



Research Report

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# Russian Military Personnel Policy and Proficiency

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Reforms and Trends, 1991–2021

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## About This Report

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In this report, we consider Russian military personnel policies and reforms pursued during the decades prior to Russia's February 2022 invasion of Ukraine. Our research identifies initiatives undertaken by the Russian Ministry of Defense to professionalize its force within broader ongoing military modernization efforts. With a focus on recruitment, retention, and proficiency, we draw information primarily from Russian-language sources to shed light on recent developments and trends. We seek to fill a gap in Western analysis of the subject and to present new information and analysis for scholars, policymakers, and subject-matter experts.

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## Summary

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In this report, we consider trends in Russian personnel policies and initiatives from the 1990s through December 2021, prior to Russia’s February 2022 invasion of Ukraine. During the initial post-Soviet years, the personnel system of the Russian Armed Forces experienced pervasive challenges because of budget limitations and domestic and international collapse of prestige. These challenges, explored in Chapter 2, included undermanning and low readiness, poor training quality and lack of funds, lack of military prestige and popular support, hazing, draft evasion, health problems and personnel deferments, military disillusionment, wage issues, criminality and corruption, and desertion. While Russian personnel policies during the years from 1991 until 2008 sought to mitigate many of these problems, these issues were more successfully addressed during the implementation of Russia’s military reform efforts between 2009 and 2021. These efforts achieved a greater degree of professionalism for Russia’s military than it had experienced in the post-Soviet period, although challenges persisted. Although Russia’s 2022 invasion of Ukraine is beyond the original scope of our study, the invasion exposed areas of weakness in the Russian military personnel system that are the subject of a forthcoming RAND report.

Many Western analyses have addressed the technological dimensions of Russian military modernization; fewer have focused on the major reforms and investments in personnel that ultimately have had profound impact on the character of Russia’s Armed Forces. Drawing primarily from Russian-language sources, including journals, papers, and military publications, we examine Russian military issues in the post-Soviet period prior to 2008, and then we discuss more-recent developments in the areas of recruitment, retention, and proficiency. Based on our research and analysis, we conclude that:

- Prior to 2022, Russia’s defense leadership prioritized the professionalization of the Russian military through policy and budgetary initiatives as a counterpart to modernization investments in weapons and equipment.
- The Russian military invested in tangible benefits associated with both conscription and contract service to enhance incentives for recruitment and retention. The policies yielded improvements in both areas, although survey data suggest that some dissatisfaction persisted.
- Other policy priorities focused on intangible factors, such as prestige and reduced stigma associated with military service. These appeared to have played a less significant role in recruitment and retention—particularly of contract personnel—than material factors.
- Within the Russian military’s professional training and education systems, reforms sought to enhance professional military proficiency to reflect new security and technological realities.
- Initiatives prior to 2022 increased the proportion of contract service members in Russia’s military.

- These initiatives also addressed but did not fully resolve several of the perennial problems that had previously hampered the Russian military's effectiveness.
- Although overall proficiency might have improved, multiple factors suggest significant variance in individual proficiency across the Armed Forces.
- Russia might not fully trust its military personnel, even as more of them increasingly serve under contract; prior to 2022, the Russian government was working hard to improve the loyalty of all its service members by promoting lessons of military history and patriotic values at all echelons.
- Investments and initiatives between 2009 and 2022 increased the base level of professionalism and readiness within Russia's Armed Forces, although the 2022 invasion of Ukraine exposed persistent weaknesses within the system.

In sum, Russia's approach to personnel reform as part of a broader modernization scheme for the Armed Forces appears to have been proactive and deliberative in addressing long-standing challenges within the Armed Forces. However, as discussed in this report, Russia's performance during the 2022 invasion of Ukraine suggests that despite policy and demonstrated improvement in many areas, multiple problems remain. Russian military leaders might have overestimated proficiency levels, and the conflict itself could have long-term implications for the recruitment and retention of Russian military personnel, based on our findings from the pre-war period.

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# Chapter 1. Introduction

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Russian military reforms and a 2010–2020 State Armament Program, set into motion after the Russia-Georgia war in 2008, sought to enact far-reaching changes to the Russian military. These reforms, which Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu anticipated would contribute to “a new qualitative level” for the Russian military, included replacing or modernizing 70 percent of Russian military equipment by 2020, revitalizing Russia’s defense industrial base, and bolstering the number of professional personnel in the Russian military.<sup>1</sup> By 2021, this investment and reforms initiated by these programs collectively yielded a significantly more capable and ready force available to Russian political leaders.<sup>2</sup>

Since the early 2000s, Western analysts have devoted substantial attention to rearmament and progress in the modernization of Russian equipment. However, there have been fewer in-depth assessments of the relevant policies and trends in Russian military manpower and proficiency. In this report, we offer insights on initiatives and developments across several major dimensions of Russian military manpower and proficiency. Although our research was completed in 2021, prior to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, where appropriate, we seek to reconcile the advances made by the Russian military personnel system since 2009 with the lackluster performance of Russian forces during the early phases of Russia’s 2022 invasion of Ukraine. Russian troops’ lack of preparedness, low morale, and tactical blunders are the subject of an upcoming RAND study.<sup>3</sup>

## Strategic Context

Overall, Russian military modernization generally is understood to reflect changes in Russian strategic exigencies and evolving conceptions of the nature of modern war. At a strategic level, Russian analysts have highlighted the revision of global military ambition following the collapse of the Soviet Union in favor of a regional posture focused on territorial defense and the assertion of influence in “buffer” states between Russia and its potential adversaries.<sup>4</sup> The RAND Corporation’s analysis of Russian strategic documents further suggests that Russian

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<sup>1</sup> Dara Massicot, “Anticipating a New Russian Doctrine in 2020: What It Might Contain and Why It Matters,” *War on the Rocks*, September 9, 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Keith Crane, Olga Oliker, and Brian Nichiporuk, *Trends in Russia’s Armed Forces: An Overview of Budgets and Capabilities*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-2573-A, 2019; International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), *Russia’s Military Modernization: An Assessment*, London, UK, September 2020.

<sup>3</sup> Helene Cooper, Eric Schmitt, and Julian E. Barnes, “As Russia’s Military Stumbles, Its Adversaries Take Note,” *New York Times*, March 7, 2022.

