

# Amid deepening drone war with Ukraine, Kremlin imposes severe internet and cellphone shutdowns

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Amid an intensifying cyber and drone war with NATO-backed Ukraine, the Kremlin has significantly expanded its efforts to restrict free access to the internet and curtail whatever democratic rights in Russia nominally remain.

Rolling internet and cell network shutdowns are now a feature of everyday life across the country. ATMs, card payments and taxi and ride-sharing apps are frequently not working. Pharmacies, especially in provincial areas, have reported major difficulties obtaining medication. Viktoriya Presnyakova, head of the Association of Independent Pharmacies, explained to the Associated Press that prescriptions had to be logged in special software, which is impossible when there is no internet connection for weeks. Cell phone services are also disabled for days or weeks on end, especially but not only in regions bordering Ukraine, such as Belgorod, which are routinely targeted by drone attacks.

Because of the severe disruptions to social and economic life, the *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* recently called for “a special backup internet access mechanism—a system that allows key digital services to continue operating when communications are shut down.” Already, the Kremlin has created a system where specific websites on a “white list” are able to function, while the rest of the internet is shut down. This “white list,” according to the *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, includes “domestic social networks, large mail and information portals, Yandex ecosystem services, marketplaces (Ozon, Wildberries, Avito), and video hosting services, as well as government resources such as the Gosuslugi portal, government websites, and the president’s website. Users can still communicate, receive news, make purchases, and use basic financial services, but only within the approved list. All other resources, including foreign platforms and messengers, will be unavailable.”

The Kremlin-backed *Izvestiia* reported that the government is now planning to set up an agency to coordinate internet shutdowns.

The shutdowns are connected to the intensification of drone warfare with Ukraine and, in part, aimed at preempting NATO and Ukraine from using telecommunications to launch attacks. The first major internet shutdowns were reported in the capital

Moscow in May during the celebrations of the Soviet victory over the Nazis in World War II. A significant turning point was the Ukraine-NATO “Operation Spiderweb” in early June, when Ukrainian drones launched from trucks attacked military airfields deep inside Russian territory. Sarkis Darbinyan, founder of Russian internet freedom group Roskomsvoboda, told the Associated Press, “They got really scared that drones now may appear, like a jack-in-the-box, in any Russian regions.”

This is precisely what is now occurring. Although there is almost no coverage of it in the pro-NATO Western media, Ukraine now launches daily attacks on Russian territory with drones, targeting both civilian and military infrastructure. The Kremlin reports that it intercepts dozens of drones every night, including in regions far from the front lines. Because of mass drone attacks, airports across the country routinely have to cancel flights. The largest airports in St. Petersburg and Moscow have experienced several major shutdowns since July.

But the Kremlin is also clearly using the escalation of the cyber and drone war with Russia to significantly step up its efforts to prevent Russian workers from accessing news and linking up with their class brothers and sisters internationally. Plans for a closed Russian internet have been in the making for many years, predating the war, and the Kremlin has long imposed some of the most far-reaching censorship laws and measures to curtail the ability of users to hide their IPs through the use of Virtual Private Networks.

Since the beginning of the war, most foreign-based social media apps and platforms, including Meta-owned platforms and Twitter (X), have been banned. WhatsApp, which is very widely used by Russian users, particularly to stay connected with friends and family abroad, still functions but its voice call and message functions have been severely restricted. On September 1, a series of laws came into effect that further complicate and criminalize the use of Virtual Private Networks.

These censorship laws are an intrinsic component of a broader crackdown on democratic rights. On September 29, Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a law on the

withdrawal of Russia from the European Convention of Human Rights.

A Russian supporter of the *World Socialist Web Site* commented,

Although the full scope of this move is not yet clear, there are fears that conditions for prisoners and suspects will be tightened, and that torture may be actively used in the future. Russia has no clear legal norms for combating torture. The normalization of torture has been in full swing since the start of the war in Ukraine. This process accelerated against the backdrop of the tragedy at Crocus City Hall (March 2024), when the perpetrators were publicly tortured, thereby normalizing violence against suspects (whose guilt had not yet been proven at that point), not to mention the fact that torture cannot be used against criminals regardless of the nature of the crime. The issue of torture in Russia has a long history: from tsarist times to the Stalinist bureaucracy with its political genocide. Putin's regime plans to once again resort to the weapons of the tsars and gangsters in an attempt to avoid retribution for its disastrous policies.

The escalating attack on democratic rights comes as NATO, and especially the European imperialist powers, relentlessly ratchet up pressure on Russia. Under these conditions, there are growing calls within the oligarchy for the Kremlin to respond more aggressively on a military level while intensifying its efforts to subordinate all of society to the war effort.

Sergei Karaganov, an influential foreign policy pundit, recently stated at a round table hosted by the Kremlin-aligned think tank Russia in Global Affairs,

Our state and military-political strategy needs to dramatically increase the role of nuclear deterrence. We have relaxed, and so has the rest of the world; the world has stopped fearing war. And we have allowed something completely unimaginable to happen—a sense of impunity has taken hold in the world, especially in the West. Therefore, we need to sharply increase our emphasis on nuclear deterrence, begin to move up the escalation ladder, starting with strikes using conventional weapons, and then, if there is a response, even nuclear weapons, against our opponents in Europe.

He continued,

If we do not defeat them [NATO] decisively now and

put them in their place, I assure you that in two or three years, when Ukraine's human capital is depleted, waves of mercenaries from the poor countries of Central and Eastern Europe will come. For Europeans and, to some extent, Americans, this is not a very big expense. Therefore, we need to end this war as quickly as possible.

Karaganov then went on to emphasize the need for a fundamental “reeducation” of the population in patriotic, Christian values. In a far-right Russian nationalist rant, he declared that Russia was destined to play the role of the “savior of civilization,” “save humanity” from a Third World War but that it had “first” to save Russia itself and establish its hegemony in Northern Eurasia.

Behind the nationalist rants of Karaganov and the attacks on democratic rights stand not efforts to “save” humanity, let alone the Russian working class, from imperialism. The Russian oligarchy, which has emerged out of the Stalinist reaction against the 1917 socialist revolution in Russia and the bureaucracy's destruction of the Soviet Union, uses this rhetoric and these measures to conceal and safeguard its own reactionary social interests. The Putin regime launched the invasion of Ukraine in the interests of that oligarchy, after years of provocations by imperialism, in a desperate effort to reach a negotiated settlement with the imperialist powers to safeguard its own class interests in the region and its “right” to exploit the working class.

Tellingly, despite far-reaching sanctions by the imperialist powers since 2022, Russian oligarchs were able to continue to grow their fortunes amidst the fratricidal war in Ukraine that has claimed hundreds of thousands of lives. According to *Forbes*, between 2024 and 2025, Russia's richest individuals amassed an additional \$20 billion in total wealth, growing their total fortune to a new record \$625.5 billion.

The Kremlin's greatest concern is the development of a unified movement of the Russian and the Ukrainian working class against both imperialism and the rule of the capitalist oligarchy. For workers, the alternative posed is, on the one hand, a future determined by the interests of the oligarchy and imperialism which means unending wars and the threat of nuclear annihilation—or, on the other hand, a return to the path of the 1917 October Revolution, of international class struggle and socialist revolution.



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