different tiers to be implemented depending on each region's particular security situation.



## Martial law in the DPR, LPR, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson regions

**Decree No. 756**, “On the maintenance of martial law in the territories of the DPR, LPR, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson regions,” imposes martial law from 20 October in four Russia-annexed Ukrainian regions. The Cabinet, based on proposals by security and military bodies, had three days to present measures to be enacted on these territories (these have not been released by the point of publication).

A separate order **Decree No. 757** specifies and enlarges the measures outlined in the previous document. Concerning the four annexed regions, the decree assigns “top officials (executive government bodies)” governors powers envisaged by **federal law on martial law** (Rus), without further specification. **According** (Rus) to lawyer Pavel Chikov, Putin’s martial law decrees are based on his 2020 **decree** (Rus) “On Defence,” which enacts a classified defence plan that includes a set of documents and measures on military planning. In addition to powers that the law on martial law implies, these top regional officials are tasked with exercising economic mobilisation policies; handling civil defence and protection of the population and territories against natural and manmade emergencies; and implementing measures to meet the needs of the Russian army, as well as other troops, military units or bodies.

The decree obliges these four regions’ proxy authorities to create a territorial defence headquarters meaning that the governors and other self-imposed civil authorities will have to closely cooperate with security and military authorities.

## CONTEXT

### *Open Ban*

Martial law **grants** (Rus) authorities the **power** to ban citizens from leaving a region, restrict freedom of movement in any form, temporarily resettle local residents to safe areas, carry out evacuations, confiscate property such as cars and force people to work “for defence requirements”. Authorities can also frisk people and search their homes and cars, detain anyone for up to 30 days, impose military censorship and **create** (Rus) an agency to monitor civilians’ letters, internet communications and phone conversations. No elections or referendums may be held during this period.

Foreign organisations can be banned from operating in Russia if the authorities receive “credible information” that they are working to “undermine Russia’s defence and security.” This also applies to political parties, public organisations, and religious groups, whether they’re Russian or foreign.



One of the most important clauses of the decree is the stipulation that “when necessary, other measures set out by [Russia's federal law 'On Martial Law'] can be applied in the Russian Federation during the period of martial law.” It does not specify whether these measures may be applied only in the regions where martial law has been introduced or to other regions as well, leaving room for interpretation. In other words, it appears that any security body or military authorities can demand that the Cabinet consider the introduction of any **elements of martial law** (Rus) on any part of Russia's territory. This could also **include** (Rus) closing the border to Russians (although the Kremlin has **denied** having plans to do this).

### **Medium response level regime**

This regime has been introduced in Russia's regions bordering Ukraine (Russian-annexed Crimea and Sevastopol as well as the Krasnodar, Belgorod, Bryansk, Voronezh, Kursk and Rostov regions) – territories which have been subjected to shelling, strikes or other direct military threats during Ukraine's counteroffensive. Authorities in these regions will exercise all the same powers mentioned for the four annexed regions (such as economic mobilisation activities or measures to meet the needs of the Russian army), excluding the measures envisaged by marital law and without the need to form a territorial defence headquarters.

These regions' authorities, however, are also tasked with enacting certain elements of martial law if required by the circumstances:

- (1) strengthening the protection of public order and the protection of military and state premises, and special facilities;
- (2) introducing a special mode of operation of facilities that ensures transport, communications and energy infrastructure continue to operate;
- (3) restricting the movement of vehicles;
- (4) temporarily resettling residents to safe areas;
- (5) introducing and enforcing a special regime for entry into and exit from the territory, as well as freedom of movement restrictions within the territory.
- (6) restricting the movement of vehicles and conducting inspections;

- (7) imposing control over the work of bodies that ensure the functioning of infrastructure such as transport and communications; the work of printing houses, as well as the use of computer centres and automated systems “for defense needs”. As *Kommersant* [discovered](#) (Rus), companies operating communications networks and data centres must provide full access at the request of the defence ministry; it is expected that they may be asked to turn off communications and grant increased control to over the transfer of information to the state.

### **High alert level for two federal districts**

This tier has been introduced in the regions of the Central and Southern Federal Districts, including Moscow. It is identical to the medium response tier except that it does not include clauses (3) and (4) mentioned above. Their authorities are also not required to carry out economic mobilisation activities or undertake measures to meet the Russian army's needs.

### **Basic readiness level for the rest of Russia**

Russia has introduced this level across its remaining territories and involves all the same measures described for the high alert level regime with the exception of clauses (5) and (6).

Decree 757 stipulates that regional authorities are responsible for determining the exact measures they take depending on the local situation. Additionally, all regions besides the four ruled by martial law post-annexation, have been tasked with forming their own special territorial operative headquarters ([many regions](#) (Rus) have already done so), headed by the governors and including representatives of the Ministry of Defence, FSB, Ministry of Emergency Situations and Rosgvardia. Importantly, all decisions by governors concerning the decree have become mandatory for regional bodies, including municipal authorities. This implies that the decree enacts direct management of cities, and this means mayors, who previously enjoyed political autonomy will now find themselves subordinate. The current situation also creates more convenient circumstances for the governors to accelerate their initiatives for abolishing the remaining direct mayoral elections, particularly [in Tomsk](#) (Rus).

Journalist Farida Rustamova wrote that all these measures are [intended](#) (Rus) to protect Putin's approval rating – similar to the Kremlin's strategy during the pandemic, when many unpopular restrictions were introduced by

governors. They partially are. But the Kremlin needs to prepare the public for restrictions sought by military bodies and the security services – the war against Ukraine and its setbacks make it necessary to place the state and the economy in a war context, and it is more convenient to split the responsibility with other bodies – this is not only political, but also military logic.