<sup>4</sup> Crane, Oliker, and Nichiporuk, 2019; IISS, 2020; see also Andrei Makarychev and Alexander Sergunin, “Russian Military Reform: Institutional, Political and Security Implications,” *Defense and Security Analysis*, Vol. 29, No. 4, 2013.

decisionmakers “believe that the current international order is transitioning from a Western-centric, U.S.-led unipolar system to a polycentric world” that will be more unstable and thus offer opportunities for Russia.<sup>5</sup> A strong and competent military, therefore, would permit Russia to defend its national interests from global and regional threats stemming from this instability while also taking advantage of the shift in power when opportunities arise.<sup>6</sup>

Russian assessments about the changing nature of warfare also provided impetus for reforms and investment, both in equipment and personnel. Russian military analyses of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) combat operations in Iraq (1991) and Kosovo (1999) underscored the expansion of NATO’s strategic scope and depth because of the potential of long-range precision munitions, launched primarily from air- and sea-based platforms.<sup>7</sup> Drawing from these and other observations of Western warfare over recent decades, Russia’s defense and national security leadership have concluded that modern war will be defined by technological prowess and the potential for rapid escalation, propelled by emerging capabilities in such areas as precision strike, aerospace technologies, and cyber operations.<sup>8</sup> Recent Russian investments in modernization have been focused on improving strategic and operational air defenses; the rapid generation of highly ready ground units; and the construction of more-effective long-range munitions, such as range ballistic missiles and land-attack cruise missiles.<sup>9</sup>

Lessons learned from combat experiences in Chechnya, the 2014 invasion of Ukraine, Syria, and other recent conflicts highlighted the role of electronic warfare and strategic efforts to disrupt adversary command and control.<sup>10</sup> Russia’s wars of the early 2000s revealed challenges—even among forces who were considered to have a high level of readiness—and showed Russia’s lingering focus on mobilization.<sup>11</sup> Moving away from Soviet concepts of ground domain operations that relied on extensive manpower and materiel resources, recent

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<sup>5</sup> Samuel Charap, Dara Massicot, Miranda Priebe, Alyssa Demus, Clint Reach, Mark Stalczyński, Eugeniu Han, and Lynn E. Davis, *Russian Grand Strategy: Rhetoric and Reality*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-4238-A, 2021.

<sup>6</sup> Charap et al., 2021.

<sup>7</sup> Anika Binnendijk, Gene Germanovich, Bruce McClintock, and Sarah Heintz, *At the Vanguard: European Contributions to NATO’s Future Combat Airpower*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-A311-1, 2020, p. 51.

<sup>8</sup> Andrew Radin, Lynn E. Davis, Edward Geist, Eugeniu Han, Dara Massicot, Matthew Povlock, Clint Reach, Scott Boston, Samuel Charap, William Mackenzie, Katya Migacheva, Trevor Johnston, and Austin Long, *The Future of the Russian Military: Russia’s Ground Combat Capabilities and Implications for U.S.-Russia Competition*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-3099-A, 2019, p. 59.

<sup>9</sup> Crane, Olikier, and Nichiporuk, 2019, p. 69.

<sup>10</sup> Lester Grau and Charles Bartles, *The Russian Way of War: Force Structure, Tactics, and Modernization of the Russian Ground Forces*, Fort Leavenworth, Kan.: Foreign Military Studies Office, U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, 2017, p. 5.

<sup>11</sup> Timothy Thomas, *Russian Military Thought: Concepts and Elements*, McLean, Va.: Mitre Corporation, MP190451V1, 2019; Bettina Renz, “Russian Military Reform: Prospects and Problems,” *RUSI Journal*, Vol. 155, No. 1, February–March 2010.

Russian operational thought has sought to replace costly offensives with “smarter” fighting through improvements in information superiority, command and control, and decisionmaking.<sup>12</sup>

Reforms were pursued in part to prepare for future conflicts driven by high-tech capabilities. In April 2019, President Vladimir Putin explicitly tied technological skills to the transition to a professional army, stating that “we are moving towards the creation of a professional army. Due to the increasing complexity of military equipment, only professionals can manage it.”<sup>13</sup> A senior-ranking Russian personnel official similarly noted in 2017 that the advent of advanced technologies and resultant “increased intensity of combat training measures require a significant increase in the proportion of military professionals in the troops.”<sup>14</sup> Some have noted that the types of operational requirements within this new concept of warfare require training and sophistication that are more difficult to find in conscripted personnel, reinforcing the need for a professionalized system.<sup>15</sup> Other Western analysts also have concluded that professionalization of the military ranks sought to significantly enhance the skills of military personnel, improve the reliability of manpower, and mitigate public perceptions of military casualties.<sup>16</sup>

Ultimately, recent Russian investment in military recruitment, retention, and proficiency also might also be best understood as a response to disappointing levels of combat readiness, a central theme driving Russian personnel modernization. Russia’s military reform and investment were prompted in part by an acknowledgment of the deficits of Russia’s post-Soviet military apparatus, made clear in part by its performance in the Chechen conflicts of the 1990s and later its war with Georgia in 2008.<sup>17</sup> As discussed in Chapter 2, changes in Russia’s personnel policies represent part of a broader shift toward an improvement in the combat readiness of Russia’s Armed Forces and away from the mass-mobilization model that defined Soviet and Russian military readiness, in which units would be supplemented by reservists during crises and maintained at lower levels of personnel and equipment readiness during peacetime.<sup>18</sup> As of 2008, less than 13 percent of military units were considered combat-ready, according to some analysts.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Michael Kofman, Anya Fink, Dmitry Gorenburg, Mary Chesnut, Jeffrey Edmonds, and Julian Waller, *Russian Military Strategy: Core Tenets and Operational Concepts*, Arlington, Va.: CNA, DRM-2021-U-029755-Final, August 2021.

<sup>13</sup> RBC, “Putin Announced the Departure of Conscription into the Past,” [“Путин заявил об уходе призыва в армию в прошлое”], 12 April 2019.

<sup>14</sup> Main Directorate for Personnel, Colonel-General Goremykin, “Wanted: An Increase in the Share of Professionals in the Troops,” 2017, cited in Radin et al., 2019, p. 60.

<sup>15</sup> Grau and Bartles, 2017, p. 5.

<sup>16</sup> IISS, 2020, p. 22.

<sup>17</sup> Renz, 2010, pp. 58–62.

<sup>18</sup> Renz, 2010, pp. 65–66.

<sup>19</sup> Makarychev and Sergunin, 2013.

The significance of a strong and capable force is underscored in Russian military doctrine. While the technological investments continue to receive top priority, the 2014 Military Doctrine explicitly emphasizes personnel issues, with the objective of yielding “highly professional servicemen devoted to their Homeland.”<sup>20</sup> Relevant ambitions of the Russian military, which will be explored in detail in subsequent chapters, reflect a desire “to raise the prestige of military service and to prepare citizens of the Russian Federation for such service in a comprehensive manner” and “to develop the mobilization base and to ensure the mobilization deployment of the Armed Forces, other troops and bodies, as well as to improve methods of recruiting and training of mobilization manpower reserves and mobilization manpower resources.”<sup>21</sup>

## Western Analysis of Russian Military Personnel

With this report, we seek to fill a gap in open-source Western analysis of Russian military personnel and proficiency and complement existing work. Some recent analysis has considered policies and trends in Russia’s approach to military personnel, primarily in the context of broader modernization efforts through the New Look reforms of 2008 to roughly 2012, to December 2021, where the scope our research ended. Reforms seeking to professionalize the Russian military have received some analytical attention, as have the cultural and social trends associated with Russian military. Russian military scholars have publicly released some of their analyses on these professionalization efforts. For example, one study from 2014, published by the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD)’s Sociology Center, found that more than a quarter of Russian military personnel surveyed reported problems with their infantry equipment.<sup>22</sup> A 2020 article in a Russian military journal discussed gaps between the use of advanced systems and the ability of their members to use this equipment.<sup>23</sup>

Thus far, however, there has been limited in-depth research by Westerners on how the Russian military conceptualizes and implements recruitment, retention, and personnel proficiency within its military structures; how approaches to recruitment, retention and personnel proficiency have changed in recent years; and what the implications of such changes might be.

