

# Why Is Russia Bombing Its Own City?

[Michele A. Berdy's The Word's Worth](#)

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*Воронеж: Voronezh, a town south of Moscow*

For the uninitiated, reading the Russian newspapers these days can be terribly upsetting. One headline shouts: Ни дня без бомбёжки Воронежа (Not a day goes by that Voronezh isn't bombed). The author writes: Только вчера властные пацаны заправили самолёты и полетели бомбить Воронеж (Just yesterday the government boys fueled up the planes and took off to bomb Voronezh.)

Poor Voronezh! What did it ever do to anyone?

Okay, just a little end-of-the-week humor. These are real quotes from the Russian media, but “бомбить Воронеж” is code for “hurt yourself to punish someone else.” Specifically: Нельзя в ответ на санкции бомбить Воронеж (We can't bomb Voronezh in response to sanctions.) That is, counter-sanctions, such as outlawing the import of drugs, medical equipment and other essential goods that Russia does not yet manufacture at all or in sufficient scale hurts the folks in, say, Voronezh more than it hurts Acme Drug Manufacturing Company in upstate New York.

If the rather darkly humorous phrase бомбить Воронеж catches on, it will be another Russian version of “to cut off your nose to spite your face.” Right now that utterly ridiculous human tendency is expressed in Russian with a number of witty expressions involving the word назло (to spite). I've had occasion to mention one before, but if you missed it, here is a collection of verbal spite, expanded and updated.

First there is the classic Назло бабушке отморожу уши (Just to spite Grandma, I'll freeze my ears off), an act committed every winter by teenagers more concerned with their hair than their health. Another version of this is Назло маме отморожу нос (To spite Mom I'll freeze my nose off). So far these are the only body parts under threat.

If you don't like that expression, you can choose from a variety of options, most of which seem home-made and not very widespread, but are very funny. For some reason, conductors (ticket-takers) on street transportation get the worst of it. There is the simple: Идти пешком назло кондуктору (Walk just to spite the bus conductor). Or you can threaten a dramatic

gesture, more affordable in Soviet times than now: Назло кондуктору возьму сто билетиков и отправлюсь пешком (Just to spite the conductor I'll buy 100 tickets and go on foot). Or to really spite him, you might do this: Назло кондуктору возьму билет, пешком пойду в другую сторону (Just to spite the conductor, I'll buy a ticket and then walk in the opposite direction). Take that... someone.

If you want a country version, you can say the rhyming назло врагам козу продам (to spite my enemies I'll sell my goat) or even назло мужу сяду в лужу (to spite my husband I'll sit in a puddle).

Of course, most of the time you don't say this about yourself. You say this when your significant other storms in from work, furious that his boss needs a perfectly done report by 9 a.m. so he can present it as his to the board of directors. Amid the kicking of furniture and flinging of clothing, he shouts: Назло ему я напишу все цифры неправильные! (To spite him I'll put all the wrong figures in.) That's when you chime in with назло врагам козу продам and wait for your spouse to realize a poorly written report would hurt him more than his boss.

In these circumstances, you might also say reasonably but tactfully: Себе хуже делаешь (You're making it worse for yourself.) Or: Ну зачем против себя поступаешь? (But why would you want to act against yourself?) /If you are trying to reason with him — perhaps after pouring a large glass of something 100 proof — you might say: Но милый, ты же себе окажешь медвежью услугу (But dear, you'll be doing yourself a disservice.)

If reasoning (or alcohol) brings your furious spouse to his senses, he might redirect his aim and start thinking up ways to punish his tormentor.

Russian to the rescue!

It has two other useful expressions concerning spiteful actions. Не рой другому яму, сам в неё попадёшь (Don't dig a hole for someone else, chances are you'll fall into it yourself). And then there is the useful reminder: Не плюй в колодец, пригодится воды напиться (Don't spit into the well — you'll drink from it, too.)

Instant karma по-русски.

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