To sweeten the deal, the Kremlin has decided to downplay these decisions in the public space. *Meduza* [noted](#) that the Kremlin distributed a media guide on how to cover the new measures to Russia's pro-government and state-owned outlets. The document opens with one key instruction: "It's vital to reassure the audience: nothing significant has changed!" The governors are trying to simultaneously assure their constituents that life will continue as usual. All of this is aimed at softening the social consequences of possible restrictions and mitigating the impact that partial martial law may have on the public mood.

Meanwhile, domestic policy overseer Sergey Kiriyenko is directly instructing the regional authorities on how to mitigate social issues. A *Vedomosti* source [said](#) (Rus) that people are now less worried about the very fact of mobilisation than they are about "how to live in these conditions" – that is, everyday issues like housing and utility payments, how to make credit repayments, etc. in the event of mobilisation. The Kremlin believes that social assistance and payments will overshadow the negative effects of mobilisation.

The recent mobilisation has already had an extremely [negative impact](#) and anxiety levels remain extremely high. While trust in the state decreases, ordinary Russians may consider martial law and its constituent elements a prelude to some much harsher decisions – something that will remain a significant source of increasing anxiety.

Interestingly (and perhaps unexpectedly) Kiriyenko [stated](#) (Rus) that any war can be won only if it becomes a 'people's war' at a forum of teachers on 22 October. He called on every Russian to participate in the war in any possible way, for example, writing letters to soldiers at the front. This is an intriguing shift: the Kremlin until recently sought to downplay the situation and keep it as domestically 'peaceful' as possible, even after partial mobilisation had been announced. Now, Kiriyenko is 'popularising' the war and is moving towards political, ideological mobilisation – this previously fell far behind military mobilisation. The new focus implies that, gradually, the regime will have to



undertake a degree of political mass mobilisation what may make domestic policy much more hawkish, coercive, ideologically intolerant and nationalistic.

*Just as with the pandemic, Putin is once again opting to delegate responsibilities to subordinates in order to provide public administrative bodies with the flexibility and responsiveness to meet military challenges while the situation at the front deteriorates. The current shift signifies a new stage in the military “operation” against Ukraine, based on three primary goals — all three of which are geared towards preparing the state for bigger military challenge. Firstly, to mobilise economic resources for the military's needs regardless of the type of property. Secondly, to increase protection over critical infrastructure and facilities in case of Ukrainian acts of retaliation; the Kremlin has obviously been expecting more serious attacks from Ukraine. Thirdly, to drastically increase political control over any social movements and activities. The Kremlin is anticipating a further intensification of fighting, which may demand tightened control over domestic affairs and a new phase of military mobilisation which this time will overlap with with greater political mobilisation.*

## ***Federal Coordination Bodies***

During the Security Council meeting, Putin ordered the creation of a coordination centre, to be headed by Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin. He also asked Moscow Mayor Sergey Sobyenin, who heads the State Council working group on state and municipal government, to work jointly with the presidential administration and to oversee the implementation of the aforementioned special measures in the regions. Putin tasked him with establishing interaction between regional and federal authorities.

The situation closely resembles that which Russia experienced at the beginning of the pandemic in 2020. That March, Putin similarly ordered the [formation](#) (Rus) of a government Covid-19 response centre headed by Mishustin, and tasked Sobyenin with coordinating anti-virus measures alongside the regions as the head of a special working group in the State Council (we wrote about this [here](#) and [here](#)). Putin viewed this experience as a success — and thus decided to adapt this existing system to his new needs during the war rather than invent a completely new one.

The coordination centre was **formed** (Rus) by Putin on 21 October. Mishustin has two deputies – his right-hand man Dmitry Grigorenko as well as Denis Manturov, both deputy prime ministers. Manturov **will be** (Rus) responsible for the supply of weapons and military equipment, as well as communications equipment for specific Ministry of Defence tasks. Grigorenko will oversee the regulatory and financial framework, while compiling informational reports.

Manturov, who is also Minister of Trade and Industry, has de facto become a second figure in the Cabinet, overshadowing Andrey Belousov. The latter, who was Mishustin's deputy in the anti-pandemic coordination centre, has not even been included this time. The new coordination centre includes more of the *siloviki*, which is logical – Defence Minister Sergey Shoigu and Aleksander Linets, the head of the President's Main Directorate of Special Programs (an indirect **descendant** (Rus) of the KGB's 15th directorate, which oversaw government bunkers, underground facilities and crisis management in the event of a military attack). Others, such as the heads of the FSB, Emergency Situations Ministry, SVR, Interior Ministry and Rosgvardia, had also been in the anti-pandemic centre.

There are several particularities here:

- The key powers have been handed to civil authorities, not the *siloviki*: Mishustin and Sobyanin at the federal level and the governors at the regional level. This is despite the fact that the new security measures primarily concern the interests of the military and security agencies. It seems especially bizarre as both Mishustin and Sobyanin have been so far notably discreet about the “special military operation”. Some observers **considered** (Rus) them to be representatives of a “latent” “party of peace” – their lack of vocal backing for the military operation laying the grounds to suspect them of opposing the war. Such a vision is biased and political – both Mishustin and Sobyanin are loyal and dedicated Putin yes-men but who, unlike Dmitry Medvedev or Andrey Turchak for example, prefer to avoid political posturing and remain discreet. This is not because they are anti-war, but because it contains fewer inherent political risks (escalatory moves would be harmful for their realms of responsibility) and it helps them to maintain a more comfortable position. This method simply appears safer to them.
- Similarly to Russia's handling of the Covid-19 pandemic, any measures may be introduced on a situational basis, depending on security risks and military

needs. The *siloviki* and military bodies, who are interested in more severe measures and tighter control over decision-making, will retain the initiative. The main intrigue here is whether Mishustin's coordination centre will be politically strong enough to oblige the *siloviki* and militaries and secure their endorsement. The pandemic experience showed that neither the Covid-19 Coordination Centre nor Sobyanin's working group played a decisive role in the introduction of anti-Covid measures. Most of the initiative came from consumer rights watchdog Rospotrebnadzor and regional governors themselves. Hence, Putin's decrees may create a situation where *siloviki* and militaries would simply bypass federal bodies to deal with regional authorities directly. The latter are much less politically protected (with some caveats regarding Sobyanin and Kadyrov) and will have to subordinate.