Within the limited body of work on the subject, a 2019 RAND publication on the future of the Russian military includes the most thorough recent treatment of Russian personnel policy and

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<sup>20</sup> President of the Russian Federation, *The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation*, Moscow, December 25, 2014.

<sup>21</sup> President of the Russian Federation, 2014.

<sup>22</sup> MoD, “The Attitude of the Fourth Stage of the Field Training Competition Participants to the All-Military Competition of Combat Vehicle Crews as Military Districts Teams Held in June 2014 (Alabino Training Ground)” [“Отношение участников четвертого этапа конкурса по полевой выучке к всеармейскому соревнованию экипажей боевых машин в составе команд военных округов проводимому в июне 2014 года (полигон ‘Алабино’)”], webpage, undated-p.

<sup>23</sup> A. Yartsev and P. Lykov, “Once More on the Training of Officers” [“Еще раз о подготовке офицерских кадров”], *Armeiskii sbornik*, November 16, 2020.

trends.<sup>24</sup> An appendix includes descriptions of efforts to improve service conditions, update training programs, and improve pay and social benefits and bureaucratic and demographic challenges that have hampered reform. Looking ahead, the analysis projects a generally even divide among conscripts, officers, and professional enlisted personnel in 2030, but notes that there are potential variations because of changes in Russian demography, defense budgets, social stability, and strategy. A 2017 report by the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command's Office of Foreign Studies, *The Russian Way of War*, also offers a dedicated section on the professionalization of Russian military personnel. In addition to the history of the Soviet personnel system and associated strategic rationale, the report reviews the evolution of Russian personnel policies through the post–Cold War to the present. It highlights the role of the officer corps as the “backbone of the Russian Army,” and the Russian military's explicit evaluation and rejection of a Western-style non-commissioned officer (NCO) corps.<sup>25</sup> The report addresses the issue of pay in the Russian military for both contract and conscription personnel and recent efforts to reduce military corruption.

Other publications have offered views of personnel reforms within the broader consideration of Russian military modernization. Within this context, IISS analysis of Russian military modernization describes the evolution of the personnel system from the Soviet mass-mobilization model to the existing system of military units maintained at high readiness and staffed by contract-based military personnel.<sup>26</sup> The Congressional Research Service (CRS) additionally highlights the objectives of the reforms, which sought to reduce personnel numbers and reinforce professionalization, and the opposition from military that constrained these ambitions.<sup>27</sup>

The CRS report notes higher levels of professional personnel in the Russian Navy and Aerospace Forces because of technically demanding missions, but reports that poor retention rates have meant that Russia's initial goal of 425,000 professional soldiers by 2017 went unfulfilled; this goal has been revised to 476,000 by 2025.<sup>28</sup> Similarly, earlier work by RAND on Russian military modernization identifies the recruitment and retention of sufficient numbers of trained personnel as a major challenge for the Russian military.<sup>29</sup>

Some Western analysts have addressed challenges associated with Russian manpower for recent conflicts, discussed in more detail in Chapter 2. A 2017 Carnegie Endowment report suggests that the Russian military's limited approach to wars in Ukraine and Syria—with

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<sup>24</sup> Radin et al., 2019, Appendix D.

<sup>25</sup> Grau and Bartles, 2017, p. 9.

<sup>26</sup> IISS, 2020, pp. 65–66.

<sup>27</sup> Andrew S. Bowen, *Russian Armed Forces: Military Modernization and Reforms*, Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, IF11603, July 20, 2020b.

<sup>28</sup> Bowen, 2020b.

<sup>29</sup> Crane, Olikier, and Nichiporuk, 2019, p. 59.

frequent rotations of personnel from across the Armed Forces—might reveal the manpower limitations of the Russian military.<sup>30</sup> The report notes some indications of improvement: Russian official statements in early 2015 suggested that Russia had achieved only 78 percent of the intended target of 1 million servicemen, although Minister of Defense Sergei Shoigu announced later that year that manning had recovered to 92 percent of posts, suggesting an easing of the recruitment crisis.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, a deficit of trained pilots in 2015 that was linked to aircraft accidents appeared to have improved by late 2016, as had the use of surplus officers to fill in for a dearth of qualified NCOs.<sup>32</sup>

A separate group of works consider cultural and social dimensions of recent evolutions in Russian military personnel policy. In a report for Harvard University's Belfer Center, Steven Covington addresses the significance and strands of strategic culture in the Russian military, and particularly the role of Russian military institutions in propagating it.<sup>33</sup> A publication for Helsinki University Press, *Nexus of Patriotism and Militarism in Russia*, explores the national narratives and strategic communications by the Russian government that have fueled increased militarism within Russia, and ways that the Russian security apparatus could seek to foster and exploit these trends.<sup>34</sup>

Finally, during the initial period following Russia's 2022 military invasion of Ukraine, Western commentators offered assessments on the performance of Russian forces during the conflict. Many attributed the poor outcomes to an underestimation by Russia's senior-level military and political leaders of the nature of the operation, and an overestimation of the forces' military capabilities.<sup>35</sup> In addition to inadequate planning and flawed command culture, critiques have highlighted tactical incompetence in combined arms groupings.<sup>36</sup> Other critiques have emphasized examples of systemic shortcomings in command and control, communication, and logistics, and have suggested that the force was insufficiently prepared to fight in high-intensity operations.<sup>37</sup> These analyses suggest a disconnect between the ambitions and expectations of Russian leadership and the actual performance of Russian military personnel.

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<sup>30</sup> Keir Giles, *Assessing Russia's Reorganized and Rearmed Military*, Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Task Force White Paper, May 3, 2017.

<sup>31</sup> Giles, 2017.

<sup>32</sup> Giles, 2017.

<sup>33</sup> Stephen Covington, *The Culture of Strategic Thought Behind Russia's Modern Approaches to Warfare*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Kennedy School, Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, 2016.

<sup>34</sup> Katri Pynnöniemi, ed., *Nexus of Patriotism and Militarism in Russia: A Quest for Internal Cohesion*, Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 2021.

<sup>35</sup> Jonathan Beale, "Ukraine: What Have Been Russia's Military Mistakes?" BBC News, March 19, 2022.

