



RUSSIAN FORCE GENERATION AND TECHNOLOGICAL ADAPTATIONS

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The Kremlin is using surge pricing for enlistment bonuses to recruit additional volunteers and attempt to sustain Russia's protracted war effort in Ukraine. Numerous Russian federal subjects dramatically increased the price of one-time enlistment bonuses in late 2024 and early 2025 and introduced additional short-term temporary sign-on bonuses to incentivize more Russians to volunteer to fight in Ukraine.[1] Samara, Omsk, Novosibirsk, and other oblasts introduced additional compensation in late 2024 and early 2025 for individuals who sign up during a defined short period – usually between three weeks and two months – to recruit additional volunteers. Russian federal subjects are simultaneously and rapidly increasing the fixed amounts for one-time bonuses. Primorsk Krai Governor Oleg Kozhemyako has increased the regional enlistment bonuses three times since the start of 2025 – the krai paid 800,000 rubles (\$9,690) prior to January 1, 2025; one million rubles (\$12,114) between January 1 and mid-February 2025; 1.6 million rubles (\$19,383) between mid-February and April 1, 2025; and 2.5 million rubles (\$30,284) starting April 1, 2025.[2] Irkutsk Oblast Governor increased one-time enlistment bonuses from around 600,000 rubles (\$7,207) to 1.4 million rubles (\$16,960) on March 19, 2025.[3] The average one-time enlistment bonus offered in Russian federal subjects and in occupied Ukraine as of April 14, 2025, is 1.51 million rubles (\$18,292). This figure includes bonuses offered by both regional and federal authorities.[4]

Russian recruitment rates seemingly increased in early 2025, likely as a result of the Kremlin's temporary increases in sign-up bonuses and some Russians' anticipation of a negotiated ceasefire in Ukraine. Russian opposition outlet *Verstka* reported on April 11 that statistics from the Unified Selection Point (Russia's main volunteer recruitment agency) show that monthly contract recruitment rates in Moscow City almost doubled in late March and early April 2025 compared to January 2025.[5] *Verstka* observed that the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) has recruited over 6,300 people through voluntary military service contracts in Moscow City since the beginning of 2025. *Verstka* added that recruitment rates suddenly spiked starting on March 17 amidst reports of peace talks between Ukraine and Russia and Russian forces repelling Ukrainian forces from much of Kursk Oblast. An employee of a Russian military recruitment center in an unnamed town in Siberia told *Radio Svoboda* that the town's recruitment rates peaked in March 2025 after the regional

government increased regional one-time enlistment bonuses to one million rubles (\$12,114).[6] The employee added that many volunteers who are enlisting had waited for the regional government to increase the one-time payment and hope that the Ukraine-Russia peace talks will lead to a ceasefire that allows them to avoid combat.[7] An analyst at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP) extrapolated recruitment data for 37 Russian federal subjects and assessed on April 13 that Russia is currently recruiting around 1,300 volunteers per day, or about 39,000 per month.[8] **Russia is unlikely to generate 39,000 volunteers per month indefinitely, however, as the increased enlistment bonuses that generated the previous recruitment bump are temporary, and Russia's economic and demographic constraints do not likely support continued large-scale recruitment at such rates.[9]**

Russian federal subjects appear to have been intensifying their recruitment efforts since March 2025 and are spending significant funds on advertising military service in Russia, suggesting that the Kremlin intends to sustain current force generation efforts for some time, peace talks notwithstanding. Moscow City officials told *Verstka* in mid-March that Moscow is continuing to recruit volunteers and that the Russian MoD will continue to advertise military service.[10] *Verstka* also found that Moscow Oblast announced a tender worth 78 million rubles (\$944,000) to organize an online recruitment campaign through at least the end of 2025. *Verstka* observed that the volume of Russian military recruitment ads on Telegram has increased since late March 2025, with recruiters publishing approximately 7,000 ads in the first week of April 2025 compared to 7,300 ads published in the entire month of January 2025.[11] An SWP analyst estimated that Russia likely spends around 1.5 billion rubles (\$18 million) in regional enlistment bonuses and 500 million rubles (\$6 million) in federal enlistment bonuses per day -- or two billion rubles per day (\$24 million) in total. The SWP analyst also observed that average one-time enlistment bonuses are around 10 percent higher in March 2025 than they were in December 2024. Russian opposition outlet *Vazhnye Istorii* (*iStories*) previously observed that the Russian federal budget expenditures for 2025 through 2027 allocated 90 billion rubles (\$1.1 billion) to federal one-time enlistment bonuses, not including regional government bonuses.[12]