- While the governors played the role of “bad cops” during the pandemic introducing restrictions to decrease pressure on the health system and coercing the public to get vaccinated (pushing highly unpopular decisions) they are a priori interested in being “good cops” this time around. Military needs are not their basic priority and they have to care about social and political outcomes. It is not surprising that the heads of regions with “medium response” and “high alert” regimes have declared that they have no plans to introduce further restrictions. Sobyanin, the governors of the Voronezh, Kursk, Krasnodar and Rostov regions, and others have made such assurances (although Kursk authorities have [decided](#) (Rus) to strengthen control over the main highways, as well as the entrances and exits to the city of Kurchatov where Kursk Nuclear Power Plant is located). Regional authorities are interested in avoiding social tension and resentment from ordinary Russians. This means that if the situation demands tighter restrictions, it may create tension between the political authorities and the *siloviki*.
- During the pandemic, despite his ambitions and prominent role in the coronavirus response, Sobyanin [failed](#) to become a consistent coordinator of the regions. This could happen again in the current circumstances. Sobyanin's problem is that he has to compete with two centres of influence. The first one: Mishustin. Unlike Sobyanin, Mishustin has the leverage to deal with different regions via the ministries' regional offices. The working group that Sobyanin heads in the State Council has no real power and may only offer its recommendations. Many of Sobyanin's ideas during the pandemic



were rejected. In the “military” coordination centre, Sobyenin is mentioned as a member under a specific agreement — he will be invited if Mishustin deems it appropriate — while in the pandemic coordination centre, Sobyenin was Mishustin’s first deputy. The second centre of influence is the presidential administration, specifically the domestic policy overseers who displease Sobyenin. Moscow is a city with significant political autonomy and domestic policy overseers have very few chances to interfere in its affairs. Furthermore, as domestic policy overseers manage the State Council, then in terms of structural organisation, Sobyenin’s working group depends on Putin’s staff. Make no mistake — Sobyenin will not be allowed to use the State Council as a platform to boost his political standing at the federal level. Finally, many governors are jealous of Moscow’s financial and economic possibilities and possess a degree of anti-Moscow sentiment.

*Partial and full-scale martial law is being introduced according to the interests of the military and the siloviki. There are grounds to believe that the very idea was proposed by Sergey Surovikin, the new commander of the special military operation. Surovikin's primary goal has been to subordinate official authorities to the needs of the military and mobilise maximum resources to focus Russian forces as the war intensifies. However, Putin has opted to let new initiatives be shaped by the mechanisms handed to the civil authorities: Mishustin, Sobyenin and the governors. Indirectly, this may signal Putin’s concerns that the siloviki could gain too much power, unbalancing the “vertical” and leading to negative political outcomes. Now, the defence ministry or the FSB must agree whatever ideas that they may have with the governors and the Cabinet. However, the problem with the current management scheme is that all these coordination centres and working groups ultimately create fractures within the authorities, provoking more competition between Mishustin and Sobyenin, Sobyenin and domestic policy overseers, Sobyenin and the governors, the civil authorities and military/siloviki, to name a few. This may give the latter more room for manoeuvre while making state policy more chaotic and inconsistent — and less surveilled by the presidential administration. The implementation of partial mobilisation shows that in reality, such disintegration means divided responsibilities, which lead to local abuses of power, overreactions and violations of the law.*

## *Sobyanin's Insolence*

On 17 October, Moscow Mayor Sergey Sobyanin unexpectedly [announced](#) (Rus) that the city's partial mobilisation had been terminated. People started speculating wildly about Sobyanin possessing anti-war [sentiments](#) (Rus) and prompted some observers to suggest that Sobyanin was challenging the Kremlin and Russian military. His statement was emotional, painting the mobilisation as a great hardship. The very fact that he promised that mobilisation offices were to be closed at 2:00 p.m. seemed like an [ultimatum](#) (Rus).

But this seems misguided. Sobyanin is a player well known for his extremely cautious approaches. A source close to the Mayoral office said that he would never dare make any move without getting the green light from the Kremlin. According to *Meduza's* [sources](#), the decision was made by Putin's administration, not Sobyanin, to dilute social tension: "The level of fear and disapproval is rising all the time. Moscow has turned into a completely different city. These subway raids were a complete circus, it had to be stopped", the source said, adding that the frustration was marked by a clear anti-Putin streak.

But this also suited Sobyanin, who positions himself as European-style mayor who relies on prominent support from middle class Muscovites. He said that mobilisation ended because the plan had been fully implemented in the Russian capital, which appears to be untrue. Viktor Sobolev, a member of the State Duma Defense Committee, [accused](#) (Rus) Moscow of failing to properly implement mobilisation – claiming the city did not even reach 50 percent of its goal (he mentioned 20,000, while *Meduza's* source placed it at 16,000 – the smallest quota of any region). *R.Politik's* source said that Sobyanin had been allowed to pre-emptively terminate Moscow's mobilisation due to growing resentment from city residents – but that the way he did it irritated domestic policy overseers.

*The Ministry of Defence has asserted full control over the mobilisation process, despite the governors' attempts to harness power. This has led to contradictions between political goals (to secure social stability) and military priorities (to draft the maximum number of soldiers). When, on 14 October, Putin said that mobilisation would be over in two weeks, this gave domestic policy*

*overseers some flexibility over the issue at least in the most politically sensitive regions like Moscow, Moscow region and St. Petersburg. However, Sobyenin did this in a way that demonstrated Moscow's political autonomy.*

## ***Surovikin's Interview***

General Sergey Surovikin, the recently appointed commander of the “special military operation,” gave an [interview](#) to a state TV channel on 18 October an unprecedented move since the beginning of the war. This is a clear sign that Putin is now ready to permit top military brass to assume a more prominent public role – a political reaction to a situation that is increasingly serious and challenging, and prompting more people to question the authorities. The Kremlin intended Surovikin's appearance to soften tensions between the authorities and the patriotic camp, which has become highly irritated by the formal and obviously deceptive official defence ministry [briefings](#) (Rus).

