



RUSSIA REFORM MONITOR

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Related Categories: Democracy and Governance; Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues; Warfare; Russia; Turkey; Ukraine

DEPORTATIONS, "FILTRATION CAMPS" KEY TO THE KREMLIN'S PLANS

Since May, reports have emerged of "filtration camps" in the self-proclaimed Kremlin-backed Luhansk and Donetsk People's Republics, where Ukrainian civilians fleeing violence are forced to undergo inhumane imprisonment and interrogation. The measures are ostensibly designed to weed out those with ties to the Ukrainian military or "nationalist organizations" before they are allowed to move freely throughout the Russian-occupied zone of Eastern Ukraine. However, according to an international investigation conducted by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, these camps are just one aspect of a broader effort on the part of the Kremlin to secure control over occupied territories in Ukraine by depopulating the area through a program of "massive displacement."

The Russian military previously acknowledged that they had transferred more than 1.4 million Ukrainians into Russia, "including 238,329 children since the start of the war," moving them through these filtration centers. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, however, claims the actual number is closer to 2 million. While the Kremlin denies that such transfers were forced, OSCE investigators assert that "[t]he number of Ukrainian civilians deported from the occupied territories to Russia has continued to rise."

That reality invokes images of mass deportations, which are considered a war crime under the Geneva Conventions. "Forced population transfers are the key to the Kremlin's plan," says Michael Carpenter, the U.S. Ambassador to the OSCE, because Moscow feels that, in order to control the occupied territories, "it must either bomb the territory until nothing is left but dust or engage in forced deportation of local residents via the so-called filtration process." The use of detention centers and forced deportations, he also explained, is part of a "Russification strategy intended to deny Ukraine's history and independence and suppress Ukrainian language and identity." (*Washington Examiner*, July 28, 2022)

HOW WAGNER IS WINNING

As the Kremlin takes aggressive steps to boost military recruitment for its war effort in Ukraine, the Wagner private military company has taken an increasingly prominent role in fighting alongside Russia's traditional forces. Wagner has maintained a presence in the Donbass since the annexation of Crimea in 2014. But whereas its role was once distinctly paramilitary, in the current conflict in Ukraine Wagner recruits have increasingly shouldered the burden of roles once reserved for Russia's official military forces. Reports continue to emerge of recruitment efforts conducted by both Russia's military and Wagner officials to enlist men from Russia's ethnically diverse and disadvantaged regions as well as from penal colonies.

Relying on Wagner recruits, as opposed to traditional soldiers, allows the Kremlin to obfuscate the death toll of the conflict and deny rights and privileges guaranteed to traditional soldiers – an important consideration for the Kremlin as Russia's economy teeters on the brink of collapse. In a July 30th intelligence update, the UK Ministry of Defense reported that, "Wagner has likely been allocated responsibility for specific sectors of the front line in eastern Ukraine." However, the bulletin also reported that, despite the ramped-up recruitment, Wagner forces are, "highly unlikely to be sufficient to make a significant difference in the trajectory of Russia's invasion of Ukraine." (Reuters, July 29, 2022)

THE TURKISH ROLE IN UKRAINE'S WAR EFFORT

NATO member Turkey has played a significant part in Ukraine's efforts to defend itself against Russian aggression in recent months. According to Ukrainian Defense Minister Oleksii Reznikov, Turkish arms company Baykar has sent 50 armed *Bayraktar TB2* drones to Ukraine since Russia's invasion began in late February. The *Middle East Eye* reports that these weapons, formerly used against adversaries with lower tech capabilities in Libya, Syria, and Nagorno-Karabakh, have proved themselves to be "extremely effective" against the Russian army's state of the art air defenses. But Ankara has reaped the benefits of this drone diplomacy as well. According to emerging reports, Turkey has greatly benefited from this public display of its military technical prowess, and Baykar has even secured plans to establish a factory in the UAE, with whom Turkey has been working hard to reestablish positive relations.

The Turkish capabilities have not gone unnoticed. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has reportedly told colleagues that "[Russian President Vladimir] Putin had approached him during a recent meeting in Tehran to suggest a deal with Turkish firm Baykar to produce its attack drones after reports emerged that the drone firm had established a factory in the UAE." But Baykar CEO Haluk Bayraktar has emphatically denied that the company would collaborate with Russia during its war in Ukraine. "There is a strategic relationship between Turkey and Ukraine, especially in the field of aviation and space," he has told CNN. "Turkey supports Ukraine with armed drone technology. We did not transmit or supply anything to Russia. We would never do such a thing." (*Middle East Eye*, July 26, 2022)