Key Takeaways:

- **The Kremlin is using surge pricing for enlistment bonuses to recruit additional volunteers and attempt to sustain Russia's protracted war effort in Ukraine.**
- **Russian federal subjects appear to have been intensifying their recruitment efforts since March 2025 and are spending significant funds on advertising military service in Russia, suggesting that the Kremlin intends to sustain current force generation efforts for some time, peace talks notwithstanding.**
- **PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) officially denied PRC state involvement in the recruitment of Chinese nationals to fight with Russian forces in Ukraine after two captured Chinese nationals participated in a Ukrainian press conference on April 14.**

- **The Russian government censored Telegram posts in a continued effort to conceal North Korean involvement in Russia's war against Ukraine.**
- **Kremlin pronatalist policies introduced during the 2024 "Year of the Family" are reportedly so far failing to improve Russia's low birth rates.**
- **Russian federal subjects are increasingly offering Russian veterans employment and education opportunities as part of the Kremlin's effort to address labor shortages in Russia.**
- **The Kremlin is continuing to offer hand-selected veterans high-ranking government positions in support of the permanent militarization of Russian youth.**
- **Russian State Duma officials registered an amendment on April 7 that would extend combat veteran statuses and state benefits to some Russian Orthodox Church Moscow Patriarchate (ROC MP) clergy who participated in Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in apparent violation of world Orthodox canons.**
- **Ukraine's Main Military Intelligence Directorate (GUR) reported on April 14 that Russian forces are using chemical agents against Ukrainian forces in Zaporizhia Oblast in an apparent violation of the Chemical Weapons Convention, to which Russia is a party.**
- **The Kremlin is actively reorienting and expanding its unmanned aerial systems (UAS) production to support its war effort in Ukraine and possibly to prepare for future aggression against NATO states.**
- **Russian forces completed joint military exercises with India and Tajikistan on April 11.**

Russian Mobilization and Force Generation Efforts (Russian objective: Expand combat power without conducting general mobilization and undermining regime stability)

Two Chinese nationals, who Ukrainian forces captured in Donetsk Oblast, revealed during Ukraine's Security Service (SBU) press conference on April 14 that the Russian military is recruiting Chinese citizens through third parties and under false pretenses.[13] Two Chinese nationals reported that Russian intermediaries trick Chinese citizens into military service by promising them high-paying jobs in non-military related fields such as construction. One Chinese national observed that Russia has been advertising military service on the Chinese internet in the People's Republic of China (PRC), and UK outlet *The Guardian* previously reported that the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) was circulating recruitment ads on Chinese social media platforms.[14] One captured Chinese national recalled that he arrived in Russia on February 5, signed a military service contract on February 25, and deployed to occupied Donetsk Oblast on April 1. Another Chinese national recalled arriving in Russia on December 24, 2024, and deploying to occupied Donetsk Oblast in early February 2025.

The Chinese nationals appealed to the PRC government to facilitate their return to the PRC.[15]

PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Spokesperson Lin Jian officially denied PRC state involvement in the recruitment of Chinese nationals to fight with Russian forces in Ukraine. Lin responded to a question about the SBU press conference with the two Chinese POWs, stating that the PRC issued "numerous warnings and asked Chinese citizens to stay away from armed conflict zones." [16] Lin stated that the PRC is still verifying information about Chinese POWs in Ukraine and reiterated that the PRC holds an "objective and fair position" on the "Ukrainian crisis" (a term the PRC uses to describe Russia's aggression in Ukraine) and called on "all relevant parties" to refrain from using the reported Chinese POWs to manipulate politics. It remains unclear whether the PRC government plays any direct role in facilitating Russian recruitment of Chinese nationals or whether the PRC has turned a blind eye to such recruitment efforts. It is unlikely that the PRC was wholly ignorant of the effort, given its pervasive censorship and monitoring of communications directed at its population, but it is possible that senior officials were not aware of these reported Russian efforts.

The Russian government censored posts published by 16 Telegram channels in a continued effort to conceal North Korean involvement in Russia's war against Ukraine. Russian opposition outlet *Verstka* observed that the Blagoveshchensk City Court in Amur Oblast banned posts about the Ukrainian capture of North Korean prisoners of war (POW) across 16 Telegram channels.[17] *Verstka* reported that the Russian Military Prosecutor's Office petitioned the court to ban Telegram posts published by Ukrainian and Russian Telegram channels, claiming that Ukrainian forces captured North Korean POWs and that the POWs were from Russia's Republic of Tuva. The Russian Military Prosecutor's Office claimed that the Telegram posts publicized the personal data of Russian military personnel.[18]

Russian Demographic Problems (Russian objective: Fix persistent demographic problems by incentivizing immigration, disincentivizing emigration, and promoting pronatalist policies to support long-term force generation and economic initiatives.)