There are several key points to note:

- **Reflections of reality.** The very fact that the “special military operation” has found its voice and its face in Surovikin speaks of a belated process of bringing Russia's stage-managed reality into line with the tangible presence of the war. All in all, Surovikin's promotion and ensuing publicity look much more natural. Everyone is more comfortable this way than when the generals were “hidden” out of sight and Putin alone was responsible for everything.
- **To tame the pro-war camp.** Surovikin's appearance is a cautious attempt on the part of the Kremlin to be more honest with Russian society as anger mounts over the military situation. Many pro-war Telegram bloggers hailed Surovikin's interview (even [calling](#) (Rus) him a “people's hero”) and appreciated its (extremely relative) openness. “Surovikin did what we have been waiting for from the authorities since Covid. He talks to us like we're adults”, [wrote](#) (Rus) MIG. Surovikin did this interview against the backdrop of [rumours](#) (Rus) that the Prosecutor General's Office, following the orders of General Staff, was considering a [list](#) (Rus) of “military correspondents” to be criminally charged. This became one of the most-discussed topics on the Russian political segment of Telegram. The Defence Ministry's indignation is



understandable: “military correspondents” have become one of the most powerful sources of criticism of the military operation, personally targeting Sergey Shoigu, Valery Gerasimov and others and accusing them of corruption. However, to successfully prosecute, the military top brass would have to resort to soliciting help from the FSB – something they may find dubious (the FSB tends to share the sentiments of the military correspondents, while Putin personally does not consider them to be intentionally harmful and hostile). The absence of univocal political support for prosecuting military bloggers sparked divisions within the authorities. For example, the Ministry for Digital Development [said](#) (Rus) that it was categorically against such prosecution. This ministry is politically close to domestic policy overseers (the minister Maksut Shadayev [consulted](#) (Rus) Kiriyenko on social networks). And even Aleksander Khinstein, a State Duma deputy from the United Russia party who is close to Rosgvardia head Viktor Zolotov, [backed](#) (Rus) Shadayev’s position. Finally, RT chief editor Margarita Simonyan also [took](#) (Rus) the side of the “military correspondents”. Three days before Surovikin’s interview, pro-war bloggers [reported](#) (Rus) that there were no longer any lists, meaning that the authorities abandoned the idea of prosecution.

- **Contradictory subjectivity.** On the one hand, Surovikin has appeared as figure that holds some political weight and which plays a political role. Plus, unlike Shoigu, who serves Putin as a nominal manager, Putin trusts and listens to Surovikin in military affairs. His appointment, as well as his interview, is certainly not an attempt to make a scapegoat out of him and to pin unpopular decisions on him. But on the other hand, the way in which he appeared is really quite weak. The general obviously reads from a teleprompter, is the bearer of bad news (he has to admit that “the situation is tense”) and promises that the situation will likely become even worse. His claims that “difficult decisions will have to be made” frankly sound like preparation for unpopular military choices – for example, [retreating](#) (Rus) from Kherson. After his interview, some bloggers suggested that such a withdrawal might be the better and more reasonable solution.
- **No Armageddon, yet.** Surovikin’s two theses – “We and Ukrainians are one people” and “We have to spare people” – betray a much closer affinity between himself and Putin than the “hawks”, who have demanded to bomb

the hell out of everything and see Ukrainians as “accomplices” of a “fascist regime”. In this respect it is also clear that Surovikin will do what Putin says and that he will not hold any special independence.

The interview itself was not Surovikin's attempt to flex his political muscles, but perhaps a forced attempt to legitimise (and warn people of) possible setbacks in Kherson, which would cushion an anticipated outburst of panic from among Russia's war correspondents.

## Rostourism Abolishing

### *Chuychenko's Loss*

Putin has abolished the Federal Agency for Tourism (Rostourism) and transferred its functions to the Ministry of Economic Development. The ministry had supervised Rostourism since the fall of 2018, taking over handling of the agency from the Ministry of Culture. Shortly after that, Dmitry Medvedev, who was Russia's prime minister at the time, replaced then-Rostourism head Oleg Safronov with Zarina Doguzova and ordered the economic development ministry to oversee the agency's functions more actively. Doguzova is a [known](#) (Rus) proxy of Justice Minister Konstantin Chuychenko, a former classmate and friend of current deputy Security Council head Medvedev.

Tourism is a highly lucrative industry and there has been always infighting for the job of overseeing it. In May 2018, when Putin appointed Olga Golodets as Deputy Prime Minister for tourism, she tried to promote someone close to herself – allegedly the ex-head of the Artek children's camp Alexei Kasprzak – to lead Rostourism. The actual Rostourism head at that time, Oleg Safronov, came from the financial sector, and his appointment was [lobbied](#) (Rus) by then-Culture Minister Vladimir Medinsky, who presently has a role as Putin's adviser. Golodets lost and Doguzova was appointed regardless of Golodets's interests.

Doguzova's career started in the government's press service and information department, and in 2012 she moved to the Russian President's Office for Public Relations and Communications, providing support for major international events including the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics and the 2018 FIFA World Cup. This office is supervised by Alexei Gromov, First Deputy Head of the Presidential Administration. But her rise is more related to her close relations with Chuychenko. After Medvedev's resignation from the Prime Minister's office in January 2020, Chuychenko's position was drastically weakened – the lack of clout within the apparatus meant that he could not secure the position of his protege.

