



RUSSIAN FORCE GENERATION AND TECHNOLOGICAL ADAPTATIONS

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Russian forces are integrating responsive tactical innovations among frontline Russian units, indicating that the Russian military is learning modern ground warfare lessons that it intends to carry on beyond the war in Ukraine. ISW has observed Russian forces increasingly using unarmored civilian vehicles, including motorcycles, in assaults throughout the theater in Ukraine since late Fall 2024.[1] Russian forces are frequently using motorcycles to penetrate Ukrainian lines and advance in the Kupyansk, Siversk, Toretsk, Pokrovsk, and Velyka Novosilka directions.[2] A Ukrainian artilleryman operating in the Pokrovsk direction reported on May 4 that Russian motorcyclists are currently attacking in columns of eight motorcycles with electronic warfare (EW) support and that Russian servicemembers carry EW systems at the front, center, and end of the columns to protect the motorcycles from Ukrainian drone strikes.[3] The artilleryman noted that recent improvements in the ground conditions in the Pokrovsk direction are allowing Russian forces to use motorcycles more frequently. Ukraine's Khortytsia Group of Forces Spokesperson Major Viktor Trehubov reported on May 4 that Russian motorcycle assaults can involve anywhere from a dozen to one hundred motorcycles, and Ukrainian Southern Defense Forces Spokesperson Colonel Vladyslav Voloshyn stated that Ukrainian forces destroyed 70 Russian motorcycles during a recent Russian assault in the Velyka Novosilka direction.[4] A Ukrainian National Guard servicemember operating in the Lyman direction reported that each Russian motorcycle has two riders – a driver and a gunner – and that Russian forces continue attacking on the motorcycle in the event that Ukrainian drone operators only kill one rider.[5]

Russian forces have iterated their use of motorcycles and other civilian vehicles several times throughout 2024 and across different frontlines. Russian motorcycle usage has not been consistent throughout the theater, as the Russian General Staff has traditionally struggled to disseminate lessons learned between operational areas of responsibility (AoRs). ISW began observing Russian forces consistently leveraging motorcycles to transport infantry in near rear areas in the

Kharkiv, Chasiv Yar, and Zaporizhia directions in mid-2024, and Russian forces have intensified their use of motorcycles to transport personnel and advance into Ukrainian lines, mainly in Kharkiv and Donetsk oblasts in recent months.[6] The Russian Central Grouping of Forces began integrating motorcycles and all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) into combat operations in the Pokrovsk direction (their priority sector) in Summer 2024, several months before the Southern Grouping of Forces began using motorcycles in the Kurakhove direction in late Fall 2024.[7] The Russian Southern Grouping of Forces intensively relied on armored vehicles and tanks to make significant advances in the Kurakhove direction in Summer and Fall 2024 while the Central Grouping of Forces likely leveraged faster vehicles, such as motorcycles, during this time. Russian forces are currently mainly using tanks as fire support for infantry assaults and are mainly using armored vehicles to transport infantry in near rear and frontline areas, but not to conduct penetrations of the Ukrainian defensive line.[8]

Russia's increased use of motorcycles is an adaptation in response to pervasive Ukrainian drone strikes against Russian armored vehicles and the unsustainable armored vehicle losses that Russian forces suffered in late 2023 and 2024. Trehubov noted on May 4 that motorcycle assaults are a "standard tactic" of the Russian military now due to Russia's ongoing shortage of heavy equipment and armored vehicles.[9] Trehubov stated that Russian motorcycle assaults are more effective because Russian forces can advance quickly and better evade Ukrainian drone operators and force Ukrainian drone operators to expend more drones to counter motorcycle assaults. Trehubov noted that Ukrainian forces typically expend one drone per Russian motorcycle – a comparatively smaller and less valuable target, given that Ukrainian forces can also use first-person view (FPV) drones to disable Russian tanks and armored vehicles.[10] ISW previously observed Russian forces largely abandon armored vehicle usage in the Pokrovsk direction after a series of successful Ukrainian drone strikes against Russian forces in Winter 2023-2024, and Ukrainian forces reportedly destroyed or damaged over 3,000 Russian tanks and almost 9,000 armored vehicles throughout the frontline in 2024.[11] The Central Grouping of Forces likely learned a lesson from observing Ukrainian drone operators successfully destroy Russian armored vehicles near Pokrovsk in Fall 2023 and Winter 2023-2024.[12] Russia's wider integration of motorcycles appears to be an effort to offset the significant armored vehicle losses that Russian forces took in Ukraine in 2024 and possibly conserve some armored vehicles and tanks for future use.[13]

