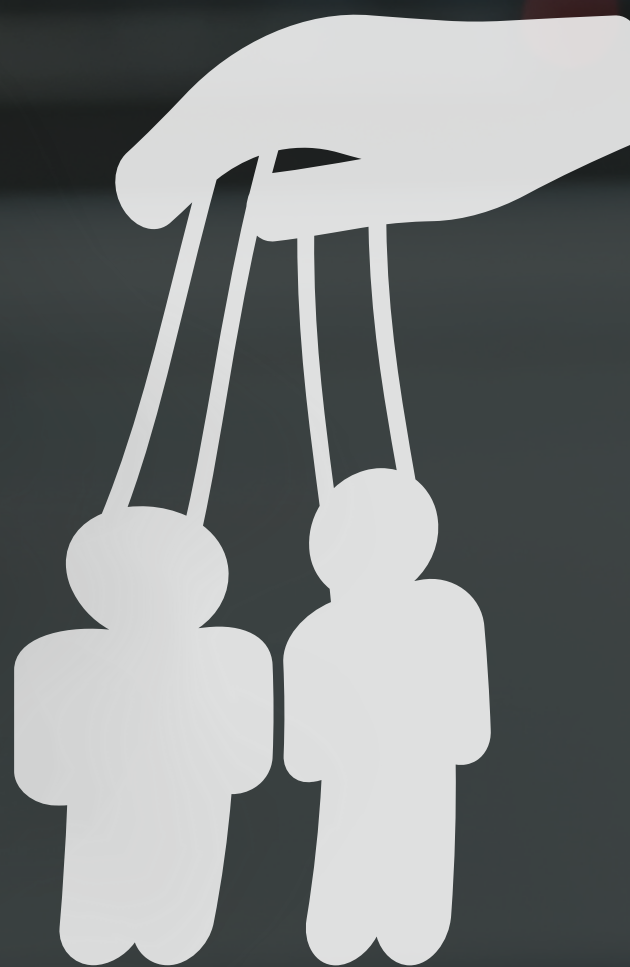




RAIPON

FROM A NATION-BASED
CHANGE AGENT
TO A WEAPON OF STATE-
CONTROLLED PROPAGANDA



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INTRODUCTION

NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS (NGOS) HAVE TRADITIONALLY PLAYED A CRUCIAL ROLE IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF CIVIL SOCIETY BY GIVING AN OPPORTUNITY FOR CITIZENS TO VOICE THEIR CONCERNS AND ACTIVELY PARTICIPATE IN PUBLIC AFFAIRS.

In the indigenous peoples' world, NGOs hold a special place; they have not only played a key and impactful role in international human rights standards-settings machinery but also serve as a platform where lost indigenous voices are recovered, where untold stories and hopes that are often overlooked in national discussions, can be heard.

The 21st century has witnessed significant advancements in recognizing and protecting the rights of indigenous peoples. Along with increased funding and growing awareness,



indigenous peoples have progressively won the international community's attention.

However, as is often the case, every progress has its bill of costs and risks. While the last thirty years have seen a dramatic increase in indigenous peoples' efforts to organize, the source of indigenous progress may become the source of their downfall. And if, in the last few decades, indigenous NGOs have grown rapidly in scale, number and sophistication - so did the GONGOs - government-affiliated NGOs.

The Russian Federation hasn't become an exception, with government-run, government-captured, or simply government-funded organizations operating within international forums and spaces and countering human rights accounts with government propaganda, all while in the guise of being independent entities. The country's biggest indigenous peoples organization RAIPON (Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North), once seen as a solution to the country's indigenous struggles and independent body representing the rights and interests of indigenous peoples, has now succumbed to the same fate and has become a powerful tool of state propaganda.

RAIPON's journey from an independent organization to an instrument of state propaganda reflects the complexities and challenges encountered by indigenous advocacy groups in Russia. The shift towards state control led to a departure from the organization's core mission, blurring the lines between its original intentions and government interests. The Russian government's increasing control over the organization's leadership, financial reliance and manipulation of information have undermined RAIPON's independence and credibility. This paper aims to scrutinize the development of RAIPON, uncovering the forces behind its downfall and transformation. By delving into the current state, it reveals the bitter impact of these changes and reflects on what this means for the future of indigenous advocacy in Russia.

