



# RUSSIAN FORCE GENERATION AND TECHNOLOGICAL ADAPTATIONS

## Russian Force Generation and Technological Adaptations

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**Note: The data cut-off for this product was 10 pm ET on April 28. ISW will cover subsequent reports in the May 5 Russian Force Generation and Technological Adaptations Report.**

**Russian military recruitment officials are reportedly leveraging a new law extending the validity of conscription notices to detain military-aged men and meet Russia's record-high Spring 2025 conscription quota.** Putin signed a law on April 21 that simplifies conscription procedures for military aged men who were called up in a semi-annual conscription but did not deploy for compulsory military service.[1] The law specifies that conscripts who underwent conscription processes such as medical commissions but were not assigned to military service could be called up to military service within a year without repeating conscription procedures. Russian opposition outlet *Verska*, citing Russian human rights activists, reported that Moscow City police began raiding public spaces to catch military-aged men and immediately commit them to compulsory military service in Russia without proper conscription processing.[2] Russian human rights activists told *Verstka* that Moscow City law enforcement is particularly targeting men ages 18 through 30 who were conscripted in Fall 2024 but were not called up or did not show up for military service.[3] *Verstka* reported that men who successfully appealed their conscription notices in Fall 2024 may also be subject to immediate conscription without additional due process. A Russian lawyer stated that the new conscription law excluded men who underwent conscription processes in Fall 2024 but did not report to military service, meaning that Russian law enforcement is illegally using this law to boost conscription numbers.[4]

Russian officials may be intensifying raids and detentions of military-age men in an effort to urgently satisfy the increased draft quota. Putin ordered the conscription of 160,000 Russian men aged 18 through 30 on March 31, the largest conscription call up since 2011.[5] Russian human rights activists told *Radio Svoboda's* northwestern Russia service *Sever Realii* that St. Petersburg law enforcement recently illegally detained at least 200 military-aged men and attempted to commit detainees with chronic illnesses and medical deferrals to compulsory military service within 24 hours.[6] Moscow City law enforcement also began raiding fitness clubs in an effort to find men who avoided compulsory military service or registration.[7]

**Russian law enforcement raids of military aged men and the new conscription procedures indicate that the Russian military conscription apparatus may lack the administrative capacity to meet the Kremlin's increasing draft quotas in wartime.** Independent Russian human rights project *OVD-Info* assessed that detentions of military-aged men are part of the military recruiters' effort to bypass the standard procedure that lasts a few days and illegally draft men into the military without due process.[8] *OVD-Info* remarked that the number of detained military-aged men in Fall 2024 increased nearly two-fold (170 detentions) over Fall 2023 (around 94 detentions) and that military recruitment centers intensified raids in December 2024 in a likely effort to urgently meet the conscription quota before the end of the draft period. *OVD-Info* reported that the largest number of raids during Fall 2024 conscription cycle occurred in Moscow City, and Russian human rights activists warned that Russian conscription methods for the Spring 2025 period will be even harsher.[9] Russian military recruiters may be struggling to meet Russia's conscription quotas due to Russia's growing demographic problems, active recruitment for combat operations in Ukraine, and draft evasion.[10]

**The Kremlin has been increasingly reforming the Russian conscription apparatus since November 2022 likely in an effort to expand the Russian inactive reserve and enhance Russia's mobilization potential.** The Kremlin has introduced various laws since at least November 2022 that expand the Russian conscription pool, introduce stricter punishments for draft evasion, and simplify draft procedures. Putin tasked the Russian Digital Development Ministry and the Federal Tax Service in November 2022 to create a joint database containing information on Russians liable for compulsory military service by April 2024.[11] Putin's order notably follows the Kremlin's systematic failures during the September 2022 partial mobilization.[12] The Kremlin began working on and rolling out a unified digital register for Russian citizens eligible for military service starting in April 2023, which allows Russian military recruitment centers to digitally distribute summonses and crack down on draft dodging.[13] The Kremlin also collated the unified digital register with other government agencies starting November 2024, which makes it challenging for military aged men to obtain government services if they dodge the draft.[14] The Kremlin also expanded the Russian conscription pool by increasing the maximum draft age from 27 to 30 starting January 1, 2024.[15] Putin signed a decree in July 2023 increasing fines for draft dodging, and the Russian State Duma Defense Committee had since proposed increasing penalties for people who fail to update their military registrations in February 2025.[16] The Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) proposed in February 2025 to shorten the list of medical conditions that qualify for deferment from the draft.[17]

The Kremlin's efforts to reform the Russian conscription apparatus suggest that the Kremlin is learning from its bureaucratic failures during the September 2022 mobilization. The Kremlin has yet to resolve persistent bureaucratic inefficiencies, draft dodging, and conscript retention, as it is increasingly relying on raids and coercion to fulfil its conscription and recruitment quotas. These reforms may enable Russia to effectively conduct partial or general involuntary reserve call-ups in the future, however, if the Kremlin properly adopts these measures.