<sup>36</sup> Jack Watling, "Just How Tall Are Russian Soldiers?" *RUSI Defence Systems*, Vol. 24, March 11, 2022.

<sup>37</sup> Thomas Grove and Stephen Fidler, "How Russia's Revamped Military Fumbled the Invasion of Ukraine," *Wall Street Journal*, March 17, 2022.



Ultimately, while the literature offer important insights into aspects of recent changes to Russian approaches to personnel, none of these reports provide the depth of analysis, drawn from Russian-language sources, that we seek to achieve in this report.

## Study Goals, Approach, and Structure

### *Research Questions*

The study leading to this report was undertaken to fill a gap in Western analysis on Russian military manpower and proficiency and help improve understanding of recent trends. More specifically, we ask:

- How has the Russian military conceptualized and implemented reforms in the areas of recruitment, retention, and personnel proficiency from 1991–2021?
- How has the Russian approach to military personnel changed since the initial post-Soviet period?
- What were the notable trends in the areas of Russian military recruitment, retention, and proficiency between the 2000s and 2021?

Within each chapter, analysis of available open-source data and literature on Russian military recruitment, retention, and proficiency addresses these questions and provides new insights into recent trends and their potential significance.

### *Approach*

To conduct this study, we assembled a research team that included deep regional, functional, and linguistic expertise. Team members drew from knowledge and professional backgrounds in military sociology, Russian military history, social psychology, military intelligence analysis, and national security policy to approach each chapter topic. Extensive Russian-language skills provided access to a variety of published and unpublished works from the Russian defense and academic spheres.

Broad examination of Russian-language sources, including military journals, local polling results, leadership statements, and unpublished academic works, offered direct insights into the information and considerations that Russian military leaders might be incorporating into their approach to recruitment, retention, and proficiency of military personnel. The research approach within each chapter relies on qualitative analysis of primary- and secondary-source documents and data, as well as secondary source review of analytical articles and book chapters. English-language sources of information offered complementary insights for each chapter and included previously published research, journal and news articles, and announcements from the Russian MoD. These sources also helped the search for Russian-language sources, including research published in Russian scholarly journals.

In recent decades, a growing number of scholars in Russia have published both quantitative and qualitative research on their country's military manpower and personnel system. Although some of this research has appeared in English-language peer-reviewed journals,<sup>38</sup> much of what is publicly available was published in Russian-language journals.<sup>39</sup> Within Chapter 4, some of the published research on personnel retention appears to have been co-authored by individuals affiliated with or sponsored by the Sociological Center of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation.<sup>40</sup> We highlight a relatively small sample of this research (most research published between 2010 and 2021), noting that there is a much larger volume of studies that we do not cover.

### *Limitations*

Some pragmatic constraints limited the methodologies applied in this report. Partially because of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, team members were unable to travel to Russia for interviews, and thus relied exclusively on written works by Russian authors.<sup>41</sup> Additionally, new criminal laws and “foreign agent” labeling laws relating to military personnel and equipment, announced in September 2021, have led to government censoring and self-censoring among Russia-based researchers and reporters, adding difficulties for outside security studies researchers to access and analyze a full range of data about the Russian military.<sup>42</sup> As noted in the individual chapters, we carefully considered the context and reliability of information sources in developing our analysis.

Within the literature reviews conducted for each chapter, we assume that Russian research related to military recruitment, retention, or proficiency is a sign that some military leaders have an interest in this topic. Although a member of the Russian Armed Forces might support a particular line of research on their personnel, we cannot conclude who within the MoD has interest in particular research findings. Additionally, the research questions and approaches

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<sup>38</sup> Some examples include Igor V. Obraztsov, “Teaching Sociology in Military Educational Institutions of Russia,” *Armed Forces and Society*, Vol. 35, No. 1, October 2008; and Irina Surkova, “Social Problems in the Russian Army Within the Framework of Social Work,” *Journal of Comparative Social Work*, Vol. 5, No. 2, 2010.

<sup>39</sup> Some examples include Vladimir Igorevich Veremchuk and Dmitry Sergeevich Krutilin, “The Religious Situation in the Armed Forces” [“Религиозная ситуация в вооруженных силах”], *Sotsiologicheskiye issledovaniya*, Vol. 4, 2016; Ludmila Vladislavovna Klimenko and Oksana Yurievna Posukhova, “Russian Military Personnel Under Institutional Reforms: Professional Attitude and Identity” [“Российские военнослужащие в условиях институциональных реформ: профессиональные установки и идентичность”], *Zhurnal institutsional'nykh issledovaniy*, Vol. 10, No. 2, June 2018b.

<sup>40</sup> The goal of this center is to use of scientific methods to monitor the socio-economic and legal status of Russian military personnel and their dependents (MoD, “Sociological Center of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation,” webpage, undated-z).

<sup>41</sup> Don Melvin, “Russia Bans ‘Undesirable’ NGOs, Sparking International Outcry,” *CNN*, May 24, 2015; Alec Luhn, “Vladimir Putin Declares All Russian Military Deaths State Secrets,” *The Guardian*, May 28, 2015.

<sup>42</sup> Maria Makutina, “Foreign Agents Will Be Brought Under One Article” [“Иноагентов подведут под одну статью”], *Kommersant*, December 12, 2022.

might have been driven more by the interests or convenience of authors rather than those held by Russian military leadership.

Another important caveat to consider within each chapter is that the quality of research cited in Russian sources might not always rise to the level of standards used by U.S. scholars. For example, surveys of Russian personnel did not always use well-designed survey instruments, representative samples, or sophisticated modeling, and some articles did not provide sufficient methodological details about their research designs. Where possible, we have identified the relevant methodological details of the Russian sources cited.

Geographically, Russian military scholars might not always have the resources to collect data within all military districts. Thus, research reviewed in this report might focus more on some districts (e.g., the Western military district) over others, not because one is a higher priority to Russian military leaders, but because of the ease and cost-effectiveness of data collection.

Finally, we exclusively reviewed open-source research, and there likely are personnel-related studies that the Russian military has not released to the public.

### *Structure*

To shed light on how Russia has pursued the professionalization of its military personnel, we consider policies and trends in three core areas: recruitment, retention, and proficiency. Each chapter draws from Russian literature on these subjects to focus on select topics of likely interest to military leaders.

Chapter 2 offers an overview of the post–Cold War history of Russian military personnel policies, including the evolving challenges and aspirations that shaped modern policies. Chapter 3 identifies recent trends that are relevant to recruitment into the Russian military, including popular perceptions of the military and military service, the qualities that the Russian military appears to be seeking and finding in its conscripts, and contract recruitment efforts. Chapter 4 focuses on core issues associated with personnel retention in the Russian military. Chapter 5 addresses Russian efforts to improve the proficiency of its military personnel. The report’s concluding chapter reviews core findings from the study and identifies ways in which recent trends have or have not addressed enduring challenges within the Russian military personnel system.