## *Chernyshenko's Win*

The decision to abolish Rostourism belongs to Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Chernyshenko, who oversees the industry. He also heads the board of directors of Russian corporation Tourism.RF, which implements the national project of the same name and has an estimated budget of more than 1 trillion roubles. He will now deal with the Ministry of Economic Development and try to promote someone close to him to the position of deputy minister for tourism. The previous deputy minister overseeing tourism, Sergei Galkin, was appointed as director of the Federal Statistics Service in May. It is interesting that Mishustin ordered an increase in the number of deputy economic ministers from 11 to 12, and the number of ministry departments from 35 to 37. This gives Chernyshenko the ability to promote someone without needing to replace any of the current deputies – which is easier to implement.

Doguzova was notably ambitious, full of initiative and politically bold. Federation Council Speaker Valentina Matviyenko recently publicly supported her, noting Doguzova's work: "she already, sorry for the slang, got it to everyone that tourism should be developed, including the country's leadership". But Doguzova's ambition finally worked against her – she ended up getting into a conflict with Chernyshenko that became public at the beginning of September.

During a meeting of the State Council Presidium on Tourism Development that month, Primorsky Krai Governor Oleg Kozhemyako criticised the government for the absence of a clear "vertical" in the tourism sector. Putin asked Chernyshenko what changes this would imply, and the latter responded that no changes were needed in his understanding. Doguzova objected, effectively proposing to transform Rostourism into its own ministry and pass the financing of tourism from the Ministry of Construction to the new Ministry of Tourism. Chernyshenko said that the government and he himself opposed this.

The topic was raised again the next day at the Eastern Economic Forum, where Putin, answering a question about the Doguzova-Chernyshenko argument, said that it was a fight over financial resources, and over which body, Rostourism or the Ministry of Construction, was to control 10 billion roubles aimed at developing tourism. "It is really the same to me because there is logic to both. But the Ministry of Construction still has a professional attitude towards

the issues of developing the infrastructure, to construction ... it would be logical to channel these funds through Rostourism. But in the end, the government must decide this. I believe they will make a decision soon. There is nothing complicated about it,” said Putin.

*The decision to abolish Rostourism is an obvious political victory for Dmitry Chernyshenko, who succeeded in convincing Mishustin and Putin’s administration to do so. The president, in turn, distanced himself from the conflict and let the cabinet decide for itself. Doguzova, who has gained an impressive reputation for being an effective manager, lacked political clout and could no longer count on the support of Chuychenko, not to mention Medvedev (who would not waste his political capital on such petty squabbles). But the very fact that this internal conflict became public is a significant and rare event. The calm and distant reaction of Putin, who preferred to stay away from it, may prompt other similar conflicts to move into a more public realm— especially as elites grow bolder in expressing their priorities and feel that revealing them doesn’t necessarily lead to negative outcomes, which could have been the case before.*

## Putin's Visit To Astana

### *New Challenges*

Putin visited Kazakhstan on October 13-14 to participate in a Council of Heads of State of the CIS meeting, the first Russia-Central Asia summit, and the 6th summit of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA). The Kremlin believes that the world order is changing and American domination is eroding, and Moscow is seeking to develop closer ties with those who are reluctant to join, as Putin sees it, the West's "anti-Russian policy". These efforts come amid new challenges and conflicts that threaten Moscow's prevailing role in the post-Soviet space.

#### **Fading arbitration role**

The mid-September escalation of the longtime [border conflict](#) between Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan was one of the main topics at the Russia-Central Asia forum. Moscow, which pretends it is still a key player in dealing with post-Soviet conflicts, this time appeared to struggle. Kyrgyzstan called on the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) to intervene in the situation, but the CSTO limited itself to a statement in which it proposed to resolve disputes through negotiations. In response, the secretary of the Kyrgyz Security Council, Marat Imankulov, said that the organisation does not possess any mechanism for resolving territorial disputes between its members and proposed excluding Tajikistan from the military alliance.

Kyrgyz President Sadyr Japarov's apparent disappointment in Moscow's ability to play an efficient arbitrating role likely led to his absence from the informal CIS summit in St. Petersburg in early October. During this summit, Putin awarded Tajik President Emomali Rahmon with a state award for ensuring regional stability and security – the Order of Merit for the Fatherland, III degree. In Bishkek, Rahmon's award was regarded as a signal of Russia's support for Tajikistan. The Kyrgyz Defense Ministry then canceled the previously planned "Indestructible Brotherhood" exercises with CSTO peacekeeping forces.



Moscow's role as an arbitrator has also been fading in Nagorno-Karabakh. For years, Russia was seen as the exclusive moderator of the peace process and the settlement of the confrontation between Baku and Yerevan – a role which was recognised not only by Azerbaijan and Armenia, but also by the United States and France (two co-chairs of the Minsk Group) as well as Iran and Turkey. Nowadays, the situation is significantly different. The European Union has noticeably increased its peacekeeping efforts and has been able to achieve the appearance of bilateral documents paving the way for the signing of peace accords between the two Caucasus republics. At the beginning of October, Azerbaijani, Armenian, French, and EU leaders met in Prague to discuss the peace process between Baku and Yerevan, ignoring Moscow's efforts. The EU agreed to [send](#) an Armenia-Azerbaijan border monitoring mission to the conflict zone. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov then had to try and catch up, promising his Armenian counterpart Ararat Mirzoyan in Astana that Russia would consider sending a CSTO monitoring mission.

The US has also been increasing its regional involvement with Nancy Pelosi's visit to Yerevan as well as the activities of Antony Blinken and Jake Sullivan. Turkey, which supports Azerbaijan and has preconditions for the normalisation of relations with Armenia, also influences the balance of power in the Caucasus.