EARLY PROMISES:

RAIPON'S FORMATIVE YEARS AND INITIAL MISSION

RAIPON, also known as the Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North, Siberia and the Far East, was established in 1990 as a non-governmental umbrella organization with the noble objective of safeguarding the rights and welfare of over 40 Indigenous Peoples in Russia who have faced numerous challenges in their struggle for recognition, representation, and protection of their rights.

RAIPON's journey from an independent organization to an instrument of state-controlled propaganda has been strongly shaped by the political pursuit of governmental self-interests. This shift has been brought about by the removal of indigenous leaders, the subsequent rise of state-aligned leadership, and the reorientation of the organization's agenda.

FOUNDING PRINCIPLES

RAIPON was founded as a beacon of hope and a powerful voice for the myriad indigenous communities spread across Russia.

- **Guardian of Ancestral Lands**

At its core, RAIPON's mission was to safeguard traditional lands of the indigenous peoples. RAIPON stood as a guardian, determined to protect these lands from exploitation and encroachment, ensuring that future generations could continue to thrive in harmony with nature.

- **Advocate for Rights and Self-government**

RAIPON was an unwavering advocate for human rights of indigenous peoples. It aimed

to empower these communities by ensuring their voices were heard in the halls of power, and tirelessly worked to influence legislation that would protect indigenous rights to land, resources, and self-determination.

- **Champion of Cultural Heritage**

RAIPON sought to be the custodian of the diverse and vibrant cultures of Russia's indigenous peoples. The organization passionately worked to preserve languages, traditional arts, music, dance, and folklore, recognizing that these cultural treasures were the heartbeat of indigenous communities.

- **Bridge to the Global Community**

Understanding the interconnectedness of the global indigenous movement, RAIPON positioned itself as a bridge between Russia's indigenous peoples and the international community. It engaged with global organizations, participated in international forums, and built alliances with indigenous groups worldwide.

But in the early 1990s RAIPON and regional Associations of Small-Numbered Indigenous Peoples of the North were hoped to lead indigenous self-government. This drive for self-organization gained significant momentum during the late Soviet period, particularly towards the end of Perestroika.¹ There was a resurgence of interest in preserving and reviving indigenous cultures, languages, and traditions, setting the stage for more organized advocacy and representation. Within this context of cultural revival, the first formal organizations representing indigenous peoples in the northern regions of Russia began to emerge, spearheaded by figures from the national intelligentsia like Vladimir Sangi and Yeremy Aipin.²

A landmark event in this journey was the First Congress of the Peoples of the North in March 1990, where the national organization "Association of the Peoples of the North of the USSR" was established. This organization, which initially united 26 indigenous groups, was officially registered on November 24, 1993, as the "Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North, Siberia, and the Far East".³ Its decision-making body, the "Congress of Indigenous Small-Numbered Peoples of the North," meets every four years, with the president serving a four-year term. Yeremy Aipin, a Khanty author, served as president from 1993 to 1997, followed by the Nenets Sergey Kharyuchi, who held the office until 2013.

In 1999, RAIPON received the status of an All-Russian Non-Governmental Organisation from the Russian Ministry of Justice. This status made its members eligible to be appointed to the Public Chamber of Russia, a consultative civil society institution aimed at protecting the rights and freedoms of citizens during the process of shaping and implementing state policies and exercising public control over the activities of executive authorities.

