

Deep Russia: **THIS WAR IS FOR THE LONG HAUL**

What Russians discussed on "VKontakte" and "Telegram" from 27 July to 2 August

Period	27 July - 2 August 2026
Platforms	VKontakte, Telegram (regional communities)



Key Findings

Throughout July, nothing indicated that the Kremlin is ready to make concessions on issues of the war. The Kremlin's basic conditions in its July statements were not new. Russian speakers again referred to the package formulated by Putin on 14 June 2024: the complete withdrawal of the Armed Forces of Ukraine from Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson Oblasts within their administrative borders, Ukraine's official renunciation of NATO, neutral and non-nuclear status, demilitarization, "denazification", legal recognition of the Russian annexations and the lifting of sanctions. **During the period, Russian diplomacy demonstrated a readiness to talk with the United States, but not a readiness to lower its own demands.**

The dominant expectation of the regional public is that the war will last a long time. At the same time, what is growing in many regions is not belief in a specific scenario of victory or defeat, but a desire for any cessation of hostilities at all.

In a number of regions, responsibility for the continuation of the war is increasingly personalized and placed on Vladimir Putin and the federal leadership. **At the same time, criticism of the authorities does not always mean an anti-war position.** Part of the Z-audience blames the leadership not for continuing the war as such, but for insufficient harshness, for refusing more massive strikes, or for an unwillingness to destroy Ukraine faster.

Rhetoric changes fastest under strikes on a region, and the direction of the change depends on the existing background. Where militaristic vocabulary previously dominated, strikes produce escalation; where people are not used to strikes, they produce a demand to end it.

Propaganda, censorship and bot activity continue to sustain the appearance of significant public support for the war until Russia's complete victory.

The week was also saturated with air raid alerts in Russia's regions. The greatest attention was drawn by **strikes on Wildberries logistics centers**. In terms of reach, this was the most widespread topic of the week.

The report that **Pavel Durov had been put on the international wanted list** on charges of facilitating terrorism spread widely on both platforms. According to the official version, it concerned the "Daivinchik/Leo" bot, through which teenagers were allegedly recruited. At the center of the discussion was the version about political pressure on Durov. Comparisons of him with opposition figures became widespread.

1. THIS WAR IS FOR THE LONG HAUL

Statements in the media

Throughout July, nothing indicated that the official Kremlin is ready to make concessions on issues of the war. The Kremlin's basic conditions in its July statements were not new. Russian speakers again referred [to the package formulated by Putin on 14 June 2024](#): the complete withdrawal of the Armed Forces of Ukraine from Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson Oblasts within their administrative borders, Ukraine's official renunciation of NATO, neutral and non-nuclear status, demilitarization, "denazification", legal recognition of the Russian annexations and the lifting of sanctions.

Throughout July, Peskov constantly made statements that [everything can proceed along a peaceful trajectory only when the "Kyiv regime" shows "good will"](#) and a readiness to take "important decisions", that they need [someone in Kyiv who will "take responsibility"](#) and will take a decision that allows the "Special Military Operation" to be concluded. He stated that [it is enough for Kyiv to "take difficult decisions"](#), after which hostilities could quickly stop and move into "serious, difficult negotiations", and that ["this could all end today by the end of the day, if Kyiv takes the appropriate decisions"](#).

At the same time, the reality of the front does not match the Kremlin's optimism. [ISW](#) on 4 July compared the statements by Putin and Russian commanders about 133 settlements and more than 3,000 sq km with its own verification. The institute saw evidence of only approximately 621.7 sq km of seizures or incursions since the beginning of 2026, and also emphasized that Russian claims about Kostiantynivka did not correspond to the state of control on the ground. [ISW](#) on 22 July put in its key takeaways that the Kremlin is repeating maximalist war aims against the backdrop of an absence of operationally significant successes. [Bloomberg](#) on 22 July spelled out the internal plan: a return to negotiations only after the complete capture of Donetsk Oblast, which the Russian Ministry of Defense had allegedly promised Putin by the end of 2026; at the same time, a source close to the Ministry of Defense called this timetable unrealistic and pushed control over Donbas back to 2027.