- **Unprecedented public disagreements.** At the Russia-Central Asia forum, Tajik President Emomali Rahmon [asked](#) (Rus) Putin not to treat the countries of Central Asia as part of the former Soviet Union. This statement made a lot of noise, with the video of Rahmon's speech attracting millions of views on YouTube. He stressed that in the USSR, “we were witnesses to the fact that there was no attention to small republics, small peoples”, “traditions and customs were not taken into account”, and Moscow “did not support development.” Rahmon complained that Russia does not take Tajikistan seriously, specifying that despite his request, Moscow only sends deputy ministers to “some unfortunate

## CONTEXT

### *Seeking Its Own Identity*

This summer, the assembly of people's deputies of Tajikistan's Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region decided to rename two mountain peaks named Mayakovsky and Oktyabrsky. They were given the names of folk poets Mirsaid Mirshakar and Mumin Kanot instead. In 2020, the Evgenia Korzhenevskaya peak was renamed to Peak Ozodi (Communism Peak was renamed to Ismoil Somoni Peak back in 1998).

forum in Tajikistan” and not the ministers themselves. It appears he meant the International Tajikistan-Russia Investment Forum held in mid-September.

Putin objected to Rahmon, saying that “in the Soviet Union they published books and opened theatres in national languages, developed culture and the economy” – a kind of polemic with the Tajik president. At the same time, Putin said that Rahmon was largely right and that it is necessary these days to fill all formats of interaction with content specific to its audience.

Timur Umarov, from CEIP Politika, having admitted that Rahmon wants more attention from Moscow, [links](#) the Tajik leader’s remarks to his perception of a Russia weakened by its anti-Ukraine war and thus unable to defend Tajikistan from [threats](#) from Afghanistan. “The weakness of Russia has opened a unique chance for Tajikistan. Today, Rahmon’s bargaining position at the negotiations with Putin is stronger than ever. Tajikistan is using the moment to get as many concessions from Russia as possible”, wrote Umarov. Additionally, Tajikistan’s economic vulnerability and dependency on Russia as a source of jobs for around 1 million migrants makes it the most affected by Russia’s economic isolation and budget shrinking due to the war in Ukraine.

Asia expert Andrey Serenko told *R.Politik* that according to his sources close to Tajikistan authorities, there were three main factors behind Rahmon’s angry speech. The

## CONTEXT

### *Migration Challenge*

One of the reasons for Rahmon’s general irritation was the attitude toward labor migrants in Russia. On 16 October, three Tajiks opened fire on Russian conscripts at a military training ground near Belgorod. One of the shooters was 24-year-old Ehson Aminzoda, who disappeared on 10 October near the Lyublino metro station in Moscow. Migrants were forcibly [mobilised](#) (Rus) by Moscow military commissariats (some were pressured to sign contracts, while others were offered an accelerated Russian citizenship procedure), which carried out raids to catch as many men as possible. ASTRA, citing a serviceman who calls himself an eyewitness to the incident, [reported](#) (Rus) that the conflict started with the fact that three soldiers – a Dagestani, an Azerbaijani and an Adyghe – wanted to “write a report that they do not want to serve anymore,” since this is “not their war.” Upon learning of this, one of the commanders, whom the source identifies as Lieutenant Colonel Andrei Lapin, allegedly “gathered everyone” and declared that “this is a holy war.” After that, a Tajik man objected that the holy war was a war of Muslims against infidels. Lapin then allegedly called Allah a “weakling” or “coward”, which “shocked” many of those present. According to an ASTRA source, three natives of Tajikistan asked other Muslims to step aside, “turned their machine guns”, killed Lapin and opened fire indiscriminately, allegedly killing 29 more people.

first and main reason, which was the trigger, was Putin's trilateral meeting with Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan's leaders in which Putin appeared to take a pro-Kyrgyzstan stance in the conflict. A *Kommersant* source close to the Kyrgyz delegation [confirms](#) (Rus) that Moscow sees Dushanbe's position as "incoherent" and destructive. The second one — Putin's negative personal position toward Rahmon's son [Rustam Emomali](#), who is being prepared as his successor. Serenko notes that Rahmon has waited for Putin to change his attitude very patiently, but as time passes the situation continues to grow more tense. Even China, which had been also reluctant to see Rustam Emomali as the next president, softened its approach. Finally, the third reason — Russia's pro-Taliban position. According to Serenko, it previously appeared to Tajikistan's leadership that Putin held a rather balanced position between the cautious Nikolay Patrushev (who is anti-Taliban) and the Foreign Ministry (which insists on recognising the Taliban). But it now seems he is definitely leaning closer to the latter side.

*The first Russia-Central Asia summit was held on initiative of Moscow. The Kremlin believes that it's time to turn to Asia, to pay more attention to Asian platforms and to show that despite its war in Ukraine, Moscow is capable of maintaining its geopolitical role of a stabiliser in the post-Soviet space. Russia's fragile, at least, position in the war against Ukraine — a dragged-out conflict with negative prospects — is starting to play a role in weakening Russia's stance in Asia, where other players, such as Turkey and China, appear to be more stable, predictable, resourceful centres of power. The Russian leadership tends to overlook its own sagging role in Asia while escalations of old conflicts, border clashes, terrorist activities and other sharpening challenges will test Moscow's ability to play the role of moderator.*

## *Putin's Press Conference*

Putin held a [press conference](#) at the end of his visit to Astana on 14 October. Some of his statements deserve special attention.