Born in an era of profound transformation, RAIPON emerged as a vibrant, independent force dedicated to protecting the rich cultural heritage, rights, and territories of the indigenous peoples of the North, Siberia, and the Far East. During its early years, RAIPON played a critical role in assisting the indigenous community against industrial exploitation and the Russian state apparatus. It was perceived as "*a political union to lead and guide the national movement of indigenous peoples and to transform political decisions into practical solutions.*"⁴

RAIPON enjoyed state support and actively participated in the discussion and preparation of indigenous laws and socio-economic development programs. This period led to the creation of national and regional legislation aimed at providing indigenous peoples with access to their ancestral lands and resources. Numerous federal laws were enacted to form the foundation of national legislation aimed at safeguarding the rights of the North's indigenous peoples. The initial law, "On Guarantees of the Rights of Small Indigenous Peoples of the Russian Federation," was enacted under Boris Yeltsin in 1999, followed by additional laws during the early years of Vladimir Putin's administration.⁵

RAIPON's advocacy sparked a movement among Russia's indigenous communities to seek allies both within the country and internationally to support their rights and interests. This search for support helped foster connections with the broader global movement of indigenous peoples, enhancing efforts to promote their rights on both domestic and international stages.

In 1999, RAIPON received the UNEP international award for outstanding services to the protection of the nature of the Russian North. By 2012, RAIPON had gained considerable respect and an international reputation for its endeavors in promoting indigenous rights. It acquired special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC) and became a Permanent Participant of the Arctic Council. RAIPON's representatives were active in the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII), the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (EMRIP), and the UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights. RAIPON's engagement with these international bodies marked a significant advancement in the global indigenous rights movement. The organization's representatives played a key role in preparing relevant international instruments and institutions developed in the last thirty years on the rights of indigenous peoples, including the adoption of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).

In essence, RAIPON was a powerful tool for Indigenous Peoples of Russia, ensuring that neglect and violations of indigenous rights by the government were known both domestically and internationally. Yet, despite the hopes and discussions of a true partnership between RAIPON and the Russian government, such a collaboration never happened.

RISE OF STATE INTERFERENCE

RESOURCE EXTRACTION AND LEGISLATIVE DISMANTLING

Since the early 2000s, the presence of resource extraction activities on Indigenous ancestral lands in Russia has increased substantially. Alongside this, the legal and political situation for Indigenous Peoples' rights, particularly regarding land use, has dramatically weakened.⁶ Anticipating a boom in the exploration of oil and other resources in the Arctic, businesses actively lobbied for changes in federal legislation.⁷

These changes included lowering environmental standards and eroding indigenous land rights. Substantial amendments to the legal framework concerning indigenous peoples removed many provisions designed to safeguard their rights, thereby deteriorating their legal protections.

One notable example includes the removal of an article from the Federal Law "On Guarantees..." which previously established quotas for the representation of indigenous minorities in both the legislative assemblies of Russian federal subjects and local self-governing bodies, highlighting a significant shift in the legal landscape for indigenous rights.⁸

Subsequently, under Vladimir Putin's administration in 2008, numerous amendments to federal laws were enacted,

adversely affecting indigenous peoples' rights.

Changes to laws governing hunting, fishing, and land use, including the introduction of auctions for fishing and hunting territories, resulted in indigenous communities losing access to their ancestral lands as these areas were acquired by commercial entities through the auction process.⁹

The opening of the Northern Sea Route for shipping further increased private and state interests in Indigenous lands for energy and transport projects, partly administered by the Ministry of Regional Development, which was also responsible for indigenous peoples' protection.¹⁰ Moreover, the government simulated legislative activities, adopting numerous federal plans and frameworks on the "sustainable development of indigenous peoples of the North," and funding countless cultural festivals. However, these actions often failed to address the core issues faced by indigenous communities.

RAIPON, alongside various indigenous public and political groups, vigorously opposed these legislative changes, proposing alternatives to the government and the State Duma. Yet, the government's

ambition to establish control over Russia's abundant natural resources and designate indigenous areas as strategic assets led to indigenous rights becoming obstacles to state objectives while indigenous communities began to be seen as opponents to the governmental apparatus and a menace to social cohesion. RAIPON's advocacy power threatened the authorities, making the organization an increasingly unwelcome participant in the political process as it opposed discriminatory government policies and openly discussed these trends in the press and at numerous domestic and international conferences and meetings.