Russian forces may also be increasingly leveraging motorcycles to intensify Russian offensive operations and to pressure Ukraine and the West into making further concessions to Russia. Russian forces intensified offensive operations throughout Ukraine in February and March 2025, around the time that the United States began significant efforts to mediate a ceasefire and long-term peace agreement in Ukraine.[14] Russian President Vladimir Putin intends to leverage these intensified offensive operations and the threat of operationally significant Russian advances to force Ukraine to the negotiating table and into concessions. A Ukrainian

servicemember recently reported that Russian forces are currently using motorcycles to support "run, stab, escape" tactics - likely referring to Russian forces' recent tactics of conducting unsuccessful assaults several kilometers into the Ukrainian line in priority frontline areas such as into Pokrovsk itself or along the T-0516 Toretsk-Kostyantynivka highway in the direction of Kostyantynivka.[15] ISW previously noted that Russian forces likely see a tactical opportunity in leveraging motorcycles and civilian vehicles to advance and seize as much Ukrainian territory as possible ahead of possible ceasefire or peace negotiations.[16]

It remains unclear how Russia's use of motorcycles will continue to evolve, particularly given reports that the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) intends to integrate formal motorcycle units into Russian formations. A Ukrainian brigade operating along the Kupyansk-Lyman line reported on April 20 that the Russian MoD intends to integrate motorcycle units into the Russian 6th and 123rd motorized rifle brigades (both of the 3rd Combined Arms Army [CAA], formerly the 2nd Luhansk People's Republic Army Corps [LNR AC], Southern Military District [SMD]).[17] The brigade noted that Russian servicemembers have previously purchased their motorcycles or received motorcycles from Russian volunteer organizations that support the war in Ukraine, but that the Russian MoD will soon begin to issue motorcycles to Russian servicemembers as standard equipment. The Russian MoD posted footage on April 26 showing likely elements of the 299th (Airborne) VDV Regiment (98th VDV Division) practicing offensive and defensive tactics on motorcycles in groups of two to three people at a Russian training ground.[18] Ukrainian Kharkiv Group of Forces Spokesperson Lieutenant Colonel Pavlo Shamshyn reported on April 26 that Ukrainian intelligence indicates that the Russian military is currently training Russian motorcyclists at training centers in Russia and along the frontline.[19] Shamshyn stated that Russia will likely increasingly integrate motorcycles into assault operations in Spring and Summer 2025.

Russian motorcycle usage appears to have begun as a grassroots tactical response to Ukrainian drone operations, comparable to how Russia's own informal frontline drone units began. The Russian MoD is responding similarly to Ukrainian ad hoc adaptations by trying to centralize and formalize Russian motorcycle usage.[20] The Russian MoD may be able to better supply Russian units with motorcycles under a more centralized system, but the MoD may also significantly constrain Russian motorcyclists' ability to adapt to new frontline realities. Russian forces will likely increasingly depend on motorcycles and other quicker unarmored vehicles, as slower-moving vehicles have become a hazard on the more transparent battlefield of Ukraine.

Key Takeaways:

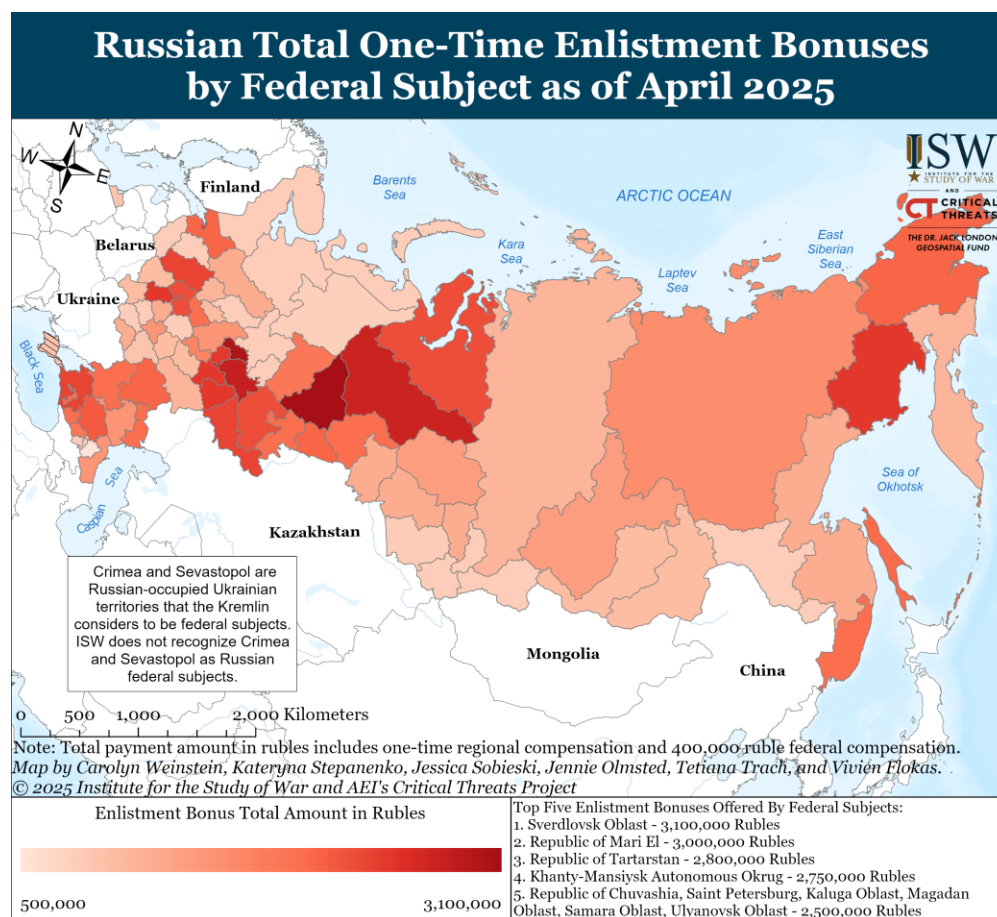
- **Russian forces are integrating responsive tactical innovations among frontline Russian units, indicating that the Russian military is learning modern ground warfare lessons that it intends to carry on beyond the war in Ukraine.**
- **Russian federal subjects continue to use dynamic pricing for one-time enlistment bonuses to incentivize volunteer recruitment.**

- **Russian military recruiters continued to lure foreign recruits from Africa to support Russia's war effort in Ukraine.**
- **A Russian serviceman suggested that poor treatment of Russian mobilized personnel, lack of financial compensation, and indefinite terms of military service are inhibiting the Kremlin's efforts to retain remaining mobilized personnel on contract military service.**
- **The Russian government continued efforts to centralize state control over private military company (PMC) elements via state financial and social benefits.**
- **Putin continues to portray himself as a wartime leader concerned with veterans' affairs, likely as part of his coordinated campaign to prevent the emergence of an independent, anti-regime veterans-based civil society in Russia.**
- **Russian occupation officials continued efforts to build out a loyal occupation government via the "Time of Heroes" veteran initiative.**
- **The Kremlin is intensifying its efforts to indoctrinate and militarize Russian youth ahead of Russia's celebration of Victory Day on May 9 to justify its war efforts against Ukraine and possibly against NATO.**
- **The Kremlin is creating new departments within government agencies aimed at promoting military-patriotic education in Russia and occupied Ukraine.**
- **The Kremlin is raising a new group of milbloggers and military correspondents to centralize the state's control over coverage of Russia's war efforts in Ukraine and prepare Russia's propaganda machine for future war efforts.**
- **Russian occupation officials and milbloggers complained that the Kremlin's centralized drone production is hindering Russia's ability to scale the production and development of drones.**
- **Systematic corruption reportedly continues to plague Russia's weapon and military supplies procurement efforts.**
- **Russian forces are continuing to develop and adapt Russian electronic warfare (EW) systems and incorporate tactical innovations to defend against drone warfare.**
- **Russian forces continued to develop unmanned surface vehicles (USVs).**
- **The Russian Ministry of Finance signaled Russia's commitment to financing force generation and defense industrial base (DIB) efforts amidst a reported budget deficit triggered by plummeting oil and gas prices.**