- **Grain deal blackmail.** If it turns out that the explosives that blew up the Crimean Bridge were sent from Odesa by a grain truck, Putin said, this would call into question the existence of humanitarian corridors and the Ukrainian grain deal itself. It's not the first time that Putin has questioned

the grain deal, and the Crimean Bridge explosion provides grounds to raise doubts and threaten to break the deal. [The grain deal](#), in the Kremlin's understanding, gives Russia two advantages. Firstly, it is leverage, a way to draw the West into a scheme in which Russia believes it can affect Western interests and coerce it to cooperate. Secondly, Moscow uses it as a tool to mitigate sanctions which indirectly affect Russian grain and fertiliser exports. Today, Moscow is signaling that it might not prolong the deal, despite optimistic statements from Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. On 13 October, the latter said that Turkey is ready to secure Russian grain and fertiliser exports. On 21 October he argued that there are no obstacles in the way of extending the deal, which is set to expire on 19 November. Meanwhile, on 20 October Russia's First Deputy Permanent Representative to the UN Dmitry Polyansky [urged](#) (Rus) Russians to be overly optimistic about its extension. Moscow will continue to raise the stakes as the deal's expiration date approaches. However, its goal is not to close the deal per se, but to 'sell' prolongation for as high a price as possible.

- **Mobilisation will continue.** Putin said that mobilisation would end in around two weeks – but the way in which he discussed the subject gave the impression that this decision could be easily reversed. He de facto backed mobilisation, justifying the Defence Ministry's draft efforts and explaining that draftees have all the necessary items and training to prepare for the fight – he thus answered a question about the premature deployment of mobilised servicemen to the front without appropriate preparations. Later, Putin personally [visited](#) a military training ground in the Ryazan region. This implies that Putin has not been politically embarrassed by the mobilisation, but is in fact seeking to promote it as something routine and a point of pride. On 21 October, Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov said that there are no clear terms for when the mobilisation will end. Each region receives its own directive from the Defence Ministry and it appears that the latter will incessantly continue drafting, manoeuvring between different regions depending on their ability to mobilise people as well as political factors (as there is a special approach to Moscow, the Moscow region and St. Petersburg).
- **Nord Stream doom.** Putin's comments suggest that there is no longer any hope for the launch of the Nord Stream pipelines. His statements indicated

deep disappointment in Europe's behaviour, especially Germany: according to Putin, if Germany had really been prioritising its own interests, no one would have blown up the Nord Stream pipelines. Apparently, the gas pipelines' explosion hit Putin personally hard. "Although they were not operational, they still provided an element of reliability – they could be switched on in the worst-case scenario. But this is no longer possible", he said. Moscow is now shifting its focus in favour of a gas hub in Turkey.

- **Growing speculation of peace talks with Ukraine.** Since the end of September, Moscow has started to push the idea of returning to peace talks which dissolved in April in Istanbul. Peskov has frequently reiterated that Russia is ready for talks, while Putin has **repeated** (Rus) on multiple occasions that Russia and Ukraine were very close to a deal, but Kyiv rejected its own commitments and prevented dialogue from progressing. This line is deliberately pedalled by the Kremlin. It's important to note that no one in the Kremlin has ever taken the Istanbul talks seriously and it has never aimed to reach an agreement with Kyiv – the spring talks, including the Istanbul meeting, were a smokescreen masking Russia's true goal of of coercing Ukraine into complete capitulation. Today, Putin is unexpectedly trying to convince the world that in April, Moscow was ready to sign the peace agreement. He is doing this with the intention of forcing the West to seriously **discuss** what Kyiv should do in order to prevent the war

## CONTEXT

### *Nord Stream Leaks*

After Putin and Erdogan's meeting in Astana, Russia and Turkey agreed to build an international gas hub in the European part of Turkey. "We could replace Nord Stream's lost volumes of transit along the Baltic Sea bed via the Black Sea region, thus making the main supply route for our natural gas to Europe via Turkey. We could make Turkey into Europe's largest gas hub, if our partners are interested in this", Putin said.

The same day, Gazprom CEO Aleksei Miller said that the restoration of the Nord Stream pipelines would require the construction of new compressor stations. "At the Portovaya CS, there is not a single working turbine ... No one said that our European partners or Germany want the restoration of blown streams ... There are regulatory issues, there are sanctions issues, there are legal issues. And there are economic issues ... It will be much faster and easier to build everything anew ... Understand, there has been a complete break! ... The pipe is filled with sea water for a very long distance... This is an unprecedented state of emergency, a terrorist act... Experts say that it is necessary to actually cut off a very large piece of pipe and rebuild a new section ... It's one thing when the pipe is hollow, and quite another when it's like that", Miller argued in a highly emotional way.

from nuclear escalation. In showing Russia's readiness to talk, Putin seeks to provide Westerners wanting Ukraine to enter into dialogue with Russia with stronger arguments and have them seriously consider some painful concessions on the part of Ukraine. Plus, the Kremlin hopes to provoke divisions within the Ukrainian elite, believing that a sort of “party of peace” may appear to challenge Zelensky’s leadership.

- **Not ready to fight.** Answering a question about mobilisation, Putin said that “The line of contact is 1,100 kilometres long, and it is practically impossible to hold it exclusively with the contract soldiers”. This is a highly revealing statement pointing at (1) Moscow’s intention to stabilise the front line, rather than to advance, as a preliminary goal and (2) it appears that Moscow will not seek to oust Ukrainian military forces from the annexed regions anytime soon. It may be interpreted in a way that Moscow will be satisfied if Ukrainian forces would just freeze and stop fighting and moving forward. Moscow is not ready for intense fighting, but the offensive could theoretically resume later. However, as *R.Politik* previously noted, Putin has not been planning to defeat the Ukrainian army at any stage of the conflict. But neither has a peace deal been Putin’s intention (in a way, this was discussed in the spring) — in his understanding, it is impossible to deal with the current leadership. From the beginning, Putin had been hoping that there would be room for manoeuvre with Ukraine’s military. Yet in his 24 February speech that preceded the war, he urged the Ukrainian militaries to give up on their political leadership and find a way to agree with Russia and avoid fighting. Moscow later succeeded in agreeing the surrender of the defenders of Azovstal, bypassing Ukraine’s leadership. It is interesting that *Meduza* recently [reported](#) that Russian authorities have developed a new “tactical option” — rather than try to get Ukraine to agree to a full-fledged peace treaty, the Kremlin will seek a temporary ceasefire. The outlet’s source said that Russia’s leaders believe this could be achieved through negotiations between Russian and Ukrainian troops — without the involvement of either country’s president. According to *R.Politik*’s information, Putin had considered a possible deal with the Ukrainian forces from the very beginning. But even if it happens, such negotiations may merely be tactical and rooted in the intention to split Ukraine’s elites, while not eliminating the possibility of coercing Kyiv to capitulate.



