



RUSSIA REFORM MONITOR

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Related Categories: Democracy and Governance; Europe Military; Islamic Extremism; Terrorism; Warfare; Gaza; Israel; Russia; South Asia; Nepal

RUSSIA FINDS NEW RECRUITS... FROM NEPAL

15,000 Nepali men have reportedly joined the Russian military, enticed by a minimum \$2,000 monthly salary and expedited Russian citizenship. Nepal's passport ranks poorly for global mobility, driving many to seek better opportunities abroad – and that apparently includes the Kremlin's war against Kyiv. For its part, the Nepalese government claims that only 200 men are fighting in Russia, in spite of differing reports from soldiers who have returned from the frontlines. One such Nepali soldier claimed that he was among fighters from across the "Global South," including Afghans, Indians, Congolese nationals, and Egyptians.

The news sheds new light on the mechanics of how Moscow, hampered by chronic manpower issues throughout its two-year fight with Ukraine, is drawing in new combatants. Men wishing to join Russian forces reportedly must first travel to Russia on tourist visas, where they can sign a one-year enlistment contract and receive cursory military training before being deployed to combat areas. Nepal, meanwhile, is working to stop the flow of its nationals to the Russian Federation. It has banned citizens from traveling to Russia for work, and urged Moscow to stop recruiting Nepali men for military purposes. (*CNN*, February 11, 2024)

THE NAVALNY EXCHANGE THAT WASN'T

Associates of Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny, who died under mysterious circumstances at an Arctic penal colony on February 16th, claim that he died just before a planned exchange of prisoners between Moscow and Western governments. The offer, which was initiated in early February, involved exchanging Navalny and two American citizens for Russian agent Vadim Krasikov, a convicted murderer serving a lifetime prison sentence in Germany. (*The Moscow Times*, February 26, 2024)

HOW FINLAND IS MOBILIZING AGAINST THE RUSSIAN THREAT

The Nordic nation of Finland plans to open 300 new shooting ranges to bolster national defense, as fears of potential Russian aggression grow. The Finnish initiative is part of a larger trend. As Russia's war on Ukraine persists, NATO member nations near Russia's borders are beginning to assemble their own defensive forces. Finland is seeking to enhance citizens' shooting skills through this initiative, and hopes to maintain proficient civilian weapon skills as a defense strategy to augment already-existing mandatory national army service. Oslo likewise hopes to expand the number of rifle and tactical ranges to 1,000 nationally by the end of the decade, as well as to promote greater female enlistment in the armed forces. (*The Telegraph*, February 19, 2024)

THE KREMLIN AS PALESTINIAN POWER BROKER

Against the backdrop of Israel's ongoing military offensive against Hamas in the Gaza Strip, the government of Russian President Vladimir Putin is once again assuming the role of a regional power broker. Israel's military campaign, now more than five months long, has spurred heated discussions about the need for a "day after" plan to govern Gaza. Israeli officials insist that such a plan cannot involve Hamas, but Palestinian factions have other ideas – and are looking for support from Moscow.

In the wake of the resignation of Palestinian Authority Prime Minister Mohammed Shtayyeh, delegations from multiple Palestinian factions – including the PLO, Hamas, and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, another extremist group – traveled to Moscow to discuss the feasibility of a "unity government," under Moscow's brokerage. The talks reportedly yielded progress on creating a "comprehensive national unity that includes all Palestinian forces and factions in the framework of the Palestinian Liberation Organization." The Palestinian delegates extended their "thanks and appreciation" to Russia's leadership for its role in hosting the talks. (*Al-Monitor*, March 1, 2024)

[EDITORS' NOTE: Moscow is hardly an impartial party in the evolving discussions over the future of "Palestine." The Kremlin hosted a delegation from Hamas back in October, following the group's deadly terror campaign against Israel, and again this past January. Russia's embrace of the group, meanwhile, is at significant odds with both Israel and the United States, which have both ruled out the possibility that the radical rejectionist organization could play any sort of political role in a future Palestinian government.]