

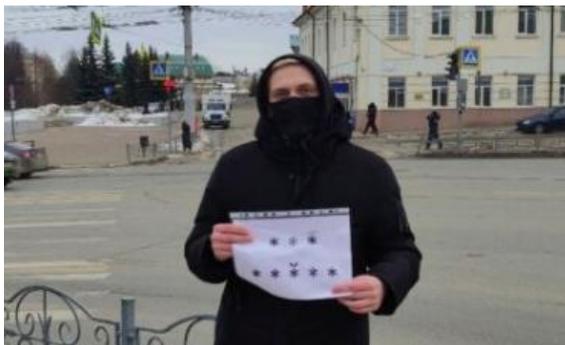
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## Russian media reporting on the ‘operation’ in Ukraine: “Calling War is peace”

Russian state media makes all effort to justify the policies of Putin and hence employs propaganda. Where Ukraine and Western nations call this a war Russian media speak of an “operation.” In [my previous article](#) I wrote that Putin [declared](#) an operation on Ukraine on February 24, 2022, two days after Putin [had announced](#) recognition of the self-proclaimed People’s Republics of Donetsk and Luhansk. In this article I will present how Russian media are presenting this conflict. This presentation is not aimed at justifying their position but at explaining what Russian people who have no access to non-Russian media are hearing. The war is not only fought on the ground but also on the Internet that has been flooded with aggressive informational combats for truth. The Russian official media’s position is clear: war is peace. In this article I will observe the conduct of major Russian mass media regarding the matter.

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“Only official Russian sources possess credible and accurate information”, [stated](#) the [Communications regulator](#). This message was published on February 24, 2022, in order to remind independent mass media in Russia to make sure their position matches the official propaganda. That same day the permanent representative of Russia to the UN Vasily Nebenzya [asked](#) not to refer to the “special operation” as to a war. In the following weeks we have witnessed free media resources [banned](#) one by one for calling the war – war. By that time some of them have already been labeled as “foreign agents” after Duma passed the “[foreign agent law](#)” – a law that obliges an organisation that receives funds from abroad to go through certain legislative procedures, as well as to stick a large sign to every publication of theirs warning that they are funded from the outside (and thus are nearly [enemies of the people](#)).



Source: <https://tjournal.ru/news/561536-aktivista-iz-ivanovo-zaderzhali-za-odinochnyy-piket-on-derzhal-plakat-s-nadpisyu>

Ordinary people who decide to speak up (or remain silent), whether in the street or on social media, are tracked down, detained, and punished. Let’s have a look at some of the actual cases:

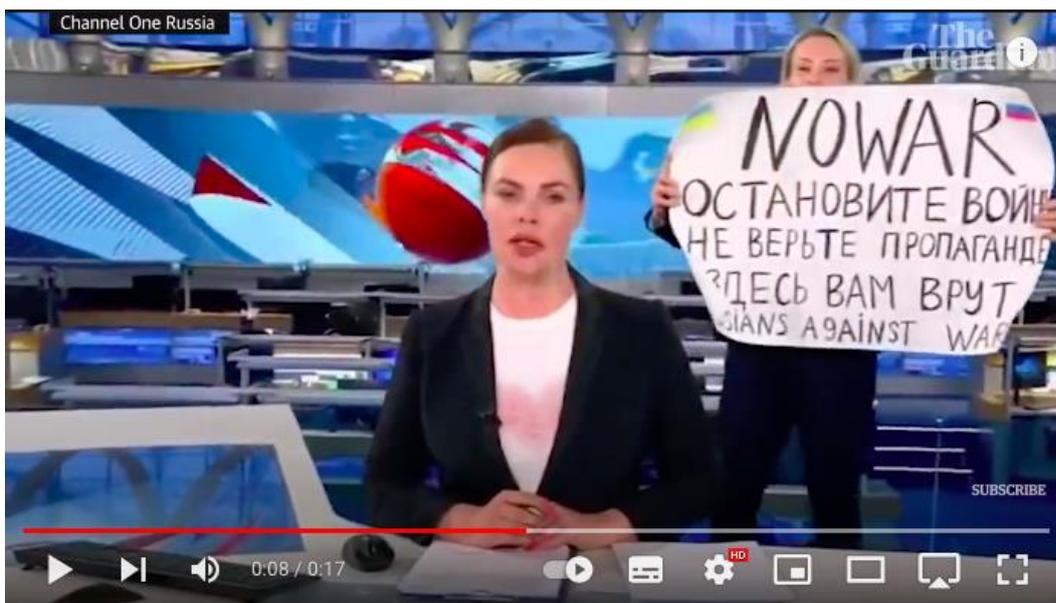
- A Tomsk citizen [was fined](#) for “expressing a silent support for the unlawful purposes” of an anti-war picket.