### **Key Takeaways:**

- **The Kremlin is continuing to recruit foreigners to support its war effort in Ukraine, particularly from Southeast and Central Asia.**
- **Russian federal subjects are continuing to incentivize military recruitment by increasing the one-time compensation for Russians who bring new recruits into regional military recruitment centers.**
- **Kaliningrad Oblast formed a new reserve unit, possibly as part of the Kremlin's ongoing preparations for future aggression against NATO.**
- **Putin is setting information conditions to lower eligibility requirements for veterans to join local government service, likely to expedite the formation of a country-wide, veteran-based elite loyal to the regime and Russia's war efforts.**
- **The Kremlin is increasing the federal funding for military patriotic education of Russian youth in an effort to expand the Russian recruitment pool over the long term.**
- **Putin acknowledged that Russia still faces drone shortages during the Military-Industrial Commission meeting on April 23.**
- **Russian milbloggers criticized the Russian MoD for failing to effectively integrate small drone development companies into the Russian DIB and rapidly adapt drones to battlefield realities.**
- **Russia continues the development of unmanned ground vehicles (UGVs) and multi-purpose drones to support logistics and remote mining efforts.**
- **Russian state-owned defense conglomerate Rostec launched an effort to improve communication between drones.**
- **Russian forces conducted joint military and naval exercises with Bangladeshi and Laotian forces in late April.**

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

**The Kremlin is continuing to recruit foreigners to support its war effort in Ukraine, particularly from Southeast and Central Asia.** Russian opposition outlet *Vazhnye Istorii* (*iStories*), citing leaked data from Moscow City's medical database for military recruitment, reported that Russia recruited over 1,500 foreigners from 48 countries to fight in Ukraine between April 2023 and the end of May 2024.[18] *Vazhnye Istorii* identified the origins of over 1,300 recruits and observed that 771 foreign recruits originated from southern and eastern Asia, 523 from countries of the former Soviet Union, and 72 from Africa. *Vazhnye Istorii* estimated that Russia recruited at least 603 Nepali citizens and that a military recruitment center in Moscow City processed a record-high number of more than 370 Nepali recruits in October 2023. *Vazhnye Istorii* reported that Russian recruitment rates for Nepali citizens sharply declined in November 2023 after Nepal's government formally asked the Kremlin to cease recruitment and stopped issuing resident authorization for work in Russia. *Vazhnye Istorii* reported that Russia

also avidly recruited foreigners from Egypt, Ghana, Tajikistan, Belarus, Uzbekistan, Sri Lanka, and the People's Republic of China (PRC), among other countries, starting in April 2023. *Vazhnye Istorii* discovered that Russian recruiters deployed foreign recruits for administrative processing to the "Avangard" Training Center in Moscow Oblast and that foreigners, on average, waited for around two weeks before undergoing training and deploying to Ukraine. The Kyrgyz State Committee for National Security reportedly arrested an employee of the Russian Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), Compatriots Living Abroad, and International Humanitarian Cooperation (Rossotrudnichestvo) on April 19 for recruiting "mercenaries." [19] A Ukrainian battalion also shared footage on April 27 showing a recruit from Senegal operating in the Toretsk direction. [20] Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a decree in May 2023 that simplified the procedure for foreign recruits to receive Russian citizenship, and the Kremlin has since continued recruiting foreigners despite Putin's claims in September 2023 that Russia had no need for foreign recruits. [21]

**Russian federal subjects are continuing to incentivize military recruitment by increasing the one-time compensation for Russians who bring new recruits into regional military recruitment centers.** The Ulyanovsk City Duma allocated 26 million rubles (\$314,582) to distribute 200,000 rubles (\$2,420) one-time compensation to Ulyanovsk residents who bring prospective recruits to local military registration centers. [22] Various Russian federal subjects have been offering 100,000 rubles (\$1,210) to any person who brought a friend to sign a military service contract since at least Summer 2024, and the Ulyanovsk City Duma's 200,000-ruble compensation marks a notable increase in such financial incentives. [23]

**Russian Military Reforms and Force Restructuring: (Assessed Russian objective: Restructure the Russian military to maintain the war in Ukraine while preparing for a potential large-scale conventional war with NATO).**

**Kaliningrad Oblast formed a new reserve unit, possibly as part of the Kremlin's ongoing preparations for future aggression against NATO.** Kaliningrad Oblast Governor Alexey Besprozvannykh announced on April 19 that Kaliningrad Oblast formed the "BARS-39" (Russian Combat Army Reserve) reserve unit after receiving approval from the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD). [24] Besprozvannykh claimed that the BARS-39 reserve unit will strengthen Kaliningrad Oblast's territorial defense and that Russian inactive reservists and contract servicemen (*kontraktniki*) are currently undergoing training at the Khmelevka Training Ground. Besprozvannykh announced that Kaliningrad Oblast is continuing recruitment for the BARS-39 reserve unit.

