



RUSSIAN FORCE GENERATION AND TECHNOLOGICAL ADAPTATIONS

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The Kremlin appears to be increasingly concerned with the Russian military's ability to retain forces in the event of demobilization following a ceasefire or a negotiated peace. Russian propagandist Anastasiya Kashevarova claimed on April 17 that the Kremlin assigned Russia's military chiefs of staff in early April to survey contract servicemen and mobilized personnel about their intent to reenlist in the Russian military should Russia complete its war in Ukraine.[1] Kashevarova implied that the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) is trying to retain active servicemen by offering them full social benefits, subsidized rent, a monthly salary of 100,000-to-200,000 rubles (\$1,225 to \$2,450), 60 days of paid leave annually, and other benefits. Kashevarova claimed that the Russian military chiefs of staff asked all Russian servicemen who refused to reenlist following Russia's war in Ukraine to write formal reports documenting their refusal. Kashevarova assessed that the survey may be part of the Russian MoD's effort to estimate potential reductions in force and forecast the strength of the Russian military in the event of the completion of Russia's war in Ukraine. The Russian government signed a decree on April 19 that will increase the salaries for military and law enforcement personnel by 4.5 percent starting on October 1, 2025, and the Ukrainian Resistance Center assessed that this decree aims to incentivize recruitment and force retention.[2] ISW has recently observed reports of the Russian MoD intensifying efforts to coerce mobilized servicemen into signing military contracts, which could help Russia to retain contract personnel in the event of demobilization.[3]

Russian milbloggers expressed doubts that the Russian MoD will be able to retain the current size of the Russian military if the Russian MoD does not promise — and honor — increased financial benefits. One milblogger confirmed that Russian military leadership is surveying Russian forces, but claimed that Russian military leadership is not offering any special benefits to increase force retention rates.[4] The milblogger, citing unnamed sources within an unspecified Russian operational grouping of forces fighting in Ukraine, claimed that some field commanders independently imposed a new requirement for servicemen to document their refusal to reenlist after facing nagging from senior military commanders about the need to retain forces on the battlefield. The milblogger added that the Russian military's persistent commitment to wounded personnel on the battlefield underscores Russia's need to generate new recruits and retain existing forces. The milblogger implied that the Russian

MoD is conducting this survey in an effort to assess which financial and social benefits are the most attractive and most likely to attract Russian servicemen to reenlist after a potential demobilization. The milblogger suggested that these efforts ultimately will be futile, as the Russian military continues to face widespread logistics problems, fails to provide servicemembers career advancement opportunities, and continues to lose credibility by providing exaggerated field reports. Another Russian milblogger observed that the Russian MoD would need to amend the Russian military's official military pay scale and official budget to deliver on promised raises.[5] The milblogger added that the Russian military must conduct reforms that transform the average Russian's perception of military service away from being a lucrative opportunity towards being an honorable responsibility.

Key Takeaways:

- **The Kremlin and some Russian federal subjects are continuing to increase financial incentives and expand eligibility requirements for contract military service.**
- **Some Russian federal subjects are failing to meet the Kremlin's recruitment targets as the Russian volunteer recruitment system continues to suffer from high recruitment costs and other inefficiencies.**
- **Some Russian federal subjects may be failing to meet recruitment targets because they are unable to compete with financial incentives offered in other federal subjects.**
- **Putin signed a decree on April 21 exempting select volunteers who fought in Ukraine in volunteer units or Kremlin proxy forces from being conscripted into the Russian military, likely as part of the Kremlin's effort to centralize control over informal volunteer units.**
- **The Kremlin is continuing to expand the "Time of Heroes" Higher School of Public Administration Program across occupied Ukraine, likely in an effort to raise a new class of loyal occupation officials.**
- **Russian milbloggers criticized Russian state media after it published a video of Russian long-range drone operators conducting a drone strike from a high-rise in Moscow City.**
- **Russia reportedly developed a new version of the "Kometa" navigation chip, enhancing the resistance of Russian satellite navigation signals against Ukrainian electronic warfare (EW).**
- **On April 16, Putin awarded the honorific "Guards" titles to four Russian motorized rifle regiments, an aviation regiment, and an army corps that have fought in Donetsk and Kherson oblasts.**

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

The Kremlin and some Russian federal subjects are continuing to increase financial incentives and expand eligibility requirements for contract military service. The Russian government submitted a bill to the Russian State Duma on April 18 that would allow stateless people to serve in the Russian Armed Forces.[6] The bill is part of the Kremlin's ongoing effort to decrease military service eligibility requirements to recruit a larger volume of troops at the expense of efforts to professionalize the Russian military and staff the military with disciplined, quality personnel. The bill also follows Russian President Vladimir Putin's March 20 decree "On the Peculiarities of the Legal Status of Certain Categories of Foreign Citizens and Stateless Persons in the Russian Federation," which stipulates that Ukrainian or "foreign" citizens living in occupied areas of Ukraine must either "regulate their legal status" or leave their homes or else risk deportation.[7] The expansion of military contract service to "stateless" people may be in support of Russia's efforts to illegally coerce Ukrainians in occupied Ukraine into military service.[8] Tyumen Oblast Governor Alexander Moor announced on April 18 that Tyumen Oblast increased its one-time enlistment bonus to 1.9 million rubles (\$25,285) from 1.6 million rubles (\$19,610) offered since October 2024.[9]

