



RUSSIAN OCCUPATION UPDATE

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ISW is introducing a new product line tracking activities in Russian-occupied areas of Ukraine. The occupation updates will examine Russian efforts to consolidate administrative control of annexed areas and forcibly integrate Ukrainian citizens into Russian sociocultural, economic, military, and governance systems. This product line is intended to replace the section of the Daily Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment covering activities in Russian-occupied areas of Ukraine.

To read ISW's assessment of how Russian activities in occupied areas of Ukraine are part of a coerced Russification and ethnic cleansing campaign, click [here](#).

Key takeaways:

- **Russian occupation administrations are seizing property throughout occupied Ukraine.**
- **Russia continues to crack down against the Crimean Tatar community in occupied Crimea, often using dubious legal charges to prosecute and detain Crimean Tatars.**
- **Children throughout occupied Ukraine are taking part in the “Zarnitsa 2.0” military-patriotic game—a revived Soviet-era war game aimed at training youth in basic military skills in eventual preparation for service in the Russian military.**

Russian occupation administrations are seizing property throughout occupied Ukraine in order to collect personal information on residents of occupied areas, conduct coerced passportization, and facilitate the relocation of Russian citizens to occupied areas of Ukraine. The Mariupol City occupation administration published updated lists on April 4 and 7 of residential and non-residential properties in Mariupol classified as “ownerless.”[1] The administration instructs residents of Mariupol to submit an application to the occupation Housing and Utilities Department within 30 days of the lists’ publication in order to have ownership restored. The Zaporizhia Oblast occupation administration similarly reported in late March that it is checking properties throughout occupied Zaporizhia Oblast to determine ownership status.[2] The Zaporizhia Oblast occupation administration directed residents of occupied areas to present a Russian passport and other documentation to claim ownership of any property classified as “ownerless.”

Ukrainian officials immediately voiced concerns about the Russian property inventory process. Ukrainian Zaporizhia Oblast Administration Head Ivan Fedorov noted that Russian officials “nationalize” property that they have determined to be “ownerless,” and then auction off property to make a profit.[3] Fedorov also noted that, in some cases, Russian occupation administrators will sell the “stolen” property to Russian soldiers, occupation officials, and other Russian citizens, regardless of whether a Ukrainian resident legally owns the property or not. The Ukrainian Resistance Center suggested that this issue is particularly acute in Mariupol, reporting that the number of properties registered as “ownerless” and nationalized by the occupation administration in 2024 was 5.5 times higher than in 2023.[4] Ukrainian Mariupol Mayoral Advisor Petro Andryushchenko also suggested that Russian officials often falsify ownership documents and property titles in order to deprive Ukrainians of their homes.[5]

Russian occupation officials are likely seizing and nationalizing property in occupied Ukraine to accomplish three objectives. First, the mass nationalization of Ukrainian property lets the Russian government directly profit from the occupation of Ukraine’s towns and cities. The Russian occupation administration in Crimea made an estimated 4.8 billion rubles (\$56 million) from nationalizing Ukrainian property in Crimea between 2022 and 2024 alone, for example.[6] Russia can benefit greatly from extracting economic value from occupied Ukraine to support its struggling domestic economy, as ISW has previously observed.[7] Second, the process of registering properties as “ownerless” facilitates personal data collection and supports passportization efforts. Residents of properties that the occupation administration has classified as “ownerless” must present personal information and documentation to occupation authorities to restore their ownership. The registration process also requires people to present Russian passports, meaning that residents may feel pressured to obtain Russian citizenship out of fear of losing their homes.[8] Finally, the seizure of property from Ukrainian residents allows Russian occupation administrations to give that property to Russian citizens, facilitating the illegal relocation of Russian citizens to occupied areas of Ukraine from Russia.[9]

Russia continues to crack down against the Crimean Tatar community in occupied Crimea, often using dubious legal charges to prosecute and detain Crimean Tatars. The Russian Southern District Court in Rostov-on-Don, Rostov Oblast, requested 17 years imprisonment in a maximum-security penal colony for a group of six Crimean Tatar men from occupied Dzhankoi on April 8.[10] The Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) and other law enforcement agents detained the men during a raid in January 2023 on “terrorist” charges due to their alleged involvement with Hizb ut-Tahrir—an international pan-Islamic fundamentalist organization that has historically been active in Central Asia and Crimea and that is banned in Russia. Crimean human rights organizations that reviewed the case materials of the “Dzhankoi Six” noted that there was no evidence that the men were planning for or preparing to commit any sort of terror attack and that the Russian occupation administration is prosecuting them because of their Crimean Tatar identities and their involvement in Muslim community organizations.[11]

The Crimean occupation administration has frequently targeted Crimean Tatar communities on tenuous “terrorism” charges, promoting the claim that Crimean Tatar identity is inherently dangerous by affiliating it with Hizb ut-Tahrir.[12] The Russian occupation Supreme Court of Crimea additionally sentenced another Crimean Tatar man to five years in prison on April 4 on the charge of communicating with the Ukrainian military.[13] Chairman of the Crimean Tatar Mejlis Refat Chubarov warned on April

1 that the FSB launched a new wave of mass searches and repressive actions against Crimean Tatars, breaking into homes and seizing personal documents from various Crimean Tatar households.[14]

Children throughout occupied Ukraine are taking part in the “Zarnitsa 2.0” military-patriotic game—a revived Soviet-era war game aimed at training youth in basic military skills in eventual preparation for service in the Russian military. “Zarnitsa 2.0” brands itself as an “all-Russian military-patriotic game in a qualitatively new, modern format using digital technologies,” intended to teach children aged seven to 17 “traditional values” and “modern challenges” such as cyber warfare and drone operations.[15] Children and youth registered in “Zarnitsa 2.0” create squad-sized “detachments” that compete against other “detachments” for points and ranking on a national leaderboard, which notably includes teams from occupied Ukraine. “Zarnitsa 2.0” is a creation of the Russian Movement of the First and Yunarmia (Young Army Cadets National Movement) youth military-patriotic movements, both of which have active presences in occupied Ukraine and strive to militarize Ukrainian youth via various military-patriotic education and training courses.[16] The municipal (city-level) stage of “Zarnitsa 2.0” competitions is currently underway in Russia and occupied Ukraine until April 16.[17] “Zarnitsa 2.0” competitions concluded in some towns in occupied Luhansk Oblast on April 9, including in occupied Bilovodsk and Sverdlovsk.[18] Over 12,000 youth from occupied Luhansk Oblast alone reportedly registered for “Zarnitsa 2.0” in February and March 2025.[19] “Zarnitsa 2.0” is part of a wider Russian ecosystem operating throughout occupied Ukraine with the explicit purpose of militarizing Ukrainian children, indoctrinating them against their Ukrainian identities, and training them to fight for the Russian military against their fellow Ukrainians.[20]

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[3] https://t.me/ivan_fedorov_zp/18067

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[6] <https://krymsos dot com/krymsos-naczionalizacziya-obyektiv-prava-vlasnosti-instrument-tysku-na-neloyalnyh-meshkancziv-krymu/>

[7] <https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-occupation-update-april-8-2025>

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