- **Russian federal subjects and occupation officials continued to introduce new pro-natalist policies in an effort to improve Russia's declining demographics.**
- **The Russian Pacific Fleet recently completed its stay in Cambodia and conducted joint naval exercises with the Royal Thai Navy.**

Russian Mobilization and Force Generation Efforts (Assessed Russian objective: Expand combat power without conducting general mobilization and undermining regime stability)

Russian federal subjects continue to use dynamic pricing for one-time enlistment bonuses to incentivize volunteer recruitment. Republic of Bashkortostan Head Radiy Khabirov announced on April 29 that the region will continue offering 1.6 million ruble (\$19,717) one-time enlistment bonus to individuals who sign military service contracts with the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) through May 15.[21] The Republic of Bashkortostan previously announced that this offer would last from January 1 through March 31 and then extended it through the end of April.[22]



Russian military recruiters continued to lure foreign recruits from Africa to support Russia's war effort in Ukraine. The Togolese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) confirmed on April 30 that Ukrainian forces captured Togolese recruits who

fought alongside Russian forces.[23] The Togolese MFA implied that Russian recruiters lured Togolese citizens under false promises of studying in Russia on scholarships. The Togolese MFA called on Togolese nationals to stay vigilant about similar scholarship offers in Russia and stated that Togolese diplomats are working to aid Togolese nationals in Ukrainian captivity.

Force Retention: (Assessed Russian objective: Set conditions that would allow the Russian military to retain its mobilized personnel, contract soldiers, and irregular forces over the long term)

A Russian serviceman compared the military service and compensation among Russian mobilized servicemen, recently recruited volunteers, and professional contract servicemen.[24] Russian mobilized servicemen are Russians whom the Russian MoD called up for compulsory military service in September 2022 and who are required to serve until the end of Russia's war in Ukraine. Russian volunteers and professional Russian servicemen who completed military education or specialized training (*kontraktniki*) are servicemen who voluntarily signed up for military service for a short period. The serviceman stated that Russian mobilized personnel, volunteers who signed military service contracts, and *kontraktniki* will be indefinitely fighting on the frontlines in Ukraine, implying that men who signed short-term military service contracts do not have the privilege of leaving the frontlines upon the expiration of their contracts. The serviceman noted that mobilized personnel are more likely to receive their monthly 158,000 rubles (\$1,963) salaries on time compared to servicemen who signed military service contracts because mobilized personnel receive salaries directly from the Russian Presidential Fund. The milblogger noted that servicemen who signed military service contracts receive their salaries from the Russian MoD, often with delays. The serviceman added that Russian mobilized personnel do not qualify for subsidized mortgages and loans offered to volunteers and *kontraktniki*, and that newer *kontraktniki* (likely referring to professional servicemen and volunteers) receive higher pay than mobilized personnel. The serviceman noted that the Russian MoD does not offer additional compensations for long-term military service and does not reward experienced servicemen.

The serviceman claimed that the Russian military command prohibits mobilized personnel from serving at permanent deployment points and taking business trips to Russia. The Russian military command also reportedly regularly orders mobilized servicemen to fight in Ukraine rather than defend Russia's international border, replacing them with servicemen who signed military service contracts. The servicemen implied that mobilized personnel serving on Russia's international border are entitled to the same combat compensation they receive while on the battlefield in Ukraine, making it more cost efficient for the Kremlin to deploy *kontraktniki* to the border who may only qualify for "peacetime" salaries. The serviceman claimed that the Russian military command bans mobilized personnel from receiving officer training and attending any specialized training before mobilized servicemen transition to contract military service. The serviceman noted that the Russian military command is switching to fully contract unit staffing by coercing mobilized personnel to sign military service contracts or committing them to grinding assaults. Some military units reportedly redistribute wounded mobilized

personnel to reserve regiments and assault detachments to replace them with recruits. The serviceman noted that the commands of at least two Russian regiments created during the September 2022 involuntary reserve call-up are returning their wounded mobilized servicemen to the frontlines. The serviceman noted that Russian military commanders in his direction refer to mobilized servicemen as "an endangered species."