Some Russian federal subjects are failing to meet the Kremlin's recruitment targets as the Russian volunteer recruitment system continues to suffer from high recruitment costs and other inefficiencies. Sverdlovsk Oblast's Ministry of Education offered university students facing deferment, debt, or poor academic performance the opportunity to fight in Ukraine in exchange for debt or academic sanction forgiveness and a chance to continue their studies upon their return from the frontlines.[10] Sverdlovsk Oblast's Chief Military Recruitment Officer Yuriy Aksenov reportedly proposed this program to the Sverdlovsk Oblast Ministry of Education to raise low recruitment numbers in some provincial Russian regions.[11] Sverdlovsk Oblast has a history of failing to meet the Kremlin's recruitment rates, with Sverdlovsk Oblast officials revealing in April 2024 that the region only recruited 25 percent of its required recruitment target.[12] Russian opposition outlet *Vazhnye Istorii (iStories)* assessed in December 2024 that Sverdlovsk Oblast's enlistment bonuses increased 75-fold from 20,000 rubles (\$245) to 1.5 million rubles (\$18,382) since the start of 2024.[13] Aksenov's proposal to recruit students facing academic sanctions indicates that the significant increase in Sverdlovsk Oblast's one-time enlistment bonuses did not improve the region's recruitment rates.

Some Russian federal subjects may be failing to meet recruitment targets because they are unable to compete with financial incentives offered in other federal subjects. Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrug Governor Dmitry Artyukhov's press service announced on April 15 that the region will decrease its one-time enlistment bonuses from 3.1 million rubles (\$38,020) to 1.9 million rubles (\$23,300).[14] Ural regional information agency *URA.ru*, citing unnamed sources, reported that military recruitment centers in the Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrug stopped offering recruits temporary surge pricing for enlistment bonuses because an influx of Russian volunteers from other federal subjects sought to capitalize on the increased bonus, which did not improve the recruitment rate among the region's own population.[15] ISW assessed on April 15 that Russian federal subjects began to use surge pricing to recruit additional volunteers in late 2024 and early 2025, but such efforts evidently increased the

competition for the same recruits among different Russian regions, as opposed to incentivizing new recruitment.[16]

Russian Force Centralization (Assessed Russian objective: Centralize the state's control over informal volunteer-based units that emerged in early 2022 after the Kremlin failed to declare general mobilization).

Putin signed a decree on April 21 exempting select volunteers who fought in Ukraine in volunteer units or Kremlin proxy forces from being conscripted into the Russian military, likely as part of the Kremlin's effort to centralize control over informal volunteer units. The decree exempts those with six months of combat experience in the Russian MoD's volunteer formations, including volunteers who fought as part of the Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics' (DNR and LNR) paramilitary, from Russia's mandatory military conscription lottery.[17] The Russian MoD began centralizing control over Russian volunteer units and formations — units that previously operated as informal units during the early stages of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine — in late 2022 and early 2023 to improve combat cohesion and minimize risks of insubordination among units that previously enjoyed greater independence from the Russian MoD.[18]

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

Putin signed a decree on April 21 granting combat veteran status to Russian servicemen and volunteers who fought in Kursk Oblast following months of domestic criticisms over the Kremlin's failure to properly recognize servicemen who fought in Kursk.[19] The decree offers combat veteran status to active and retired military personnel, employees of the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD), Rosgvardia, Russian State Fire Service, law enforcement agencies, the Russian Prosecutor's Office, and the Russian Investigative Committee who participated in combat operations in Russian territory and Russian border areas adjacent to Ukraine. The status of a combat veteran entitles a Russian serviceman to various entitlement programs, social benefits, and financial compensation.

The Kremlin is continuing to expand the "Time of Heroes" Higher School of Public Administration Program across occupied Ukraine, likely in an effort to raise a new class of loyal occupation officials. Luhansk Oblast occupation head Leonid Pasechnik announced on April 18 that veterans completed the second stage of the "Heroes of Luhansk Oblast" selection process and are beginning the selection process' third stage, during which Russian occupation officials will interview "Time of Heroes" experts.[20] The Kherson Oblast occupation administration announced on April 15 that the "Heroes of Kherson Oblast" program began evaluating veterans interested in participating in the "Time of Heroes" program.[21] The Kherson Oblast occupation administration advertised the "Heroes of Kherson Oblast" program as a "chance to become part of the government team" of occupied Kherson Oblast. Russian President Vladimir 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 Russia and occupied Ukraine over the long term.[22]