Although indigenous groups extended cooperation with global networks, the possibilities for public mobilization through informal networking were put under strong state control. Under these circumstances, civil society organizations and self-government institutions in Russia had to operate under increasingly restricted conditions. In 2011, the government dissolved the only remaining organ of state power at the federal level dedicated to the indigenous peoples, the "Committee on Problems of the North and Indigenous Peoples of the Federation Council of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation".¹¹

By the second decade of the 2000s, the Russian government had not only failed to implement its duties related to the federal laws on indigenous peoples but had significantly worsened the legal status of Indigenous Peoples in Russia.

SHIFT IN POLITICAL CLIMATE:

WAR ON NGOs

Since 2008, when Putin reentered the government, seemingly laying the groundwork for his return to the presidency, there was a noticeable increase in involvement of government officials and FSB in the activities of indigenous organizations and indigenous peoples' movements. These officials did not merely participate as observers but actively influenced and controlled internal processes and documentation. This interference indicated the state's intention to monitor and manipulate indigenous advocacy to align with state interests, thereby stifling genuine grassroots movements and eroding their autonomy.

Putin's return to the presidency in 2012 further signalled the onset of a more repressive state apparatus. Notably, this period saw the enactment of controversial laws targeting "foreign agents" and "undesirable organizations," leading to the widespread shutdown of numerous indigenous NGOs, along with other advocacy groups. These laws were deliberately designed to target civil society organizations that were perceived as threats to the state's narrative. The branding of NGOs as "foreign agents" effectively criminalized their activities, curtailed their funding, and isolated them from international support, undermining their ability to operate effectively.

The era marked a significant setback for indigenous rights and human rights advocacy in Russia, as systematic repression created a climate of fear and self-censorship, further eroding the space for political pluralism and civil society activism.

THE BETRAYAL OF A MISSION & EROSION OF INTEGRITY

POST-2013

Shortly after Vladimir Putin reassumed the presidency in 2012, the Russian Ministry of Justice moved to dissolve RAIPON as a public entity over alleged procedural violations. This action was widely viewed as politically motivated, aimed at curbing RAIPON's independence and bringing it under tighter state control.

The turning point came in 2013 when, through a series of coercive tactics and influence over the 7th Congress of Indigenous Peoples of the North, Siberia, and the Far East, the authorities used various manipulative methods to secure the presidency of RAIPON for Grigory Ledkov, a relatively unknown figure at the time and a deputy of the State Duma from the United Russia party. Regionally, the government strategically selected officials loyal to its agenda to establish control over RAIPON's actions and communication. This change marked a new chapter in the advocacy and representation of the rights of indigenous peoples in the North.



Initially committed to advocating for the rights and self-governance of indigenous peoples in line with international standards, the organization shifted its stance, endorsing amendments to what is referred to as "Putin's" Constitution.¹³ These amendments effectively broadened the president's powers, a move considered detrimental to the legal standing and rights of indigenous peoples in Russia. Moreover, the focus on "self-government" as a primary goal of RAIPON diminished. Under Ledkov's leadership, RAIPON's priorities shifted to align more closely with the state's interests. Projects prioritized were those that coincided with the government's

development goals rather than indigenous rights. One of the most notable shifts within RAIPON was its focus solely on cultural rights, neglecting the broader issues of land rights, self-determination, and political representation. The deliberate restriction of RAIPON's focus can be interpreted as an intentional effort to redirect attention from the systemic erosion of indigenous rights in Russia. By limiting their advocacy efforts to cultural matters, RAIPON disregarded the pressing issues of environmental degradation, forced displacement, and the encroachment of extractive industries on indigenous lands. The organization's new direction also includes reporting disloyal members to law enforcement including youth.¹⁴ Indigenous leaders who initially worked within RAIPON faced harassment and persecution for their activism.¹⁵

Overall, RAIPON's transformation under state influence allowed the Russian government to exert greater control over the representation of indigenous peoples. The organization, once a robust advocate for indigenous rights, became a vehicle for advancing the state's narratives.