During the period, Russian diplomacy demonstrated a readiness to talk with the United States, but not a readiness to lower its own demands. On 23 July, [Lavrov](#) during a meeting with Marco Rubio in Manila conveyed to the American side the "real state of affairs on the line of contact" and called further weapons supplies to Ukraine "unacceptable". The Kremlin also consistently tried to push Europe away from the negotiating format. [Lavrov in Manila](#) linked European policy with an alleged desire to inflict a "strategic defeat" on Russia.

On 26 July, [Putin stated](#) that the Special Military Operation will "undoubtedly, sooner or later" end, and expressed confidence in Russia's victory, but did not name any deadlines or concessions.

Main discussions

In most of the regions studied, the public **does not expect a quick end to the war**. The conflict is perceived as **protracted** or as having already moved into **a chronic phase**.

Most often the basis for such a conclusion is internal administrative processes that point to the continued recruitment of contract soldiers, payments to servicemen and their families, statements by the authorities, the prosecutor's office's work on the rights of the families of "Special Military Operation veterans", expectations of a new mobilization, regular drone attacks and the increasingly noticeable economic and everyday consequences of the war.

Novosibirsk Oblast

"😂😂😂 Western ones? Well then you will not finish even in 2030 either" — July 31 at 15:43, ♥2

It is important to distinguish between the public's expectations and its desired scenario. Even where people want peace as soon as possible, they often do not believe it will come any time soon.

Main scenarios for the end of the war

- 1) **Absence of a specific scenario.** A significant portion of people do not discuss who should win or on what terms the war should end. Their demand comes down to a halt to attacks, the return of servicemen and the normalization of everyday life.

Kaluga

"When will this ever end 😞" — July 28 at 11:10, ♥3

- 2) **A freeze or agreements.** This scenario is discussed more often among the audience that is tired of the war and its consequences. They assume the war may be stopped after the resources of either Ukraine or Russia are exhausted.

Tatarstan

"100%. Ukraine's resources are not infinite, and the West will not keep lending on top of old debts. The math here is simple. Their defeat is a matter of time 100 100 100" — July 30 at 22:48, ♥18

- 3) **Russia's victory and the achievement of the goals declared by the Kremlin.** This option is actively supported by supporters of the authorities, the Z-audience and bots. Within this rhetoric, a freeze or compromise is perceived as unacceptable, and heavy losses are explained by the need to "see the matter through to the end". The thesis of victory is sustained mainly by arguments about Russia's size and status.

Factors behind changes in sentiment

Public attitudes change most strongly where the war begins to directly affect everyday life. Regular strikes, air raid alerts, the deaths of local servicemen, fuel shortages, power

outages, rising prices and the degradation of housing and communal services intensify fatigue and the demand for an end to hostilities.

In Perm Krai, rhetoric changed noticeably after regular attacks starting in May. In Samara Oblast, intensified strikes on Samara, Syzran, Novokuybyshevsk and Tolyatti caused panic and growing support for comments about the need to end the war. In Kemerovo Oblast, an additional factor was unmanned aerial vehicle attacks in neighboring Omsk Oblast and the preparation of shelters.

Samara

"Back in 2022 it was already clear that there is no such thing as a one-sided war. I feel sorry for the country, sorry for the people who understand." — August 2 at 20:01, ♥91

In the occupied Ukrainian territories, people are more afraid to express their position directly and will probably remain afraid to the end. The public in the Temporarily Occupied certain areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions understands that their current authorities are set on continuing. Because of this, the atmosphere there is fairly oppressive, since they understand that the peace they so await is unlikely to come soon.

Attitudes toward the authorities

In some regions, responsibility for the continuation of the war is increasingly personalized and placed on Vladimir Putin and the federal leadership. **At the same time, criticism of the authorities does not always mean an anti-war position.** Part of the Z-audience blames the leadership not for continuing the war as such, but for insufficient harshness, for refusing more massive strikes, or for an unwillingness to destroy Ukraine faster.