The Kremlin is appointing veterans who are members of the "Time of Heroes" program to high-ranking positions within the Russian defense industrial base (DIB). The Kremlin appointed veteran and alumnus of the first "Time of Heroes" cohort Denis Pogodin as the first deputy director of the Lukhovitsky Aviation Plant on April 17.[23] The Lukhovitsky Aviation Plant produces advanced aviation equipment and performs ground and flight testing for aircraft.[24]

Russian Technological Adaptations (Russian objective: Introduce technological innovations to optimize systems for use in Ukraine)

Russian milbloggers criticized Russian state media after it published a video of Russian long-range drone operators conducting a drone strike from a high-rise in Moscow City.[25] Russian state news agency *Ria Novosti* published and then promptly deleted a video report about Andrei Bezrukov, the detachment commander of the Russian 88th "Hispaniola" Volunteer Brigade (Russian Volunteer Corps) and the head of the Russian Center for Unmanned Systems and Technologies, after the report faced significant backlash from Russian milbloggers. The report purportedly showed Bezrukov piloting Russian "Ovod" first-person view (FPV) drones near Chasiv Yar from a high-rise in Moscow City. *Ria Novosti* claimed that Bezrukov operated the drones using the new "Orbita" system, which reportedly allows Russian forces to operate drones from any location. Russian state media and Kremlin-affiliated milbloggers celebrated the drone strike as the first successful Russian strike against a Ukrainian target on the battlefield using the "Orbita" system, which reportedly has advanced communication systems and uses neutral networks for targeting.[26] OSINT analysts geolocated Bezrukov's location in the video to a high-rise building in the "Moscow City" business center, and some Russian milbloggers accused *Ria Novosti* of violating operational security and presenting evidence that the business center could be argued to be a legitimate military target.[27] Russian state media likely published the footage of the purported drone strike in an effort to promote the Russian MoD's controversial force centralization efforts, given that some Russian state publications overtly emphasized that this innovation was made possible by Russia's creation of specialized state-controlled military units.[28] ISW assesses that the Russian MoD launched a coordinated effort in August 2024 to centralize the Russian state's control over Russian drone operators and developers, some of whom had enjoyed some degree of relative independence from the Russian MoD's operational command and the larger Russian military bureaucracy.[29]

A Russian milblogger claimed that Russia's remote piloting solutions through the "Orbita" system can reduce threats to Russian drone operators, but acknowledged that long-range drone piloting is not a new capability. The milblogger stated that drone operators could launch drones using the "Orbita" system from areas far from the frontlines and reduce the time needed to coordinate drone strikes. The milblogger acknowledged that Ukrainian forces have already implemented unmanned drone launch platforms in the Black Sea, which enable similar long-range remote control of drones.[30] The milblogger noted that lapses in internet coverage, wireless signal coverage, or a lack of physical cables may disrupt the long-range remote operation of drones via the "Orbita" system or similar drone launch platforms.

Russia reportedly developed a new version of the "Kometa" navigation chip, enhancing the resistance of Russian satellite navigation signals against

Ukrainian electronic warfare (EW).[31] Radio technology specialist Serhiy Beskretnov commented on a Russian milblogger's footage claiming to show Russian forces using a new version of the "Kometa" navigation chip, which reportedly improves the accuracy and EW resilience of guided Russian glide bombs.[32] The milblogger stated that this is the third version of the "Kometa" navigation chip and claimed that Russian forces should use the chip to "radically" strike Ukraine's borders before Ukrainian forces can develop countermeasures.[33] The milblogger claimed that Russian forces struck an arena in Kherson City using air bombs equipped with "Kometa" navigation chips, and a Kremlin-affiliated milblogger similarly claimed that Russian forces are installing the chip on Shaheds and other heavy strike drones.[34]

Russian State Recognition of Officers and Military Units: (Assessed Russian objective: Honor specific Russian units for service, achievements, and hardships in Ukraine and incentivize service in distinguished units.)

On April 16, Putin awarded the honorific "Guards" titles to four Russian motorized rifle regiments, an aviation regiment, and an army corps that have fought in Donetsk and Kherson oblasts.[35] Putin awarded the honorific "Guards" titles to the 68th Army Corps (Eastern Military District [EMD]), the 1442nd Motorized Rifle Regiment (6th Motorized Rifle Division, 3rd Army Corps), the 102nd Motorized Rifle Regiment (150th Motorized Rifle Division, 8th Combined Arms Army [CAA], Southern Military District [SMD]), 337th Airborne (VDV) Regiment (104th VDV Division), 328th VDV Regiment (104th VDV Division), and 368th Assault Aviation Regiment (1st Composite Air Division, SMD). Elements of the 68th Army Corps are operating in the Kurakhove direction; elements of the 1442nd Motorized Rifle Regiment are operating in the Chasiv Yar direction; elements of the 102nd Motorized Rifle Regiment are operating west of Toretsk; elements of the 337th VDV Regiment are operating in the Kherson direction, and elements of the 328th VDV Regiment fought for Krynkly (Russian-occupied Kherson Oblast) in 2023 and 2024.[36]

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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