



RUSSIA REFORM MONITOR

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

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THE VIEW FROM MOSCOW

What does the Kremlin want in Ukraine? More than a year-and-a-half into its "special military operation" against its western neighbor, the Russian government appears dead-set on nothing less than the total subjugation of the country and its people. Ukraine needs to surrender, and do so on Moscow's terms, or it will "cease to exist," Vyacheslav Volodin, the speaker of the State Duma, Russia's lower house of parliament, has proclaimed. The statement provides insight into the official line being touted by Kremlin insiders from what they perceive to be a position of strength. "The simple facts are these: The West is experiencing weapons and ammunition shortages, people in Europe and the U.S. have lost trust in politicians, and the Kyiv regime's counteroffensive has failed," Volodin has maintained. (*USA Today*, September 25, 2023)

WAGNER BACK UNDER CONTROL – AND BACK IN UKRAINE?

A quarter of a year after an unexpected mutiny made Wagner CEO Yevgeny Prigozhin the Kremlin's public enemy number one, the mercenary outfit is once again firmly under the control of the Russian government. That was the signal sent by the September 28th meeting between Russian President Vladimir Putin and one of the group's most senior commanders, Andrei Troshev. During their Kremlin meeting, a portion of which was televised, Putin and Troshev discussed the group's current functioning, as well as how it can assist "in the zone of the special military operation," Russia's president disclosed. (Reuters, September 29, 2023)

[EDITOR'S NOTE: The statement is significant, insofar as it lays the groundwork for Wagner's reentry into the Ukraine war. Under Prigozhin's direction, the group had progressively disengaged from Ukraine in the late Spring owing to disagreements and disputes with Russia's Defense Ministry, which Prigozhin accused of under-resourcing his fighters. It's not yet clear how substantial of a role Wagner will assume in Russia's "special military operation" now. Early signs, however, point to the fact that the mercenary group is already participating in fighting in parts of the country. Ukrainian soldiers recently confirmed to *Meduza*, for instance, that Wagner has returned to the battlefield.]

RUSSIA PLANS FOR A LONG WAR

All of the above reflects the growing conviction on the part of the Kremlin that the Ukraine war will be a protracted conflict. Recent military modernization plans unveiled by Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu envision a long-term plan to "build up the combat power" of the nation's military to better withstand the current counteroffensive by Ukraine (and ostensibly, future ones as well). That modernization effort is projected to last "until 2025," Shoigu has said. (*Business Insider*, September 27, 2023)

MOSCOW STRENGTHENS ITS TIES TO TEHRAN

Russia is actively working to expand its long-running strategic partnership with the Islamic Republic of Iran, a new analysis by the Soufan Center, a leading counterterrorism think tank, has assessed. "The Kremlin appears interested in new, highly capable Iranian cruise missiles similar to those that Tehran is supplying to its regional allies, such as the Houthi movement in Yemen," the study notes. Iran has already emerged as a key supplier of military material, specifically drones, to the Russian war effort in Ukraine. But the partnership is thriving beyond the Ukraine war as well. "Amid Russia's battlefield struggles in Ukraine, Iran is stepping up its efforts to assist the beleaguered regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and to pressure U.S. forces in the east of the country," it outlines. Other signs of alignment – including Russia (and China) permitting Tehran to become a full member of the SCO security bloc earlier this year – are also visible. (Soufan Center, September 27, 2023)

BEEFING UP THE RANKS... AGAIN

As Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine continues, the Kremlin is again dealing with the perennial problem of manpower shortages. On September 30th, Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a new presidential decree ordering the country's military to enlist some 130,000 additional recruits. The order authorizes the expansion of military service for 18-27-year-olds from now until the end of the current calendar year. The new push for troops is intended to supplement the Russian government's previous call-up, back in the Spring, of nearly 150,000 soldiers to better cope with Ukraine's counteroffensive.

Russian officials, however, are aware of the unpopularity of such a call-up – and are working to temper the public reaction to it. "Fresh military conscripts will not be deployed to the Lugansk People's Republic, the Donetsk People's Republic, the Kherson Region or the Zaporozhye region" – which the Kremlin unilaterally annexed last Fall – or asked "to perform tasks in the special military operation zone," Rear Admiral Vladimir Tsimlyansky, the deputy head of the Russian General Staff, has told the TASS news agency. Rather, the fresh soldiers will remain stationed inside Russia, he said. (UPI, September 30, 2023)