



RUSSIA REFORM MONITOR

The American Foreign Policy Council's Review of
Russian Government Actions and U.S. Policy

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Related Categories: Democracy and Governance; Economic Sanctions; Europe Military; Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues; Warfare; NATO; Russia; Ukraine

COERCING WORKERS TO COME BACK

Russia has experienced an exodus of skilled IT and tech workers in recent months stemming from the Ukraine war, and the Kremlin is trying to develop a plan to lure them back. Moscow is now reportedly attempting to force Russians living abroad to return to the country by threatening to impose increasingly harsh punishments. Earlier in the war, the focus was on creating incentives for these workers to return, but now many Russian companies are instituting blanket bans on working outside the country. Vladimir Putin and his subordinates have also stepped up their rhetoric against those working abroad, with the Russian president calling them "traitors" and "scum," and other senior officials proposing measures like stripping "unpatriotic" Russians of citizenship. However, liberal-minded technocrats in the Russian government have argued that this will only permanently drive Russians from the country. Maksut Shadayev, Russia's minister for digital development, estimates that while 10 percent of Russia's IT workforce has left the country, 80 percent of those workers are still employed by Russian companies. (*Washington Post*, March 8, 2023)

SPARING THE URBAN ELITES...

Russia's forces have suffered massive casualties over the past year of war in Ukraine, but those costs appear to have been borne almost exclusively by the country's poor and disadvantaged. According to Western intelligence analysts, Russia's richest cities, Moscow and St. Petersburg, have been almost entirely shielded from the mobilization that has gripped the rest of the country. Instead, Moscow has been drawing its reinforcements from minority-dominated areas and poorer regions. The British Ministry of Defense reports that, "in many of the Eastern regions, deaths are likely running, as a percentage of population, at a rate 30+ times higher than in Moscow."

This strategy provides concrete dividends for Russian President Vladimir Putin, reducing the likelihood of political unrest in the country's centers of power and wealth. However, it is unclear how long Russia can both sustain its current, high casualty rates and continue to spare its urban areas. Russia's casualty rates have hit historic levels, and most estimates now place the number of Russians killed or wounded in the Ukraine conflict at more than 200,000. (*The Washington Times*, March 12, 2023)

...AND CONSCRIPTING THE TATARS

Ever since Russia's unilateral annexation of Ukraine's Crimean peninsula in 2014, its indigenous Tatar population has complained of unjust treatment from their new Russian overlords. The past nine years have been punctuated by deportations, investigations and politically-motivated persecution aimed at pacifying the peninsula's Tatar Muslim minority. With the advent of the Ukraine war, authorities in Moscow have hit upon another way to target Crimea's troublesome Tatars: by sending them to the front lines. *The Insider*, citing human rights activists, reports that "about 90% of the summons in Crimea were distributed in places densely populated by Crimean Tatars." As one activist explains, "The occupiers deliberately send them to war against their country and their brothers, who today are fighting in sufficient numbers in the Armed Forces of Ukraine." (*The Insider*, March 19, 2023)

SEEKING AN "ARMY WITH AN IDEOLOGY"

Yevgeny Prigozhin, the head of Russia's Wagner paramilitary group, has adopted a highly public profile in recent months, and he now wants to transform his private army into a military force that will "fight for justice." During a recent interview, Prigozhin claimed that he has ambitions to make the Wagner group into an "army with an ideology" – a transformation that will involve increased recruitment and rebooting the organization once the Ukrainian city of Bakhmut is taken. According to Prigozhin, "the Wagner private military group must turn from just a private, the best, army in the world which is capable of defending the state, into an army with an ideology. And that ideology is the struggle for justice." Wagner recently opened 42 recruitment centers across Russia, and although Prigozhin has embraced the political spotlight as a result of Wagner's role in Ukraine, his behavior has earned him numerous enemies within the Russian government. (Reuters, March 12, 2023)

PAYING FOR MILITARY PROGRESS

Throughout the course of the current conflict, Russia's military has been plagued by a range of deformities, from poor training to low morale. These factors have contributed to the decidedly lackluster performance of Russia's armed forces against a consolidated, and determined, Ukrainian adversary, even after Russian President Vladimir Putin's "partial mobilization" order last Fall. Now, the Kremlin is attempting to incentivize citizens to join the fight through a tried-and-true method: financial incentives.

Russia's military has reportedly begun offering financial bonuses to citizens willing to join up as contract servicemen – and even more for battlefield breakthroughs. As *Meduza* reports, "[t]hose who sign a contract to go and fight in Ukraine are eligible for a sign-up bonus of 295,000 rubles (about \$3,800) and a monthly salary of 200,000 rubles (or \$2,600), comparable to what a Russian doctor or software developer might make." Additionally, "[f]urther bonuses are offered for 'active participation in assault operations.' Advancing the Russian frontline is said to be rewarded by 50,000 rubles (\$650) per kilometer." (*Meduza*, March 22, 2023)