

Siberian Journalists Face Prison for 'Fake' War Reporting

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The Russian Defense Ministry building. [Photobank Moscow-Live / flickr \(CC BY-NC-SA 2.0\)](#)

Two Siberian journalists face up to 10 years in prison for allegedly spreading “fake news” about Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

The cases are among the [first instances](#) of Russia using its new law against spreading false information about the Russian army to target a news outlet for its reporting, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists.

“This sets a very worrying precedent and shows that the Russian authorities will not hesitate to put into practice a law that blatantly violates press freedom by enforcing de facto censorship,” said Gulnoza Said, CPJ’s Europe and Central Asia program coordinator.

Authorities detained Mikhail Afanasyev, the chief editor of the republic of Khakassia’s Novyi Fokus outlet, and Sergei Mikhailov, founder of the Listok weekly in the neighboring republic of Altai, on Wednesday.

Both journalists face charges of “deliberately spreading false information” about the Russian military’s actions, a newly passed criminal offense that carries a maximum punishment of 10 years in prison.

Investigators [accuse](#) Afanasyev of publishing “inaccurate information” in an April 4 report on 11 Khakassia riot police officers refusing deployment in Ukraine, according to the *Kommersant* daily.

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Police searched Afanasyev’s home, the Net Freedoms project [reported](#) Thursday. The next day, the court ruled to detain Afanasyev pending trial.

An Altai court ruled Thursday to place Mikhailov in pre-trial detention on charges of spreading “false information” about the war out of “political hatred and enmity,” according to *Kommersant*. Net Freedoms said several cases against Mikhailov have been combined into one.

Investigators also seized documents and equipment during searches at *LISTok*’s office, *Kommersant* said.

An Altai court fined the newspaper’s publisher and its director under another new law against “discrediting” the Russian military’s actions and is expected to deliver another verdict against *LISTok* for alleged “calls for sanctions” against Russia.

Amnesty International called for Afanasyev and Mikhailov’s release and a repeal of the new law.

“The Russian authorities’ crackdown on independent media is escalating at breakneck speed,” Marie Struthers, AI’s director for Eastern Europe and Central Asia, [said](#).

“Evidently unsatisfied with merely blocking critical news sites or forcing reporters into exile, the Kremlin now seeks to incarcerate journalists who report on anti-war protests or Russian soldiers who refuse to fight in Ukraine.”

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