## Chapter 2. Russian Military Personnel Problems and Reforms Between 1991 and 2009

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Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the newly renamed Russian Armed Forces were thrown into a period of disarray, austerity spending, and collapse of prestige domestically and globally. The personnel in the Russian military in the 1990s and most of the early 2000s experienced firsthand poor service conditions, low or unpaid wages, lack of social supports, and criminality within their units. However, throughout this period, the Russian military sought to improve and modify personnel policies to correct the course, even if their efforts were underfunded or imperfect. In this chapter, we will outline the manning and challenges faced during the tumultuous years from 1991 through 2009, until the restart of Russia's most recent military reform efforts, and will focus on issues relating to personnel proficiency, recruitment, and retention. We then will discuss the multiple attempts over this period to resolve these problems and discuss the policies created to resolve these problems.

### Systemic Personnel Problems of the Russian Armed Forces: 1991–2009

The Russian military of the 1990s and early 2000s faced daunting constraints and problems. Structurally, the military was struggling to downsize and modernize after the collapse of the Soviet Union because of entrenched military-bureaucratic views and severe financial shortcomings within a larger Russian economy in freefall. This section will catalogue these problems across three areas: proficiency, recruitment, and retention. It should be noted that several of the cultural problems inherited by the Russian military in the 1990s were carryovers from the late Soviet period (for example, hazing and undermanning), but Soviet military policy is outside the scope of our study, and our analysis begins in 1991. We have identified several systemic problems and note whether and how they affect three broad buckets of challenges: proficiency, recruitment, and retention. Several problems have had effects in more than one category.

Historically, recruiting (or forcing service) was not a problem for the Soviet Union or the polities that preceded it because manpower was plentiful. As Alexei Arbatov describes,

Commanders relied on high levels of manpower much more than on technology or mobility, and on the practice of fighting wars by overwhelming opponents with their huge numbers and by being able to absorb much greater losses than their opponents. . . .<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Alexei G. Arbatov, "Military Reform in Russia: Dilemmas, Obstacles, and Prospects," *International Security*, Vol. 22, No. 4, Spring 1998, p. 99.

The Russia of the 1990s, however, faced a new, more difficult environment for recruitment. By the mid-1990s, units were between 30 and 50 percent undermanned, depending on the unit and service.<sup>44</sup> Part of this undermanning can be explained by different readiness requirements within units at the time, but some likely is attributable to larger social problems with recruiting personnel.

Similar to the recruiting challenges, morale problems, wage arrears, and poor service conditions dogged service members throughout the 1990s and early 2000s and led to a severe retention challenge during this period.

### *Undermanned Units and Low Readiness*

A significant proficiency problem with its attendant effects on readiness arose after the collapse of the Soviet Union when Russia inherited large force structure and the inability to effectively man this force. In 1991, Russia inherited a military with 2.8 million service members and hundreds of undermanned units.<sup>45</sup> These Soviet-era structures were designed around a mass-mobilization system that used a wartime table of organization and equipment (TOE) and a peacetime TOE. The wartime TOE would be staffed and equipped to sustain a significant military operation (for example, Category A Soviet units, 80 percent manned and usually 100 percent equipped), while the peacetime TOE was made for day-to-day sustainment levels that were manned at much lower levels than during wartime (for example, Category B units that were roughly 50 percent manned, and C units, which were manned around 30 percent or less).<sup>46</sup> The large manning differences between these levels were designed to be filled by reservists, and equipment shortfalls would be addressed by materiel in storage or civilian equipment.<sup>47</sup> This system was designed for a high-intensity conflict against NATO in Europe with a significant mobilization period, not the low-intensity ethnic conflicts that Russia faced in the 1990s.<sup>48</sup>

Early 1990s reform efforts, spurred by the MoD's inability to fund and man a large standing military, sought to create a smaller subset of combat-ready formations. In theory, these formations would be expanded in wartime; in practice, the formations lacked the personnel necessary to function because of policy and demographic issues, discussed in later sections, and sometimes existed only on paper.<sup>49</sup>

Structural issues among the ranks of officers also proved to be impediments to proficiency during this period. The Russian Armed Forces of the early 1990s were top-heavy, and junior

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<sup>44</sup> Arbatov, 1998, p. 100.

<sup>45</sup> Bettina Renz, *Russia's Military Revival*, Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2018, p. 53.

<sup>46</sup> Viktor Suvorov, *Inside the Soviet Army, Part 4: Mobilization*, Moscow, 1982.

<sup>47</sup> IISS, 2020, p. 14.

<sup>48</sup> Renz, 2018, p. 53.

<sup>49</sup> IISS, 2020, p. 20.

officers struggled with upward mobility and daily task management of undermanned units. Those generals at the top tasked with downsizing, an early priority of then–Minister of Defense Pavel Grachev, did little to implement this priority: In some cases, doing so meant taking away their own jobs. Although the overall number of service members did decrease, resistance to these decreases within the bureaucracy focused more on trimming units, because such structural decreases would mean fewer opportunities for senior officers to serve in command. The new Russian military also faced difficulties developing a cadre of junior officers capable of both serving in their current roles and developing into future senior leaders. Russian military scholar Carolina Vendil Pallin of the Swedish Defence Research Agency explains that “at lower levels in the command chain, the lack of conscripts forced officers to perform menial tasks with the result that officers did not receive the training they needed for their future careers.”<sup>50</sup> With many officers leaving and persistent difficulties in recruiting new conscripts because of draft evasion or deferments, many units were undermanned and in poor condition. This cycle led to “a serious deficit” of company commanders. These issues, combined with frustrations over lack of pay (discussed in the following section), created readiness issues and led to increased corruption within the ranks.<sup>51</sup>

### *Poor Training and Insufficient Training Funds*

Another set of significant issues that created proficiency challenges were associated with training conditions and the lack of money for training. Military training efforts remained poor throughout the 1990s. The first major exercise of the newly constituted Russian military did not take place until December 1992, and service members were quickly losing the ability to conduct core functions of their roles (e.g., some pilots logged at most 20 flight hours per year, and even among this low number, crews within regiments also were divided into flying and nonflying crews).<sup>52</sup> Few service members trained together before being deployed to Chechnya.<sup>53</sup> By 1996, Dale Herspring explains, “Russia had gone through more than ten training cycles without conducting any serious training,” creating “a whole generation of platoon and company commanders (except those who had served in Chechnya) [who] had no field experience.” This issue persisted through the battalion, regiment, and division levels of the Ground Forces.<sup>54</sup> In

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<sup>50</sup> Carolina Vendil Pallin, *Russian Military Reform: A Failed Exercise in Defence Decision Making*, New York: Routledge, 2009, pp. 107–108; and Dale R. Herspring, “Undermining Combat Readiness in the Russian Military,” *Armed Forces and Society*, Vol. 32, No. 4, July 2006, pp. 520–521.