- **“No need for massive strikes now”.** Responding to a question on whether Russia is going to continue massive strikes against Ukraine, Putin said that “there is no such need ... at least for now. As for the future, we’ll see,” confirming that Russia does not plan (and perhaps cannot afford) constant massive strikes on Ukrainian infrastructure, and instead is preparing to carry out one-time retaliatory actions. This implies that if Ukraine does not go on the offensive, Russia will not strike either, sparing its missile reserves and military resources.

*Putin appears to be in a rather cheerful mood, especially when he smirks about possibly resuming massive aerial attacks on Ukraine. This answers the question of whether he feels desperate and cornered. Objectively, the situation is bad, but Putin does not feel that way, still believing that Russia has military advantages while Ukraine is doomed and literally can't win. His main argument remains in force — “a direct clash with the Russian Army is a very dangerous step that could lead to a global catastrophe”. But today he needs to freeze the situation to avoid massive fighting while gaining valuable time that would either open up a new window for Russia to resume its offensive or weaken Ukraine in such a way that it would have no choice but to concede.*

## *How To Make Ends Meet*

On 20 October, Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin [signed](#) (Rus) a decree allocating 1 trillion roubles from the National Wealth Fund (NWF) to cover the federal budget deficit, which is estimated at 1.3 trillion, but will most likely increase. As of 1 October, the volume of the state's primary savings stood at 10.8 trillion roubles (of which the liquid part, funds in bank accounts, was 7.5 trillion roubles). Since the beginning of the war in Ukraine, the NWF has noticeably diminished: as of 1 February, the fund had 13.6 trillion roubles, but by August the volume of the NWF was already down to 12.1 trillion roubles, and by September – 11.8 trillion.

According to official forecasts, the budget deficit will amount to 2.9 trillion roubles in 2023, and in 2024 – 2.3 trillion. The total volume of the NWF, according to the Ministry of Finance, will almost halve in two years to 5.9 trillion roubles, its lowest point in the past 20 years.

The government is counting on financing the deficit with internal loans as external borrowing is not an option for Russia. The finance ministry has had to postpone the sale of federal loan bonds (OFZ) several times. On 14 September, the ministry planned to issue 40 billion roubles, but raised only 10 billion at the first after a pause (and so far the only) auction. The Cabinet plans to cover the deficit in the next three years by selling OFZ in the amount of 2.512 trillion roubles in 2023, 3.389 trillion roubles in 2024 and 3.427 trillion roubles in 2025. Some economists [suggest](#) (Rus) that the government may [force](#) (Rus) state banks to buy OFZ, but they will have to do so reluctantly. After all, banks have been burdened by credit holidays, for citizens whose incomes have fallen by 30 percent, and for those who were called up in the partial mobilisation.

## *Correction Of Anxiety*

The latest [poll](#) (Rus) by FOM reveals that although Russians have somewhat calmed down over the past week, their anxiety levels still far exceed what they were prior to the mobilisation announcement. The number of respondents who characterise their mood as anxious decreased from 67 percent to 56 percent. The highest level of anxiety was recorded on 2 October – a week and

a half after the mobilisation announcement. At that time, 70 percent of Russians described their mood as anxious. Prior to mobilisation, this figure was 35 percent. At the same time, the number of respondents who assessed their mood as calm increased by 10 percent – to 38 percent, but this is still less than before mobilisation (when it was 57 percent).

The Levada Centre [published](#) (Rus) a full poll on October 21, but it was conducted on 22-28 September and thus does not reflect the latest shifts. However, the poll reveals that in September, Russian society experienced severe stress from the news of partial mobilisation. There was a sharp deterioration in public mood. The number of respondents who describe their mental state as “excellent” decreased to 7 percent (from 15 percent in July), and “normal” to 45 percent (from 65 percent in July). The share of those who spoke of “tension and irritation” (from 17 percent to 32 percent) and “fear and longing” (from 4 percent to 15 percent) increased. In the entire history of polling in Russia there has never previously been such a sharp one-time deterioration in mood. Positive moods at the end of September only slightly prevailed over negative ones, a ratio which was last observed in 2000.

- ◆ Catherine Belton in The Washington Post [explores](#) the mood among Russia's elites.
- ◆ Putin's Looming Tanker Crisis: Craig Kennedy [summarises](#) the ongoing research examining how Russian oil will fare under sanctions.
- ◆ The New York Times [looks at](#) how Russia is shrinking its forces in Syria and how this could impact Israeli strategy there.
- ◆ Nikolas K. Gvosdev [discusses](#) the new U.S. National Security Strategy that bets on a future where Russia matters less.
- ◆ Leonid Bershidsky [explains](#) what is wrong with the Western strategy of a Russian strategic defeat.
- ◆ POLITICO [speaks](#) to Fiona Hill about whether Putin's aims in Ukraine are evolving and what it will take to end the war.
- ◆ Boris Bondaryov, a former Russian diplomat who resigned over the war, [explains](#) for Foreign Affairs the factors that have fueled Russia's misconduct.
- ◆ In an [interview](#) with Institut Montaigne (France), Fyodor Lukyanov discusses the new world order being shaped by the war.
- ◆ Mikhail Zygar [interviews](#) (Rus) Serhii Plokhyy, professor of Ukrainian history at Harvard University, on how Russia seeks to rewrite the history of Ukraine.

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