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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 high-casualty-prone tactics. The Russian military, however, has implemented numerous reforms and is likely to sustain its operational tempo in the near term.

Between FY2022 and FY2024, Congress supported Ukraine's defense against Russia's renewed invasion by 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 limits junior and mid-level officer decisionmaking authority and may contribute to inflexible operations.

In May 2024, Russian President Vladimir Putin replaced longtime Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu with a former economic official, Andrei Belousov. 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 and brought them under central command. Additionally, the military has appeared capable of learning and adopting changes to force structure, operations, and equipment since the 2022 invasion. Observers debate the

speed and breadth of these changes, as some reforms appear isolated to specific units, or have been implemented only after extended deliberations.

## Personnel

Continued casualties and challenges fielding well-trained troops have hindered, but not stopped, Russian military operations. Despite heavy casualties, the Russian military continues to recruit new soldiers and its leadership appears confident in its ability to replace casualties.

## Casualties

Some Western and Ukrainian officials estimate Russia is losing as many as 25,000-35,000 casualties a month and that over 1.2 million have been killed and wounded since the war began. These rates arguably reflect Russia's continued use of high-casualty-prone tactics and limited operational-level flexibility. Russia's actual casualty rate also depends on the number of recoverable losses it sustains (those who are wounded and able to return to combat). 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 casualties have been among Russia's elite and professional soldiers, as well as its junior officer corps. New recruits, including new junior officers, have less training than those they are replacing, exacerbating the impact of the losses and 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. 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.

Russian law prohibits the combat deployment of conscripts, leading the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) to prioritize recruitment of contract soldiers. Contract recruits 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, with additional payments should soldiers be killed or wounded. To meet manpower demands, Russia reportedly has imposed quotas on regions and lowered recruitment standards.

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 policies to prohibit current soldiers from resigning and bolster the number of soldiers available, including by forcing wounded soldiers back to the front lines.

According to some estimates, Russia continues to average around 30,000-40,000 recruits a month. 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 claimed that Russia's armed forces recruited 417,000 personnel in 2025, down from a reported 450,000 in 2024 but higher than Russia's reported initial goal of 403,000.

Additionally, reports suggest the training of recruits is often substandard and rushed. The lower level of training may be sufficient for current positional, attritional fighting but not for conducting more complex or maneuver 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 estimate 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 and transitioned the defense industry to round-the-clock production. According to Russian officials, in 2025 Russia spent 7.3% of GDP on defense, with 5.1% of GDP directly on the war. Russian draft budgets for 2026 and 2027 project continued spending of around 8% defense and national security spending. 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. Battlefield demands and limited components arguably have led the Russian defense industry to prioritize quantity over quality.

Between 2022 and 2025 Russia steadily increased its defense production capacity and output—including substantially scaling up drone production. Some reports indicate Russia is constructing new factories to increase production capacity, but it is unclear how much expansion is possible. The defense industry faces a lack of sufficient components and manufacturing tools, maxed-out factory space, stagnating innovation, and labor shortages (including because of competition with the high salaries offered for mobilized soldiers).

It remains unclear whether the defense industry can support innovation and research, 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 also have proven crucial to supporting Russian military operations.

## Current Military Performance and Outlook

Russia continues to make slow and steady progress in pushing back the UAF across the frontline, possibly contributing to optimistic Russian assessments of the war's trajectory. Russian advances center on capturing the remainder of the Donetsk region, including the key "fortress belt" cities of Sloviansk and Kramatorsk. Russian forces also are launching offensives in Ukraine's north (e.g., Vovchansk and Kupyansk in the Kharkiv region) and south (e.g., Huliaipole in the Zaporizhia region).

Russia's military strategy has focused on attrition, or gradually wearing down the UAF in several sectors across the frontline. The Russian military has adapted its tactics, including using small assault teams that seek to infiltrate UAF lines rather than conduct direct attacks. These new tactics are contributing to incremental, but steady, territorial gains. Thus far, the Russian military has been unable to capitalize on these gains and make a large-scale breakthrough of UAF lines.

Russia retains quantitative advantages in personnel and artillery fires, and has increased its unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) capabilities. UAVs are now ever present on the battlefield. They have extended the "kill-zone" to as far as 20 km past the forward line of troops and are causing a majority of the casualties on each side. Russia has expanded its UAV force structure, created elite UAV units and research centers, and improved the targeting of UAF logistics and supply routes.

The Russian military also reportedly has innovated and implemented other reforms, including upgrading its communication systems and processes, and improving artillery targeting. It has deployed new equipment and tactics, such as difficult-to-intercept glide bombs and electronic warfare, to counter UAF operations. Russian logistics also have successfully adapted several times over the course of the conflict in response to improved UAF long-range strike capabilities. Russia continues its long-range massed-precision strike campaign targeting key Ukrainian military and infrastructure targets, including 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 also have expressed concerns about potential Russian military reconstitution and the threats it may pose to U.S. and European security interests.

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