**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.)**

**Putin is setting information conditions to lower eligibility requirements for veterans to join local government service, likely to expedite the formation of a country-wide, veteran-based elite loyal to the regime and Russia's war efforts.** Putin heard reports from municipal leaders about the progress of the "Time of Heroes" Higher School of Public Administration program and its affiliates, such as "Schools of Heroes" during the "Small Motherland – the Strength of Russia" forum on

April 21.[25] A municipal official told Putin that all Russian federal subjects and occupation administrations in Ukraine established local "School of Heroes" programs to execute the "Time of Heroes" program on the federal level. Another municipal official proposed to Putin to drop higher education and prior government experience as an eligibility requirement for municipal government service, arguing that one year of combat experience could count as two years of municipal service experience. The official added that Russia could also lower eligibility requirements for veterans who seek to pursue job opportunities within the education sector by hiring veterans with secondary vocational education or a bachelor's degree, under the condition that veterans will obtain higher education in the future. The official claimed that occupation administrations in Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhia, and Kherson oblasts have already adopted some of these measures. Putin responded by encouraging municipal leaders to find and help veterans who do not meet eligibility qualifications and stated that these requirements can be changed if a veteran was a patriot and made sacrifices to defend Russia. Putin called Russian veterans interested in government service Russia's "real gold reserve" and claimed that veterans constitute a new elite. Putin expressed hope that the "Time of Heroes" program will soon generate more parliamentarians and deputies during the April 28 Council of Legislators meeting.[26] 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.[27]

A Russian political commentator assessed that Putin's efforts to install Russian veterans into government positions is a deliberate campaign aimed at forming a new political and administrative elite and that the Kremlin has signaled its intent to expand the number of veterans in the Russian State Duma and other government agencies.[28] The commentator observed that Russian parliamentarians have already introduced a bill that will form government service reserves for veterans, which will let veterans receive government appointments in a prioritized order. The commentator added that the Kremlin is creating a new "hero class" in Russian society that will help the Kremlin strengthen the legitimacy of the regime using veterans' positive reputations within Russian society. The commentator argued that Putin's efforts are part of a "fundamental restructuring of the social pyramid" in which service to Russia is the most important "social capital."

**The Russian government continued to introduce support measures for current Russian servicemen, veterans, and their families as part of the Kremlin's efforts to appease veteran communities and promote recruitment.** Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin ordered the Russian government to establish country-wide property tax benefits for Russian servicemen and their families on April 23.[29] The Russian MoD proposed the same day to extend 400,000 rubles (\$4,870) one-time compensation to Russian military personnel who operate in border areas of Bryansk, Kursk, and Belgorod oblasts and signed military service contracts with the Russian MoD after August 9, 2024.[30]

**Militarization of Society and Youth (Assessed Russian objective: Condition Russian society and youth for military service and raise societal support for Russian war efforts).**

**The Kremlin is increasing the federal funding for military patriotic education of Russian youth in an effort to expand the Russian recruitment pool over the long term.** Russian opposition media outlet *Mozhem Obyasnit*, citing Russian financial documents, reported that the Kremlin allocated nearly 1 billion rubles (\$12,180,000) from the 2025 federal budget to the military-patriotic movement “Yunarmiya” (“The Youth Army”), which is responsible for instilling pro-war sentiments in Russian children and teenagers. [31] *Mozhem Obyasnit* calculated that the allocated funding for Yunarmiya in 2025 is twice as large as it was in 2024 and the highest allocated amount since the start of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. *Mozhem Obyasnit* reported that the Russian MoD will allocate another 200 million rubles (\$2,436,000) to “Yunarmiya” to prepare Russian youth for military service in the Russian Armed Forces in the future.

