

Russia: a new wave of anti-war protest

Friday 20 May 2022, by [PIRANI Simon](#) (Date first published: 20 May 2022).

Three months into Russia's assault on Ukraine, PAVEL LISYANSKY reports that anti-war protesters, pushed back in March by a fierce legal clampdown, are finding ways to make their voices heard

While the Russian media claims wholesale popular approval of the Kremlin's military aggression, Russians are being arrested for protesting peacefully in the country's urban centres.

Russia's military aggression against Ukraine has now entered its third month. The level of protest among the local population in Russian regions is increasing, due to several factors.

Because of the sanctions policy, global brands are leaving Russia and, at the same time, large employers are closing production facilities, thereby reducing jobs in the regions and draining tax revenues to regional budgets.

The regions of Russia have already received *Cargo 200* [military code for the transportation of soldiers' dead bodies] from Ukraine, which increases local people's urge to protest. But the main political point is that these events sharpen the confrontation between regional elites and the federal centre of the Russian Federation. [Note. The Russian Federation is made up of 85 administrative units (regions, republics and autonomous territories), which are constantly in battle with the central government over shares of budgets, degree of local autonomy, etc.]

At the regional level, local populations oppose the policy pursued by the federal centre by means of various types of protest activities. In April-May 2022 the following cases of internal political conflicts in the regions of Russia have been identified:

- In late April 2022, 57 members of the Surgut, western Siberia, branch of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation left the organisation - which means that the Party lost the majority of its members. Only six people still remain in the party branch, with an average age of 70, while all the young people left the Party. This move was prompted by Communist Party Central Committee's cooperation with United Russia [the pro-Putin party that controls parliament], and its tacit agreement with the Kremlin's policy.
- In Novosibirsk, local activist Vladimir Saltevsy was detained at an Immortal Regiment rally [held to commemorate soldiers who died in the second world war]. He was holding banners saying "Grandchildren, I am ashamed of you" and "We conquered fascism back then, we will conquer it this time too".
- During April 2022, several protests in support of the former governor Sergey Furgal were held in Khabarovsk, in the Russian Far East, where locals condemned Putin for starting a military vendetta against Ukraine.
- In April local activists in Orenburg, in the Urals, threw paint on billboards featuring the "Z", the sign of Russian military aggression.
- In Krasnoyarsk, Siberia, law enforcement officers detained a local resident because of an anti-war sign on her car saying *Zachem* [Why?]. The letter "Z" looked as though it was written with

blood.

- In Yekaterinburg, in the Urals, local resident Nadezhda Sayfutdinova was detained for picketing against the war. She had sewn her own mouth shut.
- Yevgeny Prokin was detained in Perm, in the northern Urals, where he staged a one-person anti-war picket. He was holding a flag and a banner with the inscription “You can’t brainwash us with propaganda, people there are just like us”;
- In Transbaikalia, in the Far East, a man argued with a cashier in a store and “condemned the actions of Putin’s Russia in Ukraine”. He subsequently had to pay a fine of 30,000 rubles [about £385].
- In Yasnogorsk, in Tula region, 35-year-old Ekaterina Zaripova removed “Z” posters from the windows of a kindergarten, saying “We must put our country in order”, and condemning the war in Ukraine. She was fined 48,000 rubles [about £620].
- In the St Petersburg legislative assembly, the Yabloko [liberal opposition] faction submitted a draft statement on the protection of citizens’ rights to freedom of information, suggesting that the regional parliament expresses “protest against restrictions on freedom of information”.

In April-May 2022, there were a series of arson attacks on local military recruitment offices in various regions. Quite often, young men made videos of Molotov cocktails being thrown at the building – after which the perpetrators were put on the federal wanted list. Military recruitment offices were set on fire in the following localities:

- Nizhneartovsk, the administrative center of the Nizhneartovsk district of the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous region;
- Lukhovitsy (Moscow Oblast);
- Voronezh;
- Zubovaya Polyana settlement (Mordovia);
- City of Berezovskoye (Yekaterinburg);
- City of Shuya (Ivanovo region).

The above-mentioned acts of public aggression are not isolated. They are taking place almost every day: the Russian propaganda media simply fails to mention them.

These protests exacerbate conflict between regional elites and the federal centre: when repression is meted out in the regions, the local authorities pay the price at elections, since almost no one at the federal level is aware of these facts.

In turn, regional elites, especially in the ethnic regions of the Russian Federation, have a negative attitude towards the actions of the federal center. On account of Russia’s military aggression against Ukraine, the Kremlin is restructuring regional subsidies allocated from the federal budget, which provokes discontent among regional elites.

Political dissatisfaction in the regions is exacerbated by ethnic and confessional separatism.

According to political scientists and researchers from Russia, processes of disintegration of the Russian Federation could be triggered as soon as the federal centre begins to lose its standing, as dissatisfaction grows in the regions. In that case, Russia could undergo rapid disintegration, as the Soviet Union did.

- The [Russian original of this article](#) was published on the web site of 24TVCanal. Thanks to Anna Yegorova for the translation.
- Pavel Lisiansky is a Ukrainian human rights activist and director of the Institute for Strategic Studies and Security.

- *About the photo. Nadezhda Sayfutdinova [was detained](#) during a one-person anti-war picket in Yekaterinburg. She had sewed her mouth shut to protest against the war in Ukraine. Sayfutdinova was taken to Police Department No. 5, where ambulance personnel removed the stitches and treated the needle damage. Her sign reads: “We can not stay quiet! War is not peace! Freedom is not slavery! Ignorance is not power! Here are the ties that bind.”*

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We want Ukrainians to have weapons to resist the monster

[A statement](#) by *Feminist Antiwar Resistance* on facebook, 7 May

Recently we have learned that [Spectre Journal](#) republished a manifesto by “Feminists against War” under our name, as if it was written by “Feminist Anti-War Resistance”. This mistake caused a lot of confusion, but also created a necessity for us to state it clearly: most of us support our Ukrainian comrades and sisters in their calls to arm Ukraine!

We have not addressed this question before, because our main activity is mobilizing people in Russia against the war. Moreover, such calls might be read as treason according to new Russian laws, and while the risks of such claims are high, outcomes in Russia are close to zero.

We understand the consequences of growing militarization, but we also know the Russian state from the inside, and we have no illusions about any possibility to negotiate with those who are in power here, who practice and understand only the language of force.

We have been humiliated, harassed, beaten, raped, tortured, and imprisoned by this monster. Today in Ukraine this monster toughens up its violence to the extent that we cannot even imagine.

We admire Ukrainian brave and strong resistance, and most of us want them to have weapons to protect themselves from the monster of the Russian state.

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Simon Pirani

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P.S.

People and Nature

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