Kemerovo Oblast

"Awful, so funny 🤔🤔🤔 Or does he really think that in peacetime the population has nothing to do. What a 🤔 He unleashed a war, turned the whole world away from the country and sits there laughing 🤔" — July 29 at 7:04, ♥118

Omsk

"In the rotting countries of the West and Europe, terrorists and Nazis supply their population with new breeding grounds in the form of schools, hospitals and so on. Meanwhile in prosperous Russia the Holy Great Leader and his brilliant comrades are building universal trenches with dugouts by leaps and bounds." — July 28 at 13:32, ♥19

Limitations of the analysis. Sentiment must be assessed taking into account the systematic deletion of critical comments, bot activity and self-censorship. The visible picture is systematically skewed toward the loyal. In a number of regions, bots create the impression that demands for "victory" dominate, while the real audience either stays silent or supports anti-war statements with likes. This applies especially to the Temporarily Occupied certain areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions, where the number of bots, according to monitoring data, may exceed the number of real commentators.

Conclusions

The dominant expectation of the regional public is that the war will last a long time. At the same time, what is growing in many regions is not belief in a specific scenario of victory or defeat, but a desire for any cessation of hostilities at all.

Rhetoric changes fastest under strikes on a region, and the direction of the change depends on the existing background. Where militaristic vocabulary previously dominated, strikes produce escalation; where people are not used to strikes, they produce a demand to end it.

Propaganda, censorship and bot activity continue to sustain the appearance of significant public support for the war until Russia's complete victory.

2. The week in Russian regional "VKontakte" and "Telegram"

Top discussions on Telegram and VKontakte

A new wave of drone and missile alerts and strikes on logistics warehouses

The week was saturated with air raid alerts in Russia's regions. The greatest attention was drawn by strikes on Wildberries logistics centers in Ryazan, Volgograd, Penza, Samara, Sarapul in Udmurtia and Koledino in Moscow Oblast. In terms of reach, this was the most widespread topic of the week: 3,005 posts were recorded on Telegram across 63 regions, and 1,371 posts on VK across 68 regions. In total, the posts collected more than 14.5 thousand comments.

Most often, commentators were outraged that during massive attacks the sirens did not go off or sounded late, and that official messages contained no specific information about impact sites. They separately criticized notifications via the MAX app, which not all users received. In parallel, an everyday habituation to constant alerts could be traced. Discussion of the published maps of bomb shelters also quickly turned into mockery of the actual condition of the shelters. The audience questioned the point of publishing lists of shelters if the premises themselves are unfit for use.

Volgograd

"Elizaveta, a basement is not a shelter, it is a basement 🤡" — August 1 at 1:45, ♥8

Another noticeable line was criticism of the war as a process that benefits the elites. Comments featured assertions about "the oligarchy and rising prices", and the strikes themselves as proof that the situation is not "under control".

Less numerous but noticeable was a bellicose reaction with calls for a "response". Such discussions featured comparisons with the abduction of Maduro, and under the most emotional posts, dehumanizing vocabulary toward the enemy.

Samara

"Saved the people of Donbas" — August 2 at 16:02, ♥58

Because of the strikes on Wildberries warehouses, people discussed delivery delays and difficult conditions for returning goods, and said they were switching to Ozon. At the same time, a rumor spread that Wildberries is looking for warehouses to rent in Kazakhstan, since Russian property owners are allegedly refusing to cooperate because of the high risks.

Some commentators linked the series of strikes to the fact that in the same week Wildberries founder Tatyana Kim was added to the Ukrainian Myrotvorets database for

"public support for Russia". In this perception, the attacks on the company's logistics infrastructure were seen as a logical event.

Fuel restrictions: QR codes in some regions, lifting of limits in others

This week the fuel situation looked increasingly uneven. In Moscow, St. Petersburg and Leningrad Oblast, large petrol station chains began to ease or completely lift restrictions on fuel sales. However, in Nizhny Novgorod Oblast and a number of other regions, petrol began to be dispensed only with a QR code via the MAX app. In Kirov, Orenburg and Chelyabinsk Oblasts, official statements about the "normalization" of the situation diverged noticeably from what people on the ground saw, as the queues at filling stations had not gone anywhere.