The serviceman suggested that poor treatment of Russian mobilized personnel, lack of financial compensation, and indefinite terms of military service are inhibiting the Kremlin's efforts to retain remaining mobilized personnel on contract military service. The serviceman noted that Russia does not have a mechanism for demobilization because it is actively replacing mobilized personnel with recruits, mostly by coercing mobilized personnel to sign military service contracts. The serviceman noted that the Kremlin also did not establish a concrete timeframe to end compulsory military service in Ukraine and that mobilized personnel are not incentivized to sign military service contracts because such contracts do not guarantee demobilization. The serviceman implied that the Russian military command is placing restrictions on the Russian mobilized personnel to coerce them into signing military service contracts. The serviceman implied that the Kremlin is not awarding experienced mobilized personnel – who have been fighting in Ukraine for over two years – with additional financial compensation, which also disincentivizes Russian mobilized personnel from signing military service contracts. The serviceman claimed that the Kremlin is manipulating statistics of casualties among mobilized personnel to imply that only servicemen who voluntarily signed military service contracts are fighting in Ukraine.

Russian President Vladimir Putin launched the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 by claiming that only professional *kontraktniki* would be fighting in Ukraine and that Russia would not rely on compulsory military service to sustain this effort, likely because he feared that general mobilization would endanger his regime's stability.[25] Putin was unable to keep his promise and launched a partial involuntary reserve call-up in September 2022 after suffering significant military failures in Kharkiv Oblast. Putin has since tried appeasing mobilized servicemen and their families by extending some financial and state benefits but likely fears that demobilizing involuntarily called-up men may threaten his regime's stability. A Kremlin insider source previously claimed that there are over 78,000 Russian servicemen who refused to sign military service contracts.[26]

Russian Force Centralization (Assessed Russian objective: Centralize the state's control over informal volunteer-based units that emerged in early 2022 after the Kremlin failed to declare general mobilization)

The Russian government continued efforts to centralize state control over private military company (PMC) elements via state financial and social benefits. The Russian Ministry of Labor proposed a law on April 29 that would extend military benefits to servicemen of Russian private military companies (PMCs) who fought in Ukraine, effectively offering PMC elements the same state benefits as those offered to

mobilized servicemen, professional Russian servicemen, and other recruits.[27] The proposed law will allow PMC servicemen to receive age-based pension payments and disability payments for injury and illness incurred while serving in the war.[28] The proposed law labels PMCs as "organizations assisting the Russian Armed Forces" during Russia's war in Ukraine, likely as part of the Kremlin's continued effort to deny the existence of PMCs in Russia. Putin notably stated in late 2023 that PMC servicemen did not qualify for state benefits because Russian law bans PMCs in Russia, and Russian officials have been setting conditions to extend state benefits to PMC servicemen as part of the Kremlin's effort to co-opt former Wagner Group PMC veterans.[29]

Integration of Veterans into Russian Society (Assessed Russian objective: Mitigate the risk of veterans emerging as a political group in a way that could erode the stability of the Russian state)

Putin continues to portray himself as a wartime leader concerned with veterans' affairs, likely as part of his coordinated campaign to prevent the emergence of an independent, anti-regime veterans-based civil society in Russia. Putin met with Volgograd Oblast Governor Andrei Bocharov on April 29, during which Bocharov stated that Volgograd Oblast's veterans and their families support Putin's war efforts and requested to rename the local airport to "Stalingrad Airport." [30] Putin responded to the request stating that veterans' "word is law for [him]" and that he would rename the airport based on the veterans' request. Most of Putin's meetings with regional officials are scripted, and this declaration of allegiance to Russian veterans is likely part of Putin's campaign to co-opt Russian veterans into supporting the regime and Russia's war efforts in Ukraine.[31]

Russian occupation officials continued efforts to build out a loyal occupation government via the "Time of Heroes" veteran initiative. Sevastopol occupation governor Mikhail Razvozhaev announced on May 5 that Russian veterans completed the exam stage of the regional educational program "Sevastopol - City of Heroes," which is part of the Kremlin's "Time of Heroes" Higher School of Public Administration program for veterans.[32] Razvozhaev added that veterans will participate in interviews between May 12 and June 6. Kherson Oblast occupation head Vladimir Saldo announced that the "Heroes of Kherson Oblast" program advanced to the third selection stage on May 3, during which candidates provide their criminal records and proof of their participation in the war.[33] Saldo claimed on April 30 that occupation officials received 1,515 veteran applications for participation in the "Heroes of Kherson Oblast" program and that 680 candidates passed the exams.[34] Saldo claimed that 10 of the best candidates will receive appointments to the Kherson Oblast occupation government, and the remaining participants will be placed into the government personnel reserve after completing four more stages of testing. Zaporizhia Oblast occupation head Yevgeny Balitsky similarly announced that occupation officials began the interview phase of the "Zaporizhia Heroes" program on May 5.[35] Putin established the "Time of Heroes" initiative in February 2024

in an effort to form a new social stratum of Russian elites composed of a limited number of loyal ultranationalist veterans who will continue to militarize Russia and occupied Ukraine over the long term.[36]