- A Moscow citizen [was fined](#) for a hat in yellow and blue colours that “expresses an evident negative attitude towards the Armed Forces of Russia.”
- A Sevastopol citizen [was fined](#) for “holding a banner with a slogan, which undermines the credibility of the special operation of defense of the Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics’ citizens.”
- An activist from Ivanovo [was detained](#) for “holding a sign that says “\*\*\* \*\*\*\*\*” (which transparently implies the slogan “net voyneh” / “нет войне” / “no to war”).
- In the Red Square, Moscow, two women were detained in 90 seconds. One of them was holding a sheet of paper that said “two words” (the same ones), another one was trying to express her *support* for the operation ([video](#)).

Saint Petersburg State University, one of the oldest and largest universities of Russia and my alma mater, enthusiastically [expels](#) students (including my friends – young researchers of the humanitarian field) who participated in the anti-war protests in March.

Most of these people might not know the actual causes and goals of the invasion, but their intention is simple and genuine: no to war, no to murder. And this pacifistic message disgusts Putin, perhaps because he is confused: what war are they talking about? There’s no war in Ukraine, as the Kremlin reassures us.

Needless to say, freedom of speech and independent press are targeted by the authorities in the most paranoid and ridiculous forms. Last week Marina Ovsyannikova, former journalist of the main federal TV-channel, [entered](#) the studio during a live news report. She was holding a banner and repeating: “Stop the war. No to war”. Simultaneously she published a [video](#) in which she calls the “operation” a crime and the regime – “anti-human.” Marina confessed that she used to broadcast the propaganda on TV but couldn’t tolerate it any longer. This courageous woman is currently detained under a freshly made law that implies a fine for a public distribution of false information about the acts of the Armed Forces of Russia and for discrediting the Russian army.



Source: <https://youtu.be/URTrPIxHpQA>

Since the beginning of the war, most of the broadcast time on TV is taken up by news and political talk shows, the “special operation” is in the spotlight. After the incident on the central

television, an independent media [published](#) stories told by current and former workers of major TV channels. Some journalists and producers who have worked for them for decades quit the job immediately after the invasion, some were fired for anti-war publications on social media. Everyone feels the tensions that arose in their studios.

Workers of the “NEWS MEDIA holding” [reported](#) that they had been given a manual on what to say and not to say about Ukraine, the West and NATO, sanctions, and such. *The main instruction is not to pronounce the word “war.”* Instead, it is advised to say “the special operation,” “the liberating mission,” etc. They as well must create a positive image of the Russian army, emphasising their humane treatment of civilians. Moreover, journalists are obliged to show faces of ordinary Ukrainians “tired of the Kyiv regime and what is called Bandera’s propaganda,” blame everything on the West, don’t speak too much of the economical crisis and convince the audience that sanctions are beneficial for their country.

Therefore, any individual or entity that publicly questions actions of the Kremlin will be stopped. Official media resources keep [repeating](#): “The operation is going successfully and according to the plan”, and its official purpose is “demilitarisation and denazification of Ukraine”, as well as the “defense of people that have been bullied and exposed to genocide by the Kyiv’s regime” (see my [previous article](#) to learn about Donetsk and Luhansk), and therefore the Armed Forces of Russia “are only targeting military infrastructure and Ukrainian troops”.

The latter statement is extremely controversial. The generation of the 1970’s was brought up believing that the government of Russia has a long tradition of harming its own people, but it could never harm others. Instead, it brings peace, stability, and sustainable development to other nations (Afghanistan in 1979–1989 is one example: the Soviet presence there is often viewed by the West as occupation, but [the industrial infrastructure](#) built by the Soviets in Afghanistan must not be neglected. [Africa and Cuba](#) are other examples). Hence many people refuse to believe that Russian troops are damaging people’s homes and are crushing the civilian population in Ukraine. Reports, photos and videos coming from Ukraine are widely considered fake, while the younger generation tends to believe anything that discredits the Russian Army. The tension between generations is getting more severe.