The Kremlin's pronatalist policies introduced during the 2024 "Year of the Family" are reportedly so far failing to improve Russia's low birth rates. Russian demographer Alexey Raksha told Russian opposition outlet *Agentstvo* that there were between 293,000 and 294,000 registered births in Russia during the entire first quarter of 2025, which is 2.3 percent less than those registered in the first quarter of 2024.[19] Raksha noted that Russia's birthrate per woman remained virtually unchanged in the first quarter of 2025 but noted that the number of women of childbearing age (20 to 40 years old) has decreased. Raksha assessed that the decreasing birthrates indicate that the Russian government's pronatalist policies are "having little effect" and noted that Russia may face an economic slowdown and further increases in its retirement age in the long term.[20] Russian President Vladimir Putin designated 2024 as the "Year of the Family" to encourage larger families and alleviate Russia's growing demographic problems, which have been exacerbated by Russia's war in Ukraine.[21]

Russian federal subjects are increasingly offering women and girls economic incentives in an effort to urgently meet the Kremlin's childbirth quotas. Head of the Republic of Mari El Yuriy Zaitsev ordered the regional government to provide one-time payments of 100,000 rubles (about \$1,215) to pregnant female students who registered with prenatal consultation centers.[22] Zaitsev stated that female students may receive the payment between 12 weeks and six months into their pregnancies and that the region previously only distributed maternal capital (payments to women who have children) to women who had already given birth. Zaitsev clarified that female students who are pursuing vocational or higher education qualify for the maternity capital and that female students on academic leave may also qualify for payments. Putin instructed Russian federal subjects in January 2025 to increase maternal capital payments for full-time female students based on regionally calculated living standards, and Zaitsev's order likely supports the Kremlin's campaign to address persistent demographic problems. Russian State Duma Deputy Igor Antropenko in April 2025 also proposed to shorten the length of the workday for women in an effort to incentivize childbirth.[23]

Integration of Veterans into Russian Society (Assessed Russian objective: Mitigate the risk of veterans emerging as a political group in a way that could erode the stability of the Russian state.)

Russian federal subjects are increasingly offering Russian veterans employment and educational opportunities as part of the Kremlin's effort to address labor shortages in Russia. *Verstka* reported that Primorsky Krai officials allocated more than seven million rubles (about \$85,085) to provide vocational training to returning Russian veterans and their families between 2024 and 2025.[24] *Verstka* noted that Primorsky Krai signed 131 contracts to train 230 people to become truck and passenger vehicle drivers, psychologists, nurses, accountants, and public administrators.[25] Amur Oblast Governor Vasily Orlov stated that Amur Oblast has a shortage of security and law enforcement personnel and that Amur Oblast is working to employ demobilized veterans to work in the federal subject's security apparatus.[26] Russian State Duma Deputy Chairman of the Construction, Housing, and Public Utilities Committee Sergei Kolunov, alongside fellow committee member Ilya Wolfson, proposed to create a program offering veterans construction training, citing the need to combat the 200,000-person labor shortage in the Russian construction industry.[27] Kolunov and Wolfson noted that the labor shortage in the Russian construction industry may reach 400,000 people by 2030.

The Kremlin is continuing to offer hand-selected veterans high-ranking government positions in support of the permanent militarization of Russian youth. The Kremlin appointed Russian veteran Roman Balashov as the Lipetsk Oblast Deputy Governor for Youth Policy after Balashov completed the "Time of Heroes" Higher School of Public Administration Program in May 2024.[28] Putin established the "Time of Heroes" initiative in February 2024 in an effort to form a new social stratum of Russian elites composed of a limited number of loyal ultranationalist veterans who will continue to militarize Russian society over the long term.[29] The Kremlin appointed at least 37 veterans from the "Time of Heroes" initiative, many of whom assumed positions related to military patriotic education and youth movements in Russia.[30] The Kremlin likely aims to expand Russia's military patriotic education with support from loyal veterans in an effort to militarize the youth and facilitate force generation over the long term.