**Russian federal subjects are continuing to hold military-patriotic lectures with prominent Russian ultranationalists to militarize Russian youth.** The Moscow Oblast Ministry of Information and Youth Politics held a military-patriotic educational lecture as part of the broader “We Are the Future. The Power of Meanings” project on April 26 for over 1,000 Russian students and members of youth organizations. The Moscow Oblast Ministry of Information and Youth Politics featured former Donetsk People's Republic's (DNR) deputy information minister Daniil Bezsonov as the key speaker.[32]

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

**Putin acknowledged that Russia still faces drone shortages during the Military-Industrial Commission meeting on April 23.** Putin stated that the Russian defense industrial base (DIB) delivered over 1.5 million drones of various types in 2025 and that Russian forces receive 4,000 first person-view (FPV) drones every day.[33] Putin acknowledged that drones remain in short supply and claimed that the Russian MoD, Defense Minister Andrei Belousov, and DIB are working on increasing production. Putin also claimed that almost all Russian DIB enterprises fulfilled their state orders in 2024 and that Russian forces received over 4,000 pieces of armored equipment and 180 combat aircraft and helicopters. Putin stated that more than 400 enterprises are participating in a Russian DIB expansion and modernization program. Putin also noted that the Russian DIB needs to speed up the production of robotic systems, unmanned surface vehicles (USV), and combat lasers.

**Russian milbloggers criticized the Russian MoD for failing to effectively integrate small drone development companies into the Russian DIB and rapidly adapt drones to battlefield realities.** A Russian milblogger responded to Putin's April 23 meeting by implying that Russian drone production would increase if the Kremlin did not focus on centralizing drone production and did not exclusively rely on large DIB enterprises.[34] The milblogger claimed that his team produces 5,000 drones per month and that the team could expand drone production in two to three months with government support. Another Russian milbloggr claimed that Russia's main problem is not the shortage of drones but the Russian DIB's inability to rapidly adapt to technological advances.[35]

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

**Russia continued the development of unmanned ground vehicles (UGVs) and multi-purpose drones to support logistics and remote mining efforts.** Former Roscosmos (Russian space agency) head and Zaporizhia Oblast occupation senator Dmitry Rogozin published footage on April 23 claiming to show the first flight of the "Stiletto" multipurpose drone, which uses various communication and control systems to adapt to the frontline conditions.[36] Rogozin claimed that elements of a Russian technical battalion of the "BARS-Sarmat" Special Purpose Unmanned Systems Center developed the "Stiletto" drone, that the drone can carry a warhead of up to four kilograms, and that Russian forces are currently testing the drone without any bureaucratic restrictions. Russian milbloggers claimed on April 19 that Russian military units received "Veran" multifunctional tracked robotic platforms that are capable of transporting supplies of up to 1.5 tons.[37] Russian milbloggers noted that Russian forces use "Varan" UGVs to transport ammunition and evacuate the wounded, and that the UGV can automatically follow Russian soldiers without the need for drone operators to control the UGV. Russian milbloggers also amplified footage on April 22 of the Russian "Strannik" UGV that can travel for up to 15 kilometers, mine, transmit WiFi, and transfer supplies.[38] Russian milbloggers claimed that "Strannik" has a carrying capacity of 50 kilograms and operates via satellite communications.

**Russian state-owned defense conglomerate Rostec launched an effort to improve communication between drones.** Rostec announced on April 22 that Rostec's Rosel holding has begun testing a drone identification system, which automatically identifies friendly drones at an altitude of up to five kilometers and at a distance of up to 100 kilometers from the operator.[39] Rostec claimed that it plans to produce the initial batch of these systems in 2025 and that the system is a radar that is installed in the drone. Rostec noted that Russian developers are testing the identification system on the Geodesy-401 drone used for aerial photography in urban areas. Head of Ukraine's Aerorozvidka non-governmental organization Lieutenant Colonel Yaroslav Honchar assessed that the drone identification system will allow Russian forces to increase the efficiency of drone use, improve drone coordination, and avoid fratricide among drones.[40] Honchar added that Ukrainian forces are also integrating drone identification systems and have already tested such systems in combat.

**Joint Military Exercises and Combat Experience Exchanges (Assessed 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 conducted joint military and naval exercises with Bangladeshi and Laotian forces in late April.** The Russian MoD announced on April 22 that the Russian Pacific Fleet's *Rezkiy* and *Aldar Tsydenzhapov* corvettes, and *Pechenga* medium sea tanker participated in joint naval exercises of the passing exercise (PASSEX) type with Bangladeshi forces in the Indian Ocean.[41] The Russian MoD announced that the Russian and Bangladeshi navies engaged in communications, joint tactical maneuvering, and replenishment of water and fuel training. The Russian MoD reported that Russian Pacific Fleet ships continued a long-distance voyage after

completing the joint military exercises. The Russian MoD announced on April 24 that elements of the Russian Eastern Military District (EMD) trained special purpose elements of the Lao People's Armed Forces as part of the "Typhoon-2025" military exercises.[42] The Russian MoD reported that Russian and Laotian forces aimed to strengthen military cooperation and exchange experiences on countering illegal armed groups. The Russian MoD reported that Russian forces also trained Laotian forces to operate and counter drones.

**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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