Militarization of Society and Youth: (Assessed Russian objective: Condition Russian society and youth for military service and raise societal support for Russian war efforts)

The Kremlin is intensifying its efforts to indoctrinate and militarize Russian youth ahead of Russia's celebration of Victory Day on May 9 to justify its war efforts against Ukraine and possibly against NATO. Putin held a meeting on April 30 with the Russian youth as part of the federal educational marathon “Knowledge. First” dedicated to celebrating the 80th anniversary of the Second World War.[37] The Kremlin reported that 134 Russian veterans, Russian servicemen fighting in Ukraine, military correspondents (milbloggers), and other lecturers briefed over 25,000 Russian and foreign young people between April 28 and 30. Putin compared Russian Second World War veterans to the Russian soldiers fighting in Ukraine and indirectly equated Russia's aggression against Ukraine to the Soviet Union's contributions to defeating Nazi Germany. Putin stated he will consider creating a culture and art development program for Russian veterans in response to a Russian serviceman's request. Putin also commended a young volunteer at the military-patriotic museum in occupied Chystiakove, Donetsk Oblast, for propagating “the right information” to peers in the “historical, new regions” when referring to occupied Ukraine.

The Kremlin is creating new departments within government agencies aimed at promoting military-patriotic education in Russia and occupied Ukraine. Russian Investigative Committee Chairman Alexander Bastrykin ordered on April 29 the establishment of a council on culture under the leadership of the Russian Investigative Committee.[38] The council on culture will allow law enforcement officers to collaborate with cultural and public organizations in an effort to promote patriotism, civic responsibility, and traditional values among young people. The Russian Investigative Committee may attempt to use this council to force children and youth in Russia and occupied Ukraine to participate in state-funded military-patriotic education programs.

The Kremlin is raising a new group of milbloggers and military correspondents to centralize the state's control over coverage of Russia's war efforts in Ukraine and prepare Russia's propaganda machine for future war efforts. Russian video platform RUTUBE held a training session for Russian war correspondents and servicemen of the 98th Airborne (VDV) Division to teach them how to cover Russia's war in Ukraine, shape public opinion, and filter information leaks.[39] RUTUBE Content Director Ilya Emelin stated that many Russian servicemen want to run personal Telegram channels, that milbloggers and political commentators appeal to a broader Russian audience, and that milblogger content will be relevant “for a very long time.” Emelin's framing suggests that the Kremlin is investing in a long-term

campaign to control the ultranationalist milblogger community, which has been instrumental in facilitating recruitment, crowdfunding efforts, and militarizing Russian society. A Russian milblogger praised the creation of the new program and called Russian media an extension of the Kremlin's war effort against Ukraine.[40] Ukrainian Center for Countering Disinformation Head Lieutenant Andriy Kovalenko, for example, reported that Russian YouTube bloggers are targeting Ukrainian children with pro-Russian content in order to shape future Ukrainian generations into supporting Russia.[41] ISW previously reported that the Kremlin faced the rise of an independent Russian milbloggers' community after failing to establish effective state control over Telegram channels at the outset of the Russian invasion of Ukraine.[42]

Russian Defense Industrial Base (Assessed Russian objective: Increase Russia's defense industrial base production to support Russian war efforts)

