



## RUSSIA REFORM MONITOR

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

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August 18, 2023 **Ilan I. Berman, Sydney Duckor**

**Related Categories:** Democracy and Governance; Warfare; Central Asia; Russia

### A LACK OF LAW ENFORCEMENT... AND EVERYTHING ELSE

Russia's military, it appears, is not the only governmental entity experiencing serious personnel shortages. Up to 5,000 law enforcement employees left their jobs in July, new information from the Kremlin has revealed. At a recent Interior Ministry meeting, Russian Interior Minister Vladimir Kolokoltsev admitted that the "shortage is very large." According to Kolokoltsev, the deficiency is "critical" because the thinned-out workforce could affect the Kremlin's ability to crack down on crime and anti-government dissent, since the Interior Ministry governs most of Russia's law enforcement operations.

The situation being experienced by Russian law enforcement, however, is far from unique. Labor shortages in the country recently reached the highest recorded levels to date, and are now observable in crucial sectors such as manufacturing, mining, and transportation. (*The Moscow Times*, August 10, 2023)

### A NEW TARGET FOR RUSSIAN MILITARY RECRUITMENT

Throughout the duration of its current war on Ukraine, Russia has experienced significant manpower shortages in its military. These shortfalls were ameliorated, for a time, by the activities of the Wagner paramilitary group and its unorthodox recruitment tactics, including the call-up of Russian convicts in exchange for pardons. In the wake of Wagner's late-June mutiny, however, the group has disengaged from the Ukraine front, exacerbating Russia's manpower problems in the process. As a result, Russia's military is now trying new tactics, and eyeing new targets, to replenish its ranks.

Thus, despite local laws explicitly forbidding its citizens from participating in foreign wars, the Russian armed forces are still advertising online in Kazakhstan – and doing so in lucrative fashion. Kazakhs who join the Russian military would receive an immediate payment of \$5,300, a 190,000 ruble (\$2,018) monthly stipend, and undisclosed "extra benefits." However, potential volunteers are likely to be deterred by the 5-9 year prison sentence they would receive under the criminal code of Kazakhstan, if apprehended. (*Meduza*, August 3, 2023)

### RUSSIA'S DRONE PUSH

In its troubled war against Ukraine, one of Moscow's biggest assets has been the drones it has acquired from abroad, thanks in large part to a robust – and growing – strategic partnership with Iran. In recent months, drone supplies from the Islamic Republic have reinforced Russia's military and expanded its ability to strike Ukrainian population centers, much to the dismay of Western capitals. Now, Russia is trying to take this collaboration to the next level, and utilize Iran's drone know-how to build an unmanned aerial vehicle industry of its own.

The Washington Post reports that, as part of its extensive strategic partnership with Iran, the Kremlin has launched a major effort to indigenously produce drones, using Iranian designs. Situated at the Alabuga Special Economic Zone in the central Russian region of Tatarstan, the industrial effort is geared to produce 6,000 drones analogous to Iran's 1,000-kilometer-range Shahed-136 by next summer. If successful, the paper notes, the supplies will be "enough to reverse the Russian army's chronic shortages of unmanned aerial vehicles, or UAVs, on the front line," as well as to "preserve its dwindling supply of precision munitions, thwart Ukraine's effort to retake occupied territory and dramatically advance Moscow's position in the drone arms race that is remaking modern warfare."

The project is an exceedingly ambitious one. However, researchers note, it may not be proceeding smoothly. According to David Albright of the Institute for Science and International Security, a Washington, DC think tank, the facility has only manufactured drone bodies to date, and is unlikely to meet its current targets for production. Even so, he cautions, it reflects a real, serious and strategically significant effort. "Alabuga looks to be seeking a drone developmental capability that exceeds Iran's." (*Washington Post*, August 17, 2023)