The main topic of discussion was the inequality between the capital and the regions. Users accused the authorities of directing fuel primarily to Moscow, and perceived reports of the lifting of limits as news that does not concern most of the country.

No less irritation was caused by the QR code system via MAX. Commentators complained about being effectively forced to install the app, and about the inconvenience for elderly people and those who use push-button phones. Part of the audience saw in this yet another "test of obedience", comparing the new system with COVID QR codes.

A separate practical problem was the "even/odd" rule, under which one can only refuel on designated days. Comments described cases where transit vehicles were refused fuel, and families with children were forced to wait for "their day" out in the open. Users advised one another on how to document such refusals and file complaints against filling stations.

Another line of discussion concerned distrust of official statistics. In Novosibirsk, users questioned Rosstat data on a 10.4% rise in petrol prices over the week, citing prices at specific filling stations which, in their words, did not match the published figures.

Samara

"That is exactly why the luminaries of our medicine should be in the shelled cities and regions, and not looking after the condition of high-ranking old asses in the capital! They will take excellent care of themselves abroad too. The best doctors should be saving the injured. First and foremost - the little ones. My condolences to the parents, it does not fit in my head... And they are still threatening to fight for 15 years... build proper capital shelters for ordinary people! Regular alerts, so there is at least a tiny chance of surviving." — July 29 at 17:16, ♥165

Running through all the discussions was an argument about the causes of the shortage. Some blamed "panickers" who stock up on fuel en masse and themselves create the frenzy. Others insisted that the problem is not invented and that at many filling stations there really is no petrol, regardless of official statements and explanations.

The international manhunt for Pavel Durov and the case against Telegram

The Federal Security Service reported that Pavel Durov had been put on the international wanted list on charges of facilitating terrorism. According to the official version, it

concerned the "Daivinchik/Leo" bot, through which teenagers were allegedly recruited. Over the course of the day the information changed several times. At first it was reported that the decision had already been taken, then that it was only under consideration. This confusion itself became an occasion for irony. Users noted that "the headline contradicts the text", and joked: "first we are looking for him, then we are not".

The news spread widely on both platforms. On Telegram, 944 posts were recorded across 76 regions, and on VK, 413 posts across 70 regions. In total, the posts collected more than 6.6 thousand comments.

At the center of the discussion was the version about political pressure on Durov. Commentators linked the case with the Telegram founder's unwillingness to hand over control of the messenger and with his competition with the state MAX app. Some recalled that among MAX's owners is the son of Sergey Kiriyyenko.

Comparisons of Durov with opposition figures became widespread. Comments featured formulations along the lines of "they have found another Navalny". In parallel, users compared his case with the absence of prosecution of influential officials and businessmen accused of large-scale corruption.

The logic of the accusation itself was also criticized. Commentators drew analogies with manufacturers of knives, weapons or cars, whose products can also be used by criminals. They discussed why responsibility is placed on the platform's creator rather than on the individuals who created the specific bot or used it for recruitment.

Perm

*"Let us then also prosecute the mobile networks, since scammers call through them" —
July 29 at 9:08, ♥40*

A significant part of the discussion consisted of meme and entertainment content. Users joked about Durov changing his avatar, about "jars of his sperm" and about his numerous "biological children", who might now allegedly also come under suspicion.

A smaller but noticeable part of the audience supported the official version. Such commentators considered the prosecution justified, citing the fact that minors really could have been recruited through the platform.

Explosion at a restaurant on Kudrinskaya Square in Moscow

On the evening of 1 August, an improvised explosive device went off near the entrance to the Balzi Rossi restaurant on Kudrinskaya Square. The number of dead is estimated at up to five, and the injured at up to 21. It later emerged that on that evening the restaurant was closed for a private banquet marking the birthday of Aerospace Forces general Sergey Chaika. It was precisely this detail that largely determined the audience's subsequent reaction.

The greatest support went to comments about the contrast between a closed celebration by the military leadership in an expensive restaurant and the deaths of mobilized men at the front. Authors called the banquet a "feast during the plague" and were outraged that

representatives of the high command were celebrating in an expensive establishment against the backdrop of mass losses among servicemen.