Someone is evidently killing civilians, including children, in Ukraine. The question is – who? Russian newspapers [report](#) that columns of refugees trying to leave Mariupol are targeted by the Armed Forces of Ukraine. This [report](#) by the UN lists victims of the conflict in the first 5 days, while the Russian embassy in Ukraine “blames the Ukrainian military”, reminding that “Russia is carrying out a special operation which is aimed exclusively at military objects and battalions.” Many in the West have seen footage of a maternity hospital in Mariupol damaged by an airstrike on March 9 (*here I wanted to attach a link to an article that would not pick a side but rather cover the event neutrally but no such report was found*). A Ukrainian media source [blames the](#) horrific event on “enemies,” not specifying these. Another Ukrainian source [was convinced](#) that the hospital in Mariupol was bombarded by the Russian military. Meanwhile, the Kremlin [responded](#) that they themselves “do not have a clear understanding of what happened” and will “certainly ask the military.” Later that day the Ministry of Defense of Russia [claimed](#) that the explosions at the hospital were a “fictional provocation” carried out by Ukraine to impress the audience of Europe and the U.S.

The common response of the Kremlin to people’s confusion about the destruction of civilian objects is that they are used by nationalist battalions. “Ukrainian nationalists murdered civilians that they had previously used as living shields,” [reports](#) one of the leading newspapers.

These days Russia celebrates the 8th anniversary of what is termed the reunion with Crimea. Moscow's Luzhniki, one of the largest stadiums in Russia, held a grandiose [concert](#) in honour of contemporary Russian achievements. Famous singers performed patriotic songs from the times of WWII, in Russia called the Great Patriotic War of 1941–1945.

At the show in Luzhniki the hosts kept exclaiming: “For Russia, for victory, for the president!” This inevitably reminds us of the call “For the faith, for the tsar, for the Motherland” – a slogan used in the Patriotic war of 1812 with Napoleon. Another slogan comes to my mind: “Orthodoxy, Autocracy, and Nationality” – the doctrine of tsar Nicolas I (1825–1855). In Luzhniki Putin quotes the Bible, and the crowd responds with an ecstatic roars. This show vividly reflects today's image of Russia. It consists of three elements: God, the military, and Putin.

After the beginning of the war, Patriarch Kirill, head of the Russian Orthodox Church, [addressed](#) the faithful of the two orthodox countries and called for careful treatment of civilians. However he is traditionally very supportive of the president and did not condemn the war in Ukraine openly. All of this perhaps sounds controversial until we address the official page of the Ministry of Defense. Among enthusiastic and nearly extremist comments of Putin's supporters we find the following images:



Source: Users' comments on the official public page of the Ministry of Defense  
<https://vk.com/mil>

Sadly, throughout history, the church has been used for the political powers at the time. They, at the one hand, seek the support of the ruler and are paying a steep price for this by supporting political propaganda since this makes them lose their credibility with many of the younger generation.

It is often said that truth is the first victim of war. This is sadly also the case in the Russian-Ukrainian war of 2022.

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In conclusion I would like to quote a song known by every Russian. It is "[Mother, we are all gravely sick](#)" by a rock singer Victor Tsoy from the 1980's:

“...A destroyed world, wounded heads,  
a piece of bread broken in two

And there's someone who cries,  
and someone who's quiet  
And someone who's so so glad

Mother, we are all gravely sick  
Mother, I know, we have all gone mad...”

These verses do reflect ongoing controversy and madness of the informational war. People are fed with propaganda, but propaganda is indeed nutritious for them. Russians question the legitimacy of the war, and the media's response is soothing. In the comment section of the previously mentioned page of the Ministry of Defense I ran across statements that left no doubt: some people, large in numbers, are happy with the war. Nevertheless the protest against Putin's actions is immense, and protestors refuse to keep quiet, no matter how hard they are beaten by the police or how cynically restricted from continuing their education or work. And there are those who grieve and those who do not know what to believe.

When someone accuses all Russians of the evil they reportedly have done to Ukraine, that person must keep in mind that among the 150 million Russians there are those who celebrate the war and those who struggle for peace. The propaganda we learned about earlier has, no doubt, sadly its greatest effects on the first group.