

Trend Analysis and Assessment Report

CLASSIFICATION LEVEL: DECLASSIFIED AND AVAILABLE FOR PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION

Report Topic: Short-Term Assessment on the Russo-Ukrainian War

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The Putin administration remains secure amid the Russo-Ukrainian War

Key Takeaway

The Russian government remains secure, given the following factors: media propaganda; the arrest of anti-war protestors; and the increase in support for the Russian cause. Vladimir Putin has asserted control over major media outlets and he passed a measure criminalizing reports that contradict the government's version of events [01]. The amount of anti-war protests remains insignificant compared to the overall Russian population, as approximately 15,000 Russian citizens have been arrested for their dissent. However, it can be observed that there is an increasing trend in symbolic protests that more so protect a protestor's anonymity. We believe that Russia is maintaining the support of several countries, as those countries have a desire to maintain a strategic partnership with Russia. We can assess with high confidence that the Putin administration is secure in Russia from a non-economic standpoint, with high confidence that Russian media is indicating Russian momentum in the war operation, and with moderate confidence that more countries have established their support or indifference to the conflict in order to not compromise their relationship with Russia.

Trend Pattern

A series of recent events indicate that President Putin's authoritarian approach to media and protest mitigation has concealed the true state of the Russo-Ukrainian war from the Russian population and that Russia's position on the international stage has incentivized support for the Russian cause.

- On March 2, the United Nations (UN) General Assembly voted to condemn Russia for its invasion of Ukraine. The resolution, supported by 141 of the assembly's 193 members, passed in a rare emergency session called by the UN Security Council [02]. 35 countries abstained from the vote, while 5 countries voted against the resolution. The 5 countries that voted against the resolution included Belarus, North Korea, Syria, Eritrea, and Russia.
- On March 22, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov met with the ambassadors of BRICS. The countries within this group consist of Brazil, China, India, South Africa, and Russia. The sides discussed current issues on the international agenda with a focus on the situation in and around Ukraine [03]. Russia indicated the effect of economic sanctions on the Russian population and requested military and economic assistance for the war operation.
- On March 2, Russian opposition activist Alexei Navalny called on Russians to stage more protests. Nearly 15,000 have been detained at protests in Russia since the invasion of Ukraine began on February 24, according to the independent protest monitor OVD-Info [04]. Since then, well-known opposition activists have started a national resistance movement that are encouraging disobedience beyond traditional street protests. Anonymous protests have emerged from this, such as writing anti-war messages on Russian currency. Additionally, a Russian artist doused herself in fake blood in St. Petersburg to symbolize the bloodshed in Ukraine on March 27.

- On March 10, rallies were held in Syria at Damascus University in Hama province to show support for and solidarity with Russia. It is reported that 40,000 Syrians have signed up to fight for Russia. On March 17, South African President Cyril Ramaphosa blamed the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) for the Russian invasion, while North Korea blamed it on the United States' "hegemonic policy."
- Russia has enacted two laws, adopted and brought into force on March 4, that criminalize independent war reporting and protesting the war, with penalties of up to 15 years in prison [05]. The laws were passed with no opposition and President Putin signed them the same day they were introduced. On March 16, President Putin stated in a televised press conference that "the cleansing of society of traitors" will strengthen the Russian cause and help solidify unity amongst the Russian population.

Assessment

The call for an emergency session at the UN to vote on condemning Russia demonstrates the potential for long-lasting effects on the international community. The countries in support of the Russian cause have been historically pro-Russian in their policy and rhetoric. We can assess that the abstaining countries remained neutral in order to preserve their relations with Russia. Many countries that rely on imports from Russia aim to preserve their economic stability. Given Russia's highly influential position in the international community, it can be assessed that international support for the Russian cause has increased. When looking at BRICS members, they have been consistently anti-Western since the group's founding in 2006. We can assess that the non-intervention policy of nations within the BRICS group is a major factor in these countries' decision to maintain a neutral stance.

We can assess that anti-war protests have very little impact on the security of the Putin administration in Russia. The swift arrest of protestors has led to symbolic protests, which makes it less likely for individuals to be arrested compared to a traditional street protest. The state-run nature of the media industry in Russia has created a biased perspective amongst the Russian population and is a factor in the minuscule amount of protests in Russia. We can estimate that the longer the Russo-Ukrainian war continues, the more likely it is for the security of the Putin administration to decrease due to economic instability.

Broader Implications

The economic cost for those within BRICS is substantial, as they make up 40 percent of the global GDP. The more the economic stability of countries in the BRICS group decreases, the more likely it is for the non-intervention policy to be broken. If that is the case, international support for the Russian cause would decrease. Due to the current degree of economic sanctions, it is highly likely that it will have a long-lasting effect on the world economy. Russia and Ukraine are major commodities producers, and disruptions have caused global prices to soar, especially for oil and natural gas [06].

Indicators

We will be monitoring news reports to trace the arrest and incarceration rate of anti-war protestors. If the numbers stagnate, we will observe instances of symbolic protests to measure the level of dissent amongst the Russian population. Reports that are released from Russia that differ from the mainstream media will indicate that the Russian government's hold on the media industry remains in place. Additionally, a change in rhetoric from countries that previously abstained will indicate that support for the Russian cause is decreasing. The continuation or escalation of the war operation will indicate that it is more likely for the economic stability of Russia to decrease, meaning that the security of the Putin administration will likely follow the same trend.

Sources

[01] <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/03/07/russia-criminalizes-independent-war-reporting-anti-war-protests#>

[02] <https://www.reuters.com/world/un-general-assembly-set-censure-russia-over-ukraine-invasion-2022-03-02/>

[03] [DNGTS] <https://tass.com/politics/1425741>

[04] <https://www.npr.org/2022/03/07/1084870797/russia-has-reasserted-state-control-over-the-country-s-major-media-companies>

[05] <https://www.wsj.com/livecoverage/russia-ukraine-latest-news-2022-03-11/card/russian-opposition-leader-navalny-calls-for-more-antiwar-protests-fzeGV7VjfkXgrSD67TXV>

[06] <https://blogs.imf.org/2022/03/15/how-war-in-ukraine-is-reverberating-across-worlds-regions/>