<sup>51</sup> Pallin, 2009, pp. 107–108; and Herspring, 2006, pp. 520–521.

<sup>52</sup> Herspring, 2006, p. 516.

<sup>53</sup> Herspring, 2006, p. 518.

<sup>54</sup> Herspring, 2006, p. 520.

addition, the dire economic conditions of the 1990s meant that the military lacked the funds to maintain equipment and training efforts, leading to a significant degradation in capabilities.<sup>55</sup>

After Putin came to power, the situation began to improve, albeit unevenly. For example, some pilots (likely the best) received more opportunities to fly, while others did not because of funding constraints.<sup>56</sup> After increasing the training budget in 2005 and ordering a resumption of out-of-area deployments in 2007, the Russian military held training exercises more frequently and at larger scales, especially compared with the immediate past.<sup>57</sup>

### *Loss of Prestige and Population Support*

Military morale and population support was low in the early years of the new Russian military, which discouraged many from pursuing the once-prestigious military career path, which led to recruitment challenges. Although the Armed Forces remained one of the most trusted institutions in the post-Soviet period at a time when most state institutions at the time had lost popular trust (in 1993), only 59 percent of the Russian population reported confidence in the Armed Forces because the image of the military as a profession and personal preparedness to serve waned.<sup>58</sup> Military service decreased in prestige as service members' pay became uncompetitive amid the Russian economic crisis of the 1990s and because the military faced systemic issues stemming from the poor treatment of both conscripts and officers.<sup>59</sup> Moreover, while the populace might have previously been willing or forced to make sacrifices for the national defense in a command economy, the democratization process of the 1990s led to other priorities and a greater focus on human rights. Pallin explains that, "in practice, society displayed its unwillingness to participate in developing the Armed Forces through draft evasion on a massive scale, and this became one of the main reasons for military reform."<sup>60</sup> Draft evasion is discussed in greater detail in a section that follows.

### *Hazing and Other Poor Service Conditions*

Endemic hazing, especially among conscripts, was a fact of life in the Armed Forces before the collapse of the Soviet Union, and such practices continued in the new Russian military. This

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<sup>55</sup> Renz, 2018, p. 55.

<sup>56</sup> Konstantin Rashchepkin and Andrey Lunov, "Lieutenant General Vladimir Shamanov: The Training and Look of the Armed Forces Will Change" ["Генерал-лейтенант Владимир Шаманов: подготовка и облик армии будут меняться"], *Krasnaya zvezda*, No. 107, June 24, 2008. Some estimates suggest that by 2006, tactical aviation pilots were flying around 30 hours annually at most, Long-Range Aviation (LRA) pilots around 40, and some units were divided into a combat crew and non-flying crew.

<sup>57</sup> Herspring, 2006, pp. 523–524; and Dmitriy Litovkin, "It Is Good That the Bears Are Flying!" ["Хорошо, что 'Медведи' летают!"], *Izvestiya*, December 21, 2007.

<sup>58</sup> Herspring, 2006, p. 516.

<sup>59</sup> Renz, 2018, p. 56.

<sup>60</sup> Pallin, 2009.

problem led to severe recruitment and retention issues for the Armed Forces. Conscripts faced *dedovshchina* (which roughly translates to “hazing”), which Julie Elkner defines as “the widespread systems of informal power hierarchies that operated in Soviet barracks, and the associated violence in which senior conscripts bullied and victimised new recruits” throughout their two years of service.<sup>61</sup> As Arbatov explains, because of “shortages in both funding and manpower, inadequate housing and training, increasing demands to perform nonmilitary duties, and a general lack of morale coupled with little incentive for good performance,” officers were allowed to effectively treat younger conscripts “like an obedient ‘slave labor’ force.”<sup>62</sup> A 1994 Russian Academy of Sciences report catalogued that “for any man entering the Army, there was an 80 per cent probability of his being beaten up (30 percent in a particularly savage or humiliating form) and a 5 percent” chance of being raped.<sup>63</sup> Hazing remained widespread throughout the 1990s, leading to violence perpetrated by officers; for example, a 1999 Military Prosecutor’s Office report noted “that 57 officers died and 2,735 were injured” by November of that year, with another 300 officers dying by suicide, “many because of their inability to put up with hazing.”<sup>64</sup> Furthermore, conscripts had few opportunities to communicate with their friends, families, or nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in the 1990s and early 2000s. Their methods for communicating with the outside world were through letters and what soldiers presumed was a monitored landline, which often lead to the concealment, suppression, or underreporting of bad news. For example, in 2001, a Russian NGO, Prikamye, received multiple reports of hazing from a remote unit in Siberia. The conscripts did not write to their parents because they felt that their communications were monitored. When representatives and parents negotiated a time to see them in person, the soldiers were quiet and said there were no problems. The NGO and parents concluded they were silent because of a fear of reprisals.<sup>65</sup>

Herspring notes that the lack of professional, empowered NCOs serving in the ranks probably contributed to the failure to reduce *dedovshchina*.<sup>66</sup> Such NCOs, if available and properly trained, would have provided better oversight within the barracks at night, on the weekends, or during the training day. So many experienced NCO vacancies (nearly 80 percent vacancies at the platoon level or equivalent in other services) meant that junior officers were used to perform these duties to a certain extent. But many of these junior officers (often lieutenants) did not want to sleep in the barracks with enlisted personnel or provide oversight on such tasks as mess duty or showering. Many lived off-base or had to work second jobs on the

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<sup>61</sup> Julie Elkner, “*Dedovshchina* and the Committee of Soldiers’ Mothers Under Gorbachev,” *Journal of Power Institutions in Post-Soviet Society*, No. 1, 2004.

<sup>62</sup> Arbatov, 1998, p. 101.

<sup>63</sup> Herspring, 2006, p. 519.

<sup>64</sup> Cited in Herspring, 2006, p. 521.

<sup>65</sup> “A Mother’s Order to Commanders” [“Материнский наказ Командирам”], *Soldat Otechestva*, No. 12, 2001.

