The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Nemtsov Report Details Human and Financial Costs of War in Ukraine

By Anna Dolgov

May 12, 2015



A fighter with the separatist self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic Army sits at a checkpoint along a road from the town of Vuhlehirsk to Debaltseve in Ukraine, in this picture taken Feb. 18, 2015.

About 70 Russian soldiers were killed early this year in eastern Ukraine's Debaltseve alone, in addition to at least 150 others who died during major battles last August, according to excerpts from a long-awaited report by murdered opposition leader Boris Nemtsov quoted by Russian media.

Nemtsov, who was shot and killed in central Moscow on Feb. 27, had begun the work on the report early this year to counter pro-Kremlin rhetoric deluging Russians from television screens, according to the document, quoted Tuesday by the RBC news portal. Nemtsov's allies, who have completed the report titled "Putin. War," have said it will be released later in the day.

“I know what needs to be done,” Nemtsov is quoted in the report as telling his allies. “We need to write a report 'Putin. War,' publish it in huge numbers and hand it out on the streets. We will tell how Putin unleashed this war. That's the only way to defeat propaganda.”

The report is based on interviews with families of Russian troops who fought in Ukraine and their representatives — many of whom were later frightened into silence by Nemtsov’s shooting death within a stone’s throw from the Kremlin, Nemtsov's allies have said.

According to those sources, at least 150 Russian soldiers were killed in eastern Ukraine in August, 2014 alone, when Moscow-backed separatists rebuffed an advance by Kiev's government forces near Ilovaisk, RBC reported.

The soldiers' families received 2 million rubles each ($39,000 at the current rate), after signing pledges to not disclose the circumstances of their loved ones deaths,RBC quoted the report as saying.

About 70 more Russian soldiers were killed in January-February this year in battles around Debaltseve, according to figures Nemtsov gathered from the troops' families and their representatives, RBC reported.

But by then, Russia had started discharging troops from the army before sending them to Ukraine, and the Defense Ministry refused to pay compensation it had promised to the soldiers' families, the report said.

The financial burden of Russia's annexation of Crimea a year ago, and its support for separatist rebels in Ukraine's east is also staggering, according to economists' estimates cited in the report.

Russia has spent 53 billion rubles from state coffers in the 10 months of the conflict in eastern Ukraine, according to estimates by the head of macroeconomic studies at the esteemed Higher School of Economics, Sergei Aleksashenko, one of the co-authors of the report, according to RBC.

The costs included 21 billion rubles ($1 billion) to operate a force of 6,000 Russian “volunteer” soldiers in Ukraine, another 25 billion rubles to support 30,000 local insurgents, and 7 billion rubles for the maintenance and repairs of military machines, Aleksashenko said, RBC reported.

Since July 2014, Russia has also spent 80 billion rubles to support “refugees” from the Donetsk and Luhansk regions in eastern Ukraine, according to Aleksashenko's estimates, the report said.

As for the annexation of Crimea, ordinary Russians paid for it with 2.75 trillion rubles in lost wages and savings — an estimate based primarily on price hikes that followed Western sanctions against Moscow, according to the report.

A spokesman for the Kremlin declined to comment on the report, saying he was not familiar

with it and could not say if Russian President Vladimir Putin would look into it.

The 64-page report, divided into 11 chapters, follows the crisis in Ukraine starting from the street protests that toppled the country's previous, Moscow-backed administration — events that the report said prompted the Kremlin to begin planning to seize Crimea.

Ilya Yashin, who was an aide to Nemtsov, accused Putin of lying to Russians by waging the war amid denials of involvement.

"The war with Ukraine is an undeclared war, a vile cynical war which amounts to a crime against all of the Russian nation. Putin will go down in history as the president who made Russians and Ukrainians foes," he told a news conference on the report.

Despite Nemtsov's plans for a large-scale distribution on the streets, only 2,000 copies of the report have been published so far, Yashin said, adding that Nemtsov's associates were starting a fundraising campaign to fund the printing of more issues for a wider distribution, RBC reported.

(Reuters/MT)

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2015/05/12/nemtsov-report-details-human-and-financial-costs-of-war-in-ukraine-a46471