UNDER SIEGE

In the 2000s, the Regional Development Ministry, the ministerial body was responsible for implementing government policy on Indigenous Peoples issues in the country. RAIPON expressed strong criticism at the time because the ministry was not fulfilling its task of creating the conditions for protecting the rights of indigenous peoples, especially in the area of traditional subsistence. In 2009, the Deputy Minister Travnikov received an official rebuke from President Dmitry Medvedev for failing to fulfill government duties in connection with the federal law on Territories of Traditional Nature Use (TTNU), the only federal law

affording some form of recognition of Indigenous Peoples' land tenure. Since then, the Ministry of Regional Development has begun to persuade other federal ministries to pressure RAIPON and actively sought ways to create an alternative puppet organization to replace¹⁶ it – without success. Since the beginning of 2010, RAIPON has been audited several times. In September 2012, Travnikov resigned as Deputy Minister of Regional Development and was appointed Deputy Minister of Justice of the Russian Federation on September 30, 2012, the same Ministry responsible for shutting down the organization a few months later.

PROPAGANDA IN ACTION:

RAIPON'S NEW ROLE

The reorientation of RAIPON reached a critical point in March 2022 when it rushed to support President Putin's military actions in Ukraine and even conducted outgoing humanitarian-cultural missions to the illegally annexed parts of Ukraine.¹⁷ RAIPON's endorsement of these actions contravenes the fundamental rights of Ukraine's indigenous peoples, including their rights to life, security, self-determination, and the preservation of their lands, cultures, and languages. This support also neglects the rights of indigenous communities within Russia, legitimizing the state's suppression of dissent, violation of international norms, and perpetuation of the marginalization of indigenous peoples in Russian society.

(GO)NGOs

NGOs have become instrumental in Putin's administration, utilized to further its objectives in both domestic and international spheres. His authoritarian regime has given rise to a sophisticated system of government-organized NGOs (GONGOs) and quasi-NGOs (QUANGOs), along with unregistered and informal groups established and funded by the Kremlin or its loyal businesses.¹⁸

This strategy allows the Kremlin to promote its political views and disseminate propaganda and disinformation under the guise of an independent civil society. This façade stirs divisions among and weakening genuine civil society actors such as human rights and Indigenous rights movements. It also distracts from fundamental discussions about rights violations in Russia.

While GONGOs in themselves are not inherently problematic, their instrumentalization by an authoritarian regime is deeply concerning. By presenting a controlled and manipulated version of civil society, the government undermines the credibility and effectiveness of authentic NGOs, making it harder for both domestic and international audiences to discern the true state of civil society in Russia.

This manipulation is part of a broader strategy to erode the foundations of independent civil society, making it difficult for organizations to operate and advocate effectively. By co-opting the language and appearance of civil society, GONGOs and QUANGOs overshadow and sideline genuine independent civil society organizations.

Initially formed as an independent advocate for the rights of indigenous communities in the North, Siberia, and the Far East, RAIPON has gradually been co-opted by governmental influences. This adaptation to shifts in legislation and broader geopolitical strategies mirrors the broader transition of the Russian state from a period of democratic openness to an authoritarian regime. Many indigenous NGOs have faced increased scrutiny, harassment, and forced closures, further stifling independent advocacy.

By 2021, RAIPON had transformed into an organization entirely controlled by the Russian government. With the approval and support of the authorities, the Association engaged in collaborations with major Russian mining companies.¹⁹ In exchange for funding, RAIPON participated in the public relations efforts of these companies and promoted their interests internationally.²⁰ Notably, the largest Russian mining company, Norilsk Nickel, which operates in the territories of indigenous peoples in Taimyr, the Murmansk Region, and the Trans-Baikal Territory, played a significant role in financing RAIPON.²¹