Russian State Duma officials registered an amendment on April 7 that would extend combat veteran statuses and state benefits to some Russian Orthodox Church Moscow Patriarchate (ROC MP) clergy who participated in Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in apparent violation of world Orthodox canons.[31] The proposed amendment to the Russian "On Veterans" law will offer veteran status to clergy who performed religious services for more than four months in Ukraine or in combat zones along Russia's international border with Ukraine, upon the official written request of a religious organization. Russian opposition outlet *Novaya Gazeta* assessed that the amendment would only offer veteran statuses to a very limited number of priests, given that the ROC MP does not offer many clergy official trips to Ukraine and because many Russian priests in Ukraine are legally classified as "volunteers." [32] *Novaya Gazeta* estimated that there could be between as few as five and as many as 2,000 Russian priests who participated in Russian operations in Ukraine, based on statements made by ROC MP and Russian officials. [33] *Novaya Gazeta* observed that extending combat veteran statuses to priests appears to contradict the 66th Apostolic Canon, given that such veteran statuses are typically granted to individuals who actively participate in combat. The 66th Apostolic Canon requires that any priest who kills a person (even accidentally or in self-defense) be defrocked. *Novaya Gazeta* remarked that the Patriarchate of Constantinople can use this amendment to further question the ROC MP's affiliation with and adherence to the laws of Orthodox Christianity. ISW continues to assess that the ROC MP is a Kremlin-controlled institution and is an instrument of Russia's hybrid warfare, which has been increasingly used as part of the Kremlin's campaign to militarize Russian society. [34]

Russian Defense Industrial Base (Russian objective: Increase Russia's defense industrial base production to support Russian war efforts.)

The Kremlin is actively reorienting and expanding its unmanned aerial systems (UAS) production to support its war effort in Ukraine and possibly to prepare for future aggression against NATO states. The Ukrainian Eastern Human Rights Group (EHRG) and Institute for Strategic Research and Security (ISRS) released a report in March 2025 assessing that the Kremlin is pursuing targeted militarization of Russia's civilian UAS industry. [35] The report noted that the Kremlin introduced its "Strategy for the Development of Unmanned Aviation through 2035," which aims to use civilian research and production centers and resources for UAS production. The strategy identified five key areas for UAS development, including stimulating demand for domestic UAS; developing, standardizing, and serially producing UAS and UAS components; forming a specialized UAS certification system, UAS safety, and developing infrastructure; training UAS specialists; and supporting UAS research. The report highlighted that the Kremlin aims to train over one million specialists in the UAS field. The report observed that the Kremlin seeks to grow Russia's UAS market (including airplanes, helicopters, and multi-rotor UAS) between now and 2030. The report noted that the Kremlin distributed funds to 30 federal subjects, creating 4,872 specialized UAS classes in schools and 380 practical UAS training centers.

The report noted that employment in Russian UAS production nearly doubled from 4,500 workers in 2021 to 8,400 workers in 2023, likely due to increasing demand for military drones. The report found that Russian UAS enterprise revenues increased by 2.5 times since 2022 – from 22.9 billion rubles (\$277.4 million) in 2022 to 84.2 billion rubles (over

one billion dollars) in 2024. *Verstka* similarly reported on April 11, citing Russian State Resource of Accounting Reporting data, that the Russian "Albatros" company that assembles Shahed strike drones earned over 955 million rubles (\$11.6 million) in 2024 – 61 percent more than the company earned in 2023.[36]

Joint Military Exercises (Russian objective: Improve interoperability among Russia and its allies and partners, expand Russia's global military influence, and support Russia's information operations about Russia's conventional military capabilities)

Russian forces completed joint military exercises with India and Tajikistan on April 11. The Russian Pacific Fleet announced on April 11 that a detachment of Russian ships completed naval exercises at the port of Chennai, India, and departed for a long-distance voyage in the Indian Ocean.[37] Russian state media reported that Russian corvettes *Rezkiy* and *Geroy Rossiyskoy Federatsii Aldar Tsydenzhapov* and medium sea tanker *Perchenga* arrived in India on March 26 to participate in the Indra-Navy 2025 naval exercises in the Bay of Benegal alongside the Indian Navy. Russian state media added that the Russian and Indian navies practiced tactical maneuvering in joint formations, improved their practical skills in combating unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), and carried out artillery fire against sea and air targets.[38] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) announced on April 11 that the Russian Armed Forces completed joint military exercises with Tajikistan's military at the "Harb-Maidon" Training Ground in Tajikistan.[39] Russian and Tajik forces practiced eliminating terrorist gangs and illegal armed groups operating in mountainous terrain and commanding detachments during border protection exercises.

Note: ISW does not receive any classified material from any source, uses only publicly available information, and draws extensively on Russian, Ukrainian, and Western reporting and social media, as well as commercially available satellite imagery and other geospatial data, as the basis for these reports. References to all sources used are provided in the endnotes of each update.

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