Russian occupation officials and milbloggers complained that the Kremlin's centralized drone production is hindering Russia's ability to scale the production and development of drones. Former Roscosmos (Russian space agency) head and Zaporizhia Oblast occupation senator Dmitry Rogozin complained on May 2 that the Kremlin does not offer necessary support to independent drone developers and small drone companies that are organically emerging along the frontlines in Ukraine.[43] Rogozin implied that the Kremlin is making up excuses for failing to scale up Russia's drone production and that the Kremlin does not have a stakeholder who would focus on localizing production of drone components, organizing dialogue between frontline units and the Russian defense industrial base (DIB), and identifying the most competent Russian drone developers. Rogozin added that such a stakeholder would also prioritize ordering microelectronic parts for drone production, procure machine tools and lab equipment from abroad, and ensure the quality of manufactured Russian drones. Rogozin added that Russia needs a stakeholder who will establish drone repair and training centers, lobby the government and Russian DIB enterprises for drone production, and create a regulatory framework that will incentivize the expansion of the Russian drone industry. A Russian insider source also complained that Ukrainian forces have a five-to-seven-times advantage in drones over Russian forces and that the Kremlin lacks an analytical framework to closely monitor Ukrainian and battlefield drone developments.[44] A Russian milblogger advocated on May 3 that the Russian DIB delegate the task of developing unmanned surface vehicles (USV) to private companies and independent drone developers to compete with Ukrainian and Western drone innovations.[45] The milblogger added that Russian forces cannot to use many USV prototypes due to the slow nature of Russia's bureaucracy.

Systematic corruption reportedly continues to plague Russia's weapon and military supplies procurement efforts. Russian state media outlet *Izvestia*, citing unnamed sources, reported on May 1 that Rosgvardia signed nine agreements with a contractor company "Oruzheinaya Palata" for the supply of "Vyzhygatel" electronic warfare (EW) systems from China for over 820 million rubles (about \$10.1 million).[46] *Izvestia* reported that Russian forces tried to use the supplied EW systems

but that these systems failed to repel Ukrainian drones and did not match the characteristics stated in the state procurement order. *Izvestia* reported that the Russian Investigative Committee opened a criminal investigation on charges of fraud and embezzlement of state funds against Russian entrepreneur Alexei Rule (who mediated the deal) and other officials of “Oruzheinaya Palata.” *Izvestia* reported that Russian investigators believe that Rule and his family used state funds for personal gain.

Russian Technological Adaptations (Assessed Russian objective: Introduce technological innovations to optimize systems for use in Ukraine)

Russian forces are continuing to develop and adapt Russian electronic warfare (EW) systems and incorporate tactical innovations to defend against drone warfare. Russian state-owned defense conglomerate Rostec's "Rosel" holding reportedly developed a new "Solyaris NS" EW system, which can protect areas from unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs).[47] Rostec claimed that the "Solyaris NS" system can detect UAVs and suppress UAV control channels using a set of jammers and detectors embedded on a four-meter-long post. Rostec claimed that the system can impact UAVs operating in the end-to-end frequency range from 100 to 6,000 MHz and that "Solyaris NS" is undergoing the final testing stages. A Ukrainian military unit published footage on May 3 claiming to show Russian forces using a donkey to carry a portable EW system on the battlefield.[48] A Kremlin-affiliated milblogger published footage on May 4 showing that Russian forces covered an armored vehicle in loose metal cables as a way to protect the vehicle from Ukrainian UAVs.[49] The milblogger observed that Russian forces are trying to use these cables to entangle UAV propellers but noted that this defensive adaptation may impede armored vehicles' capabilities.

Russian forces continued to develop unmanned surface vehicles (USVs). The Russian Center of Unmanned Systems and Technologies announced on April 29 that the center will upgrade the "Skvorets-VMF" first-person view (FPV) platforms to arm Russian USVs against Ukrainian coastal targets and to ambush Ukrainian sea communications.[50] A Russian milblogger commented on the announcement, stating that Russian developers still lack a necessary reliable signal to control USVs and supporting UAVs in the Black Sea and that Russian forces are currently using specialized radio communication channels to control these drones.[51]

Russian Economy (Assessed Russian objective: Mobilize Russian economy to support the war effort against the backdrop of sanctions)

The Russian Ministry of Finance signaled Russia's commitment to financing force generation and defense industrial base (DIB) efforts amidst a reported budget deficit triggered by plummeting oil and gas prices. The Russian government approved on April 30 almost a three-fold increase in the expected government budget deficit for 2025, raising deficit forecasts from 0.5 percent of Russia's GDP or 1.17 trillion rubles (\$14.134 billion) to 1.7 percent of GDP or 3.79 trillion rubles

