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Russian Military Performance and Outlook

Despite the advantages of a larger recruitment base and defense industrial capacity, the Russian military has not been able to decisively defeat the Ukrainian Armed Forces (UAF) since Russia's February 2022 invasion of Ukraine. The Russian military has suffered significant losses in personnel and equipment. Its performance has been hindered by a rigid command and control structure, a weakened corps of trained and professional units, and a reliance on tactics that have contributed to high casualty rates. The Russian military, however, appears to remain a resilient and capable adversary and is likely to sustain its operational tempo in the near term.

Since 2022, Congress has supported Ukraine's defense against Russia's renewed invasion through enacting five supplemental appropriations measures that have provided assistance to Ukraine. Members may consider the Russian military's condition and performance as they evaluate the state of the war, assess the effectiveness of U.S. sanctions on Russia, evaluate the Russian military's prospective reconstitution and longer-term threat to U.S. and European security, and deliberate about whether to appropriate further military or other assistance for Ukraine.

Command and Control

Despite attempted reforms to increase lower-level leadership and autonomy, the Russian military continues to operate with a Soviet-style centralized command. This centralized command style at the tactical level has contributed to the types of inflexible operations that led to previous failures and casualties.

In May 2024, Russian President Vladimir Putin replaced longtime Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu with a former economic official, Andrei Belousov. This change came after persistent poor Russian military performance. Some observers assess that Belousov's appointment reflected the Russian leadership's recognition that the war in Ukraine is a longer-term challenge and that managing economic and defense industrial resources is key to sustaining Russia's war effort.

Some observers argue that Russia's leadership prioritizes the political loyalty of officers over their battlefield effectiveness. Multiple Russian military leaders, including some reported to be highly competent, have been relieved of command (and in some cases imprisoned), seemingly for perceived criticism of or insufficient loyalty to Russian political leaders.

Nevertheless, the Russian military leadership appears to remain a cohesive force. It has gradually consolidated various semi-independent security force units and organizations fighting for Russia and brought them under central command. Additionally, the military leadership has

proven capable of adopting changes to force structure, operations, and equipment since the 2022 invasion. Observers continue to debate the speed and breadth of these changes. Some reforms appear to address specific problems, remain isolated to specific units, or have been implemented only after extended debate.

Personnel

Russia's leadership continues to encounter challenges to recruiting and training sufficient troops. Continued casualties and challenges fielding well-trained troops have hindered, but not stopped, Russian military operations.

Casualties

As of April 2025, U.S. officials estimate Russia has suffered over 790,000 killed and wounded. Other estimates place Russian casualties as high as 900,000. These rates arguably reflect Russia's continued use of high-casualty tactics—including a reliance on massed personnel attacks and massed artillery fire—and limited operational-level flexibility. Casualty totals likely include mobilized personnel, volunteers, members of the Russian National Guard, recruited prison convicts, and personnel from Russian-occupied Ukrainian regions.

The loss of experienced soldiers has been particularly detrimental. Many of the casualties have been among Russia's elite and professional soldiers, as well as its junior officer corps. New recruits, including new junior officers, often have less training than those they are replacing, exacerbating the impact of the losses and seemingly eroding the effectiveness of some Russian military units. Some observers say the loss of experienced troops and junior officers will have a long-term detrimental effect on Russia's military capabilities.

Recruitment and Mobilization

In September 2024, President Putin issued an order to increase the size of the Russian military to 1.5 million active-duty troops. Russia's draft budget for 2025-2027 annually allocates 30 billion rubles (about \$370 million at current exchange rates) for sign-on bonuses. Russian authorities announced a mobilization of 300,000 personnel (outside of Russia's regular draft) in September 2022 but have not announced another large-scale mobilization since, likely due at least in part to domestic opposition.

Russian law prohibits the combat deployment of conscripts, leading the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) to prioritize recruitment of contract soldiers. Contract recruits may earn high salaries as well as sign-on bonuses offered by both regional and federal authorities. MoD salaries may be several times the average Russian monthly wage (including sign-on bonuses reportedly as high as 22 times the monthly wage), as well as additional payments should soldiers be

killed or wounded. Since late 2024, Russia's regional authorities have increased one-time signing bonuses and advertising campaigns to attract new recruits. These measures may indicate increased recruitment difficulties.

