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## Jamestown Foundation

## Moscow Turns to Regions to Replace Losses and Boost Forces in Ukraine; Eurasia Daily Monitor Volume: 19 Issue: 106

By: [Paul Goble](#)

Faced with mounting combat losses in Ukraine and Russian President Vladimir Putin’s threat to expand the size of Russian forces there, the absence of a general mobilization plan undermines the Kremlin leader’s claims and could trigger more domestic opposition ([Meduza](#), May 5). As such, Moscow is now turning to the regions and republics to procure more volunteers for the Russian army and to form regionally based battalions similar to what Ramzan Kadyrov has done in Chechnya. The center is devoting enormous resources to both now that the spring draft is ending, but problems persist with each approach. The recruitment effort outside Moscow and other major cities has not attracted as many as the center appears to have hoped, forcing Moscow to offer ever more generous pay packages and to extend the age range of those who can sign up. Furthermore, the new push for regions and republics to form their own military units, while popular in some quarters, is sparking concerns that such units could allow some federal subjects to become more independent in their actions as Chechnya has, or even lead to the transformation of a foreign war into a civil one.

The Russian government has released only scant details about its losses in Ukraine, although it seems clear they are mounting. The Kremlin has also been short on specifics about draft resistance or refusal of soldiers to be sent to Ukraine, although these seem to be increasing as well ([TRT Russian](#), May 13). Additionally, Moscow has not provided any information about the exact size of its forces in Ukraine or any plans it may have for expanding its military presence there.

But some information has surfaced. One Russian Duma deputy says that the Russian army in Ukraine numbers no more than “about 200,000” and that, even with forces from the Donetsk People’s Republic and Luhansk People’s Republic, Moscow does not have more than 250,000 soldiers at its disposal—a number Moscow analysts say is inadequate if Russia is to defeat the Ukrainian army in the field and achieve Putin’s war aims ([Politnavigator.net](#), May 3; [Svpressa.ru](#), July 10).

The spring draft, which appears set to meet the 134,500 target—7,000 more men than answered the call last fall—Moscow announced earlier this year without massive violations of the population’s rights, will likely allow the Russian Defense Ministry to cover losses. However, it will not allow the Kremlin to expand its forces in Ukraine, given that Russian law prohibits the use of draftees in foreign wars—a ban that the Russian government has violated but not massively since invading Ukraine and one that Putin has pledged to maintain and to punish any commander who uses draftees without their written permission ([Meduza](#), March 9; [TASS](#), March 9; see [EDM](#), March 31; [TRT Russian](#), May 13).

But if losses mount, or if Moscow wants to boost the size of its forces in Ukraine significantly, it must take steps in other directions. Instead of choosing to mobilize the country, the Kremlin has decided on a two-pronged approach. On the one hand, it is radically expanding its efforts to recruit volunteers, mostly in rural areas far from Moscow; on the other, it is calling on the governments of Russia’s predominantly ethnic Russian regions and its non-Russian republics to form battalions that can be dispatched to Ukraine. The first has not yet proved successful; and the second, now just beginning, is sparking as much concern as hope that it can produce what Moscow wants without issue.

In the regions, the Russian military over recent weeks has launched a major recruitment effort to convince volunteers to sign up. To make this more attractive, the army is offering higher pay and benefits and allowing those who sign up to choose their service. That might appear to mean that those who do join as volunteers could avoid service in Ukraine, but once in uniform, they may not have a choice. Moreover, if volunteers go to elite units, such as the strategic rocket forces, others already serving there could be sent to Ukraine as a result. To date, however, this effort appears to have attracted only a few hundred men, although that number may grow as the effort, including mobile vans at public events, takes off. (On how this effort looks in one region, see [The Barents Observer](#), July 10. For the promises Moscow is making to attract volunteers and its loosening of age, health and educational requirements, see [M.vk.com](#), accessed July 14.)

This approach is modeled on the Chechen units that Ramzan Kadyrov has already dispatched to Ukraine. Across the country, governors are rushing to create such units, anxious about receiving the money needed, and many younger men are signing up both because of patriotism, national or local, and because such units are offering pay that is five to ten times greater than what they can earn in the civilian economy ([Kavkaz.Realii](#), June 24; [Bash.news](#), July 5; [Business-gazeta.ru](#), July 9; [Rbc.ru](#), July 9; [Svpressa.ru](#), July 10; [Kasparov.ru](#), July 14).

Potentially, such an effort could give Russia hundreds of thousands of additional troops, though possibly at a high cost to the economy. Some observers are already expressing concern about costs and a legal basis, the precedent of Chechen behavior in Ukraine and, most seriously, what the existence of such units could mean for the regions or republics in the future.

Moscow is spending vast sums on this project, and some experts say it is unclear where the money is coming from ([Svpressa.ru](#), July 10). Others point out that serious issues abound regarding control, given that no laws have been passed about such units, and it is unclear whether volunteers are joining the Russian army or a regional or republic one ([Idel.Realities](#), June 25; [Verstka Media](#), June 22). They also bring up the bad behavior of Chechens in Ukraine, including their clashes with other non-Russians, such as the Buryats, and with Russians, and ask whether the Kremlin is not creating new problems for itself ([Kavkaz.Realii](#), [April 30](#), [May 4](#), [May 25](#)). And still, others say that, once these regional or republic units are created, they may give the governors unwanted leverage vis-à-vis Moscow, with a few now suggesting that this whole program may lead to the transformation of what is now a foreign war into a domestic civil war ([Idel.Realities](#), June 25).

The question now is whether Moscow will pull back because of these concerns or go ahead full throttle due to the need for more men to meet Putin's agenda. Whichever happens, it will be a turning point not only for the war in Ukraine but also for the Russian Federation itself.

#### ecoi.net summary:

Article on recruitment efforts  
of the military

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