RAIPON's statements at global events started echoing the official narratives of the Russian government, frequently acknowledging the state's support for indigenous peoples and promoting the protection and implementation of their rights.²² The most prominent role in promoting the Russian presidency of the Arctic Council (2021-2023) was arguably assigned to RAIPON, recognized as the organization "representing the interests" of the indigenous peoples of the North. According to Nikolai Korchunov, Ambassador-at-Large of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and a member of the Committee of Senior Officials of the Arctic Council from Russia, Russia organized 30 events on indigenous issues within the framework of its chairmanship in the Arctic Council, with RAIPON involved to varying degrees in each.²³

However, at none of these events did representatives of RAIPON express significant criticism of Russian government decisions or the actions of mining companies that violate the rights of indigenous peoples. Instead, they emphasized the existence of such violations in other countries of the Arctic Council while highlighting the positive role of Russian authorities and businesses in preserving the culture of indigenous peoples in Russia. This selective advocacy underscores RAIPON's transformation into a mouthpiece for state and corporate interests.

Over the past 20 years, the Russian government, in collaboration with the business sector, has prevented the consolidation of land for indigenous communities through legislative changes. These actions have systematically eroded the legal protections for indigenous peoples, aligning RAIPON's activities with state interests and undermining its original mission. This transformation represents a significant setback for indigenous rights in Russia, reducing the space for independent advocacy and consolidating state control over indigenous issues.

COMPROMISED LEADERSHIP



RAIPON representatives wear red badges, designating them as part of the official delegation of the Russian Federation

The leadership of RAIPON, represented by Aleksandr Novyukhov as First Chair, Anna Otke, Sergey Sizonenko and Nina Veisalova as Vice Chairs, and Grigory Ledkov as President, epitomizes a troubling merger between indigenous advocacy and state power. As members of the Russian parliament, they are intrinsically tied to the central authorities, effectively transforming RAIPON from a defender of indigenous rights into a puppet of state-controlled propaganda.

This blatant conflict of interest highlights a severe ethical breach, as their roles within the Duma mean they are more aligned with government directives than the independent interests of the indigenous communities they are supposed to champion and represent. Their positions enable the Kremlin to project an illusion of advocacy while systematically undermining genuine indigenous autonomy and silencing dissent.

Furthermore, their prominent roles on international platforms, such as the Arctic Council, coupled with their vocal support for the war in Ukraine, exacerbate the ethical dilemma. By endorsing a violent and widely condemned conflict, Novyukhov,

Otke, and Ledkov betray the fundamental principles of human rights and justice that should underpin RAIPON's mission.

How can individuals so deeply enmeshed in the machinery of an authoritarian regime be allowed to occupy influential positions in international bodies like the Arctic Council, the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples or UNESCO, as seen with figures like Anna Otke, Antonina Gorbunova (the former RAIPON lawyer) and Nina Veisalova?

Their presence in these esteemed forums sends a dangerous message on a global scale, signaling an acceptance or ignorance of their compromised integrity and the oppressive policies they support. It undermines the credibility of these international bodies, diluting their purpose of fostering genuine dialogue and advocacy for marginalized communities. This alignment with state power fundamentally contradicts the ethical obligations of advocacy leaders, raising profound questions about their integrity and the future of indigenous representation.

PUPPET DIPLOMACY

The transformation of RAIPON into a mouthpiece for government interests under Putin's regime is a calculated strategy to silence critical voices, neutralize Indigenous political power and prevent the formation of an opposition from within.

A glaring example is the School of Public Indigenous Peoples Diplomacy, led by Aleksey Tsykarev, formerly associated with the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. This school is funded by Nornickel, and aimed at training Indigenous diplomats to represent Russian interests globally.

Tsykarev's close ties with extractive industries, financing programs to groom Indigenous diplomats as Kremlin puppets on the international stage, epitomize how genuine Indigenous advocacy has been hijacked by state interests. These initiatives, disguised as tools for empowerment, primarily serve to advance state and corporate agendas rather than uphold Indigenous rights. This not only undermines the legitimacy of Indigenous representation but also serves as a cynical ploy to manipulate international perceptions.

Figures like Tsykarev underscore a disturbing trend where Indigenous platforms are co-opted to advance state propaganda, thereby diminishing their efficacy in addressing the real struggles faced by Indigenous peoples.