<sup>66</sup> Herspring, 2006, pp. 525–526.



weekend, leaving the barracks in the evenings and on weekends. This structural problem resulted in significant periods of poor supervision for conscripts and ample opportunity for hazing and other discipline breakdowns.<sup>67</sup>

### *Draft Evasion*

In the 1990s and early 2000s, many families were desperate to keep their sons out of conscription, which contributed to the military's recruitment issues. In the context of an overall demographic decline that shrunk the pool from which to draw eligible men for service and an entrenched pro-conscription element within the military bureaucracy that wanted to punish evaders, pervasive draft evasion created a thorny set of issues in Russian society. Conscription was in need of immediate reform.<sup>68</sup> Some officers within the Armed Forces resisted overhauling the conscription system, claiming, for example, that the only fix to the hazing problem was harsher discipline. This disdain for the well-being of conscripts and minimal efforts by the MoD to assuage public concerns during the 1990s further contributed to draft evasion and lower-quality Armed Forces.<sup>69</sup>

Although the population was split over supporting the military abstractly, most had no desire to serve or have a family member serve, according to Pallin. Hazing continued to plague the ranks, further pushing people away from serving or wanting their children to serve.<sup>70</sup> Even after the 2008 Russo-Georgian War—when pride in and respect for the military were relatively high—54 percent of poll respondents still did not want their husbands, brothers, or sons to serve in the Armed Forces. Forty-four percent of those responding highlighted hazing as the reason why.<sup>71</sup> In fact, as of 2008–2009, Russian websites would offer services to ensure that a family could get their son deferred or exempted from military service. One company promised that a successful deferral would cost 10,000 rubles, and for 72,000 rubles, a lawyer could set up a potential conscript with enrollment in a graduate school.<sup>72</sup> Other companies also would provide false military service papers and identification to conscripts who needed to show proof of service

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<sup>67</sup> Irina Demina, “Back to What Has Been Published: Pain Points of the Siberian Military District. Is Krasny Yar a Survival Zone?” [“Возвращаясь к напечатанному: ‘болевы́е точки’ СибВО. Красный Яр—зона выживания?”], *Na boevom postu*, No. 89, November 17, 2001; Vitaly Shlykov, “The Spineless Army” [“Бесхребетная армия”], *VPK. Voенно-Promыshlennyyi Kur'er*, No. 14, 2011.

<sup>68</sup> Pallin, 2009, pp. 57–58

<sup>69</sup> Pallin, 2009, pp. 58–59.

<sup>70</sup> Pallin, 2009, p. 159.

<sup>71</sup> Jason P. Gresh, “The Realities of Russian Military Conscription,” *Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 2, 2011, p. 189.

<sup>72</sup> Sergey Turchenko, “The Smaller the Army, the More the Crimes” [“Чем меньше армия, тем больше преступлений”], *Svobodnaya pressa*, March 24, 2010.

for future employment for a price of \$3,000 U.S. dollars, claiming that they had connections inside the MoD to make this process authentic and worth the high price.<sup>73</sup>

Because of the issues surrounding *dedovshchina* and other service problems, draft-dodging was a particularly acute problem for the Russian military of this period. In the 2000s, this issue had not been resolved: Some estimates suggested that 60 to 90 percent of draft-age men were able to obtain a deferment of some kind.<sup>74</sup> Then, for each 500,000 men drafted, an average of 30,000 to 40,000 evaded the draft.<sup>75</sup>

In response to political pressure to shift toward more contract service and demographic pressures, the military pushed for a reduction of official draft exemptions but still argued for a large conscription pool. Although service was reduced from two years to one and other ministries were no longer allowed to rely on conscripts, the Armed Forces still faced a small, demographically challenged conscription pool by 2008.<sup>76</sup> Gresh argues that these “institutional realities” and “antiquated mentality surrounding the overall military culture,” particularly over the continued push for conscription, were among the “most formidable barriers to the creation of an all-volunteer force.”<sup>77</sup>

Recruiting contract service personnel also fared poorly during early attempts. In 2006, the MoD launched a pilot program to expand from the Russian Airborne Forces (*Vozdushno-desantnye voyska*, or VDV) pilot to shift to permanently ready formations. Although it offered better compensation, the program did not pay more than civilian employment and lacked the benefits and social supports—such as housing—that are necessary to make contractor service enticing. For example, any contractor with a family had to rent an apartment and could not apply for housing allowances.<sup>78</sup>

### *Health Problems and Deferments*

The combination of poor physical and mental health of potential draftees and a complicated system of deferments and exemptions (estimates by the military suggested up to 90 percent of eligible draftees received legal deferments) meant that the Russian military expended precious resources on recruitment to meet annual conscription quotas.<sup>79</sup> As of 2000, admissions

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<sup>73</sup> Turchenko, 2010.

<sup>74</sup> Victor Permyakov, “Details. The Reform of the Military Service System Started” [“Подробности. началась реформа системы военной службы”], *VPK. Voенно-Промышленный Кур’ер*, No. 17, May 3, 2006; Gresh, 2011, p. 210.

<sup>75</sup> Gresh, 2011, p. 210.

<sup>76</sup> Pallin, 2009, p. 160.

<sup>77</sup> Gresh, 2011, p. 212.

<sup>78</sup> IISS, 2020, p. 22.

<sup>79</sup> Permyakov, 2006.

committees had begun passing unwell conscripts to the military to meet annual draft quotas.<sup>80</sup> In this period, 30 percent of potential draftees were not healthy enough for service and failed to meet physical health standards.<sup>81</sup> Drug use was also a disqualifier, and during this time, small numbers of draftees would arrive at military commissariats under the influence to be disqualified from service.<sup>82</sup>

One of the most common issues facing Russian military units in the 1990s and 2000s was malnourished conscripts (22 percent in some units). The military knew that it needed to provide high-calorie food to malnourished young men—meat, fish, cheese, and eggs—to build muscle mass.<sup>83</sup> However, the military was facing critical food shortages and had little in the way to assist struggling conscripts during the 1990s. For example, in 2000, the MoD district chief logistical officer of the Far East Military District (now called the Eastern Military District) noted that regionally, milk, some meats and fish, and chocolate were in short supply.<sup>84</sup> In 2001, the military medical commission of the former Siberian Military District discussed the urgent need to treat malnourished and underweight conscripts. However, food resources were not available and commanders reported that conscripts had only bread, water, and some vegetables, and no fish, butter, eggs, meat, or milk. Even when given extra food allowances, only 5 percent of these conscripts gained weight.<sup>85</sup> As late as 2005, military units were not being adequately supplied with food and contracted with local farms to provide for themselves.<sup>86</sup> In some cases, this meant that conscripts would provide the labor for a share of the harvest. As the Prosecutor General of the Russian Federation noted of these underweight conscripts, part of their service term included physical therapy, weightlifting, conditioning, and “sometimes just [being] fed and provided with normal nutritious food.”<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> “Colonel General Vladimir Isakov: Health Is Our Defense Potential” [“Генерал-полковник Владимир Исаков: Здоровье—наш защитный потенциал”], *Suvorovskii natisk*, No. 38, 2000. According to notes from the meeting of the Military Council of the Far Eastern Military District, local recruiting offices were passing unwell draftees through the process to meet biannual quotas.

<sup>81</sup> Demina, 2001.

<sup>82</sup> “Who and What Generates Dedovschina?” [“Кто и что порождает дедовщину”] *VPK. Voенно-Promyshlennyyi Kur'er*, No. 24, June 23, 2010.

<sup>83</sup> Aleksandr Babakin, Aleksandr, “Soldier’s Ration with Additive” [“Солдатский паек с добавкой”], *Na strazhe Zapoliar’ia*, No. 22, 2003.

<sup>84</sup> “Colonel General Vladimir Isakov: Health Is Our Defense Potential,” 2000.