The second most resonant storyline was about the posthumous Tigran Keosayan prize awarded to the security guard who stopped the woman with the explosives. Part of the audience considered a million rubles insufficient compensation, especially compared with the likely cost of the banquet itself. Comments proposed giving the dead man's family an apartment or placing all the costs on the party's guests. Some users also criticized the form of the award itself. In their view, awarding a prize named after a propagandist devalues the memory of a person who saved the lives of others.

Another line of discussion concerned the changes in the official versions of the event. At first a gas leak was named as a possible cause, and only later did the National Anti-Terrorism Committee confirm the use of explosives. Commentators saw this as a familiar scheme: first voice a domestic explanation, and only then admit a terrorist attack.

The patriotically minded part of the audience demanded tighter border controls, restrictions on the entry of Ukrainian citizens and the return of the death penalty for terrorism.

A significant share of the comments consisted of sincere condolences to the family of the killed security guard. Users asked for his name to be made public so that in the public space he would not remain a faceless "security guard", but would be named as a person who stopped the attack at the cost of his own life.

Finland is cutting Russia's international internet traffic

The Finnish energy company Fingrid announced that from 2027 it will stop servicing the power transmission line pylons on which fiber-optic cables are placed. According to available estimates, this could affect up to 30% of communication channels between Russia and Finland. It is precisely through the Finnish direction, as the posts noted, that 60–70% of Russia's foreign internet traffic passes. On Telegram the topic spread noticeably more than on VK: 37 posts in 21 regions against 13 posts in seven regions.

The most common reaction was jokes about the "Cheburnet" and comparisons of Russia with North Korea. The audience perceived a possible reduction in traffic as yet another stage of self-isolation, for which, in commentators' view, the country had been prepared in advance.

Separately, there were technical objections to an excessively alarmist presentation of the news and assertions that claims of a large-scale shutdown of the Russian internet were exaggerated. One such remark, citing a "source in the telecom market", was repeated in regional chats many times over with almost no changes. This indicates that the rebuttal was being spread by bots.

A smaller part of the audience, on the contrary, supported further isolation of the internet. Its proponents argued that restricting access to external resources would allegedly help

protect young people from "degradation". Comments also featured historical parallels with the Winter War of 1939–1940 and jokes about a possible "return of Karelia".

Kaluga

"We will be conducting the special military operation in Alaska and Finland." — July 29 at 8:03

Only on VK: Public Opinion Foundation poll on 70% trust in Putin

The pro-Kremlin Public Opinion Foundation published the results of a poll according to which 70% of Russians trust Putin and the same share rate his work positively. The same report cited a forecast of voting in the State Duma elections: 35% for United Russia and 10% each for the Communist Party of the Russian Federation and the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia.

The news spread significantly more on VK than on Telegram: 78 posts in 30 regions against eight posts in seven regions.

The audience's reaction was predominantly ironic. Most often users questioned the poll's sample itself and mocked the very plausibility of such a high rating. Comments suggested that respondents had been sought among public sector employees or directly in the State Duma building.

Sincere support was also present in the comments. Some users wrote that they had voted for Putin in 2018 and 2024 and continue to support him without reservations.

However, the overall tone of the discussion was set not by these voices, but by distrust of the poll and a sarcastic attitude toward the published 70%.

Altai Krai

"Show me these seven of them 🤔" — August 1 at 7:00, ♥35

↳ *"Vadim, you cannot show those who do not exist)" — August 1 at 7:34, ♥28*

Methodology

What this project is. Systematic monitoring of sentiment in Russian regions — with a focus on critical and negative posts as an indicator of what irritates, frightens or outrages people. The conclusions rest on two parallel sources from monitoring regional VKontakte groups and Telegram.

VKontakte and Telegram. Automated data collection in regional Russian communities on VKontakte (536 groups) and Telegram (428 channels) — regional news channels, local public groups, oblast media, local "chat bots" with audiences ranging from several thousand to hundreds of thousands of subscribers. Coverage — all Russian regions and the occupied territories of Ukraine. Observations by regional analysts were used in addition.

Quotes in the report text are given verbatim.