MEET THE TEAM

FACES BEHIND RAIPON'S DOWNFALL

SANCTIONS



GRIGORY LEDKOV
PRESIDENT

SANCTIONS



ALEKSANDR NOVYUKHOV
FIRST CHAIR

SANCTIONS



ANNA OTKE
VICE CHAIR
Chair of Indigenous Peoples
Secretariat of the Arctic Council



SERGEY SIZONENKO
VICE CHAIR

Chair of KMNS Soyuz



NINA VEISALOVA
VICE CHAIR

Member of the UNESCO
Steering Committee of
the Global Task Force,
International Decade of
Indigenous languages



ANTONINA GORBUNOVA
FORMER RAIPON
LAWYER

Director of KMNS Soyuz



ALEKSEY TSYKAREV
SCHOOL OF PUBLIC
DIPLOMACY

CONCLUSION

CAPITULATION OF INDIGENOUS ADVOCACY

RAIPON's journey over the past three decades starkly illustrates the transformation of an independent indigenous advocacy organization into a state apparatus under Putin's regime. The ongoing war with Ukraine has further accelerated this transformation, serving as a catalyst for the Kremlin to consolidate power and erode civil society. By fueling nationalist sentiments and tightening societal control, the conflict has allowed the government to strengthen its grip over RAIPON, redirecting its mission to serve state interests.

Now a cog in the Russian regime, RAIPON tirelessly promotes pro-Kremlin narratives. This complicates the understanding of the roles that Permanent Participants are expected to play in international forums like the Arctic Council (where despite the odds RAIPON keeps its seat). The only repercussion RAIPON encountered was sanctions imposed on its leadership, namely Aleksandr Novyukhov, Anna Otke, and Grigory Ledkov - not in their roles in RAIPON, but in their capacities as senators. Yet, this minor inconvenience hasn't stopped them from deploying their obedient lackeys as representatives in global platforms.

Following the state-imposed leadership changes, RAIPON's activities have increasingly mirrored government policies and positions. Post-2013, RAIPON has increasingly depended on funding from extractive industries, such as oil, gas, and mining companies, which have significant interests in indigenous territories rich in natural resources. The organization's focus has shifted towards promoting the benefits of resource extraction, often downplaying or ignoring the adverse impacts on indigenous communities. Moreover, RAIPON has facilitated agreements that grant these companies easier access to

indigenous lands, presenting these deals as beneficial for local development, while the true costs are borne by the indigenous peoples.

The future of indigenous advocacy in Russia is fraught with peril. The organization that once stood as a bastion of independent advocacy has now become a mouthpiece for the very forces it once opposed. RAIPON, now aligned with state interests and funded by extractive industries, has become a tool for government propaganda and a weapon against those who dare to speak

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out. Instead of protecting ancestral lands, it facilitates their exploitation. Rather than preserving cultural heritage, it promotes state narratives. The once-guardian of indigenous rights has become the gatekeeper for those exploiting the lands it vowed to protect.

In this complex landscape, challenging questions remain about how Russian Indigenous people living in political exile and their allies can support the small circle of indigenous leaders and activists within Russia. These efforts must navigate the dangerous waters of state surveillance and repression without endangering those involved.

In its original mission, RAIPON embodied the hopes and dreams of Russia's indigenous communities. It was more than an organization; RAIPON's founding vision was one of protection, empowerment, and celebration of indigenous rights, striving to create a future where these communities could thrive with dignity, respect, and harmony. The bitter irony of its transformation into a state-controlled entity underscores the profound loss of an independent voice for indigenous peoples in Russia.

The international community must remain vigilant, ensuring that international platforms are not manipulated by state interests at the expense of genuine advocacy. As of today, the erosion of RAIPON's independence is a sobering reminder of the fragile balance between advocacy and co-optation in the face of authoritarianism.

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RAIPON :

FROM A NATION-BASED CHANGE AGENT
TO A WEAPON OF STATE-CONTROLLED
PROPAGANDA

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International Committee of
Indigenous Peoples of Russia