The MoD also employs more coercive conscription and recruitment methods, including increased penalties for ignoring draft summons, pressure on conscripts to sign contracts, and punishments for canceling contracts. In addition, Russia has instituted a number of "stop-loss" policies to prohibit soldiers from resigning and bolster the number of soldiers available, including by forcing wounded soldiers back to the front lines.

As of April 2025, U.S. officials estimate Russia is recruiting 30,000 new recruits a month to replenish and rotate units. This rate is arguably sufficient to sustain Russia's current scope of operations in Ukraine, but it may be insufficient to support large-scale offensive operations. Russian officials have claimed that the military recruited almost 440,000 personnel in 2024, but some observers assert these figures are likely exaggerated and do not accurately reflect the often ad hoc nature of current Russian military recruitment. Additionally, reports suggest the training of recruits is often substandard and rushed, undermining the military's ability to conduct complex offensive operations.

Equipment and Ammunition

In addition to inflicting heavy personnel losses on the Russian military, the UAF has destroyed large quantities of Russian equipment. U.S. officials and others have estimated that Russia has lost more than 3,000 tanks, a higher number than its pre-war active duty tank inventory. Other heavy equipment losses include armored personnel carriers, artillery and rocket systems, helicopters, and naval vessels.

Russia has responded to these losses by mobilizing its economy to support the war effort. Among other actions, it has directed civilian enterprises to manufacture products with military applications; it has transitioned the defense industry to round-the-clock production; and it plans to spend 40% of its 2025 federal budget on the military and security services. Russia's 2025 defense spending is estimated at 7.2% of GDP; some observers question whether the Russian government will be able to sustain such high levels of defense spending.

Running low on stockpiles, Russia has focused most of its defense production on refurbishing old equipment rather than producing new versions, particularly in the face of sanctions restricting the import of critical components. It remains unclear whether the defense industry can produce advanced weapon systems or increase production over the long term. U.S. officials assess that China is a crucial source of components for Russia's defense industry. Iran's supply of drones and North Korea's large supply of artillery ammunition have also proven crucial to supporting Russian military operations.

Russia has steadily increased its defense production capacity and output—including substantially scaling up drone production. However, a lack of sufficient components and manufacturing tools, maxed-out factory space, and

labor shortages arguably have led the Russian defense industry to prioritize quantity over quality. This includes relying on dual-use items (typically less effective than components designed exclusively for the military) and reactivating Soviet-era tanks and artillery. According to U.S. officials and observers, most of Russia's equipment replacements consist of older models refurbished from storage facilities rather than new or modern equipment. Some reports indicate Russia is constructing new factories to increase production capacity.

Current Military Performance and Outlook

Russia's offensive operations continue to focus on eastern Ukraine. Russian forces seek to leverage quantitative advantages in firepower and personnel and conduct heavy casualty-prone operations to wear down the UAF. Russian quantitative advantages in artillery may be diminishing, however; Ukrainian officials assert that Russia's artillery fire ratio advantage has decreased from 10 Russian artillery shells for every one UAF shell in early 2024 to 1.5-2:1 as of early 2025. Despite some localized successes, Russian forces have been unable to break through UAF defensive lines in eastern and southern Ukraine.

Russia's military strategy has focused on attrition, or gradually wearing down the UAF in several sectors across the front line, including (among other advances) capturing the town of Velyka Novosilka in January 2025. Russian forces also succeeded in expelling the UAF from most of Russia's Kursk region in April 2025. Russia has heavily fortified the Ukrainian regions it occupies, including the use of minefields and fortified defensive positions.

The Russian military also has reportedly adjusted its tactics to focus on small unit assaults, upgraded its communication systems and processes, and improved artillery targeting. It has deployed new equipment and tactics to counter UAF operations, including by increasing the use of drones, difficult-to-intercept glide bombs, and electronic warfare. Russian logistics also have successfully adapted several times over the course of the conflict in response to improved UAF long-range strike capabilities provided by the United States and other Western allies. Russia also continues its own long-range massed-precision strike campaign targeting key Ukrainian military and infrastructure targets, including much of Ukraine's energy grid.

The Trump Administration has initiated efforts to facilitate discussions to end the Russia-Ukraine war. Despite these efforts, Russian military operations and long-range strikes continue. Some Members of Congress have called for further sanctions against Russia, including against its defense industry and military leadership. Some Members have also expressed concerns about potential Russian military reconstitution and the threats it may pose to U.S. and European security interests.

Andrew S. Bowen, Analyst in Russian and European Affairs

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