<sup>85</sup> Demina, 2001.

<sup>86</sup> “Competently. What Is on the Soldier’s Table” [“Компетентно. Чем богат стол солдата”], *Voennyi Vestnik Yuga Rossii*, No. 27, June 30, 2006.

<sup>87</sup> “Who and What Generates Dedovschina?” 2010.

## *A Military Disillusioned and Struggling*

The Russian military faced a twin morale crisis as it navigated the 1990s and early 2000s; this crisis affected proficiency, recruitment, and retention. Several factors, such as the ambient confusion and chaos of the collapse of the Soviet Union and loss of social standing of the military within Russian society in the aftermath of the collapse, led to a military that was structurally in disarray and strategically adrift, and to the individual disillusionment or despair of military personnel about the future. Within the military, the poor operational performance in the Chechen campaigns, a chaotic piecemeal breakup and relocation of former Soviet military units from abroad, a halt to out-of-area military operations, and crumbling readiness were sources of shame that affected even the most senior echelon of the Russian military. The degree to which despair permeated the military during the 1990s cannot be overstated. Marshal Sergey Akhromeyev, the last Soviet Chief of the General Staff, shot himself in his office in August 1991 as the Soviet Union collapsed, with a note that allegedly read “everything I devoted my entire life to building is crumbling.”<sup>88</sup> A decade later, in 2000, then–Defense Minister Igor Sergeev, when asked about the dire state of materiel and personnel readiness of this period by a young Sergei Shoigu (who would later become Defense Minister) allegedly pondered aloud, “What can I do? There is not enough money even to maintain the nuclear forces.”<sup>89</sup>

Among field-grade and junior officers, disillusionment with military service manifested in different ways. Austerity defense budgets meant that there were few funds left for training or operational deployment, which led to idle time spent on noncombat tasks, such as groundskeeping. This downtime lowered morale and introduced opportunities for hazing and other crime. In 2006, senior officials from the General Staff met with members of the Commission of the Public Chamber of the Russian Federation to discuss social issues in the military; they met with Russian academics, economists, diplomats, human rights activists, and other NGOs.<sup>90</sup> Russian press accounts of this meeting recounted that these groups raised several critical issues with General Staff representatives about morale in the military during this time. Problems in the officer corps included dissatisfaction (66 percent of polled officers said they were unsatisfied with their socioeconomic situation, 54 percent believed it was better to be a civilian), low salary, and limited employment opportunities for wives (100 percent of polled cadets in Moscow worked side jobs; 50 percent of polled lieutenants worried that they could not

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<sup>88</sup> Gerald Nadler, “Akhromeyev a Suicide,” UPI, August 25, 1991.

<sup>89</sup> MoD, “Remarks by the Minister of Defense of the Russian Federation General of the Army S. K. Shoigu at the Russian Defense Ministry Board Session” [“Тезисы доклада Министра обороны Российской Федерации генерала армии С. К. Шойгу на расширенном заседании Коллегии Минобороны России”], webpage, 2020a.

<sup>90</sup> Y. Gavrillov, “In the Army with the Parents” [“В армию с родителями”], *Strazh Baltiki*, No. 195, 2006. This Public Council was created by order of then–Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov.

start a family, and 30 percent of polled officers and warrant officers were living below the poverty line).<sup>91</sup>

When Vladimir Putin assumed the presidency in 2000, strengthening the military was a key priority. In 2000, he noted “the trust of the Army [Russian military] and having the Army feel good about itself is the bedrock foundation of the state of the Armed Forces.”<sup>92</sup> Although Putin entered office promising reform and improved conditions, the situation remained dire in the early 2000s. In 2002, Russian news sources reported that 400,000 officers had resigned in the previous decade. Eighty percent of officers serving in the Moscow region resigned before completing 30 years of service, and 20 percent of military academy students quit before graduation.<sup>93</sup>

### *Low Wages and Wage Arrears*

The MoD faced dire financial straits, unable to pay service members and personnel for long periods in the 1990s and early 2000s. Moreover, pay lagged behind other opportunities in Russian society, including those forces under the control of other power ministries (such as Border Troops).<sup>94</sup> This problem translated into both recruitment and retention issues for the military.

Pay remained well below the level of civilian compensation; as Herspring explains, the pay of service members living in some areas of the Russian Federation “met only 25 to 30 percent of their subsistence needs.”<sup>95</sup> One hundred and twenty thousand officers reportedly were homeless. Some Russian officers took second jobs to make ends meet, and other members of the Armed Forces often had to sell old uniforms and other materiel to provide for themselves and their families.<sup>96</sup> Two lieutenants from the Strategic Rocket Forces—considered to be an elite branch of the armed services—observed that “store clerks are paid more,” that their salaries were “barely enough for good food,” and that this caused difficult living conditions and placed families in disarray.<sup>97</sup> By the 1995–1996 election cycle, Russian leadership were seeking to secure votes by promising to deliver wages that were still in arrears. Their promises, however, did not match their actions: The 1996 defense budget called for reductions. By the following autumn, service members and employees still had not been paid.<sup>98</sup> During this period, the head of

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<sup>91</sup> Vladimir Roschupkin, “Actual Topic. Focus on Social Aspects of Military Reform” [“Актуальная тема. В центре внимания—социальные аспекты военной реформы”], *Voennye znaniia*, No. 5, May 31, 2006.

<sup>92</sup> Renz, 2018, p. 62.

<sup>93</sup> Herspring, 2006, p. 523.

<sup>94</sup> Pallin, 2009, p. 107.

<sup>95</sup> Herspring, 2006, p. 517.

<sup>96</sup> Pallin, 2009, p. 107.

<sup>97</sup> A. Goncharov, “I Ask You to Speak. Return to Lost Prestige” [“Прошу слова. Вернуть утраченный престиж”], *Voennyi Vestnik Iuga Rossii*, No. 29, 2003.

<sup>98</sup> Pallin, 2009, p. 101.

the Main Directorate of the Military Budget claimed he was fired because he refused to obtain high-interest commercial loans to make up for insufficient defense funds in the federal budget.<sup>99</sup>

By the early 2000s, some efforts to address the wage situation had helped to decrease the pressure, albeit slightly. Military wages were shifted to more closely match those in other state sectors, and efforts to find better accommodations for service members and their families increased, including through a mortgage program. These two efforts, however, faced continued difficulties: Any pay increase often was offset by inflation, and the mortgage assistance program was not implemented efficiently.<sup>100</sup>

### *Criminality and Corruption in the Military*

During this period, criminality- and corruption-related issues were pervasive in the Russian military, affecting proficiency, recruitment, and retention. At the largest scale, there are estimates that, during the early 1990s, as much as 50 percent of the Russian defense budget disappeared in the pockets of criminal individuals.<sup>101</sup> Within the military ranks, the criminal crisis in this period could be attributed to such factors as low and unpaid wages and runaway inflation, in