(\$45.783 billion).[52] The Russian Ministry of Finance announced that the total government budget revenue in 2025 will amount to 38.5 trillion rubles (\$465.08 billion) compared to 40.3 trillion rubles (\$486.824 billion) previously forecasted in Fall 2024. The Russian Ministry of Finance forecasted that Russia's GDP growth in 2025 will remain unchanged at 2.5 percent but notably raised Russia's inflation estimates from 4.5 percent to 7.6 percent. The Russian Ministry of Finance forecasted that Russian oil prices will decrease from \$69.7 per barrel to \$56 per barrel and that Russian oil and gas revenues will decrease by 2.6 trillion rubles (\$31.41 billion) to a total of 8.3 trillion rubles (\$100.26 billion). The Russian Ministry of Finance stated that the Russian economy will generate an additional 829 million rubles (\$100.264 million) in non-oil and gas revenues to make up for new budget deficit estimates. Russian state media reported that the Russian Ministry of Finance's amendments to the government budget plan reflect the decrease in expected government oil and gas revenues resulting from plummeting oil prices.[53]

The Russian Finance Minister Anton Siluanov stated that the Russian budget priorities will remain unchanged "regardless of external conditions and factors" and emphasized that the Kremlin will continue to finance government assistance to the families of Russian soldiers and defense needs.[54] Siluanov's statements indicate that the Kremlin will support its war effort in Ukraine at the expense of other government sectors. Russia notably significantly increased its defense budget for 2025-2027 in November 2024, allocating 13.5 trillion rubles (6.31 percent of Russia's GDP and about \$133 billion) to national defense expenditures in 2025, 12.8 trillion rubles (about \$126 billion) in 2026, and 13.1 trillion rubles (about \$129 billion) in 2027.[55]

Russian Demographic Problems (Russian objective: Fix persistent demographics problems by incentivizing immigration, disincentivizing emigration, and promoting pronatalist policies to support long-term force generation and economic initiatives)

Russian federal subjects and occupation officials continued to introduce new pro-natalist policies in an effort to improve Russia's declining demographics. The Murmansk Oblast Government issued a draft resolution on April 29 that offers a one-time monetary payment of 5,000 rubles (\$61.4) to any doctor who dissuades a woman from having an abortion and 25,000 rubles (\$306.8) to any gynecologist who persuades a woman to give birth.[56] Vologda and Pskov oblasts reportedly introduced similar payments to medical workers in 2024 to increase the birth rates.[57] Razvozhayev reported on April 29 that Sevastopol occupation officials are offering one-time payments of 300,000 rubles (\$3,681) to families that had a third or subsequent child under the Russian federal program "Mnogodetnaya Semya" ("Large Family") since January 1, 2025.[58]

Select Russian federal subjects are attempting to lure Russians who had fled abroad to avoid Russia's war in Ukraine and the Fall 2022 partial mobilization with financial incentives. Belgorod Oblast officials offered on April 29 to pay a one-time sum of 40,000 rubles (\$490) to Belgorod Oblast residents who return to Russia after moving abroad before February 24, 2022.[59] Russian opposition outlets previously assessed that over 700,000 Russians fled Russia since the start of Russia's full-scale invasion 2022.[60]

Joint Military Exercises (Russian objective: Improve interoperability among Russia and its allies and partners, expand Russia's global military influence, and support Russia's information operations about Russia's conventional military capabilities)

The Russian Pacific Fleet recently completed its stay in Cambodia and conducted joint naval exercises with the Royal Thai Navy.[61] The Russian MoD announced on May 3 that the Russian Pacific Fleet's *Rezkiy* and *Aldar Tsydenzhapov* corvettes, and *Pechenga* medium sea tanker completed a five-day stay program at the Sihanoukville port in Cambodia.[62] The Russian MoD announced that Russian Captain First Rank Alexei Antsiferov and other ship commanders held official meetings with representatives of the Royal Cambodian Navy as part of the program. The Russian MoD announced on April 29 that the crews of the Russian Pacific Fleet ships participated in joint naval exercises of the passing exercise (PASSEX) type with the Royal Thai Navy in the Gulf of Thailand on April 28.[63]

Note: ISW does not receive any classified material from any source, uses only publicly available information, and draws extensively on Russian, Ukrainian, and Western reporting and social media as well as commercially available satellite imagery and other geospatial data as the basis for these reports. References to all sources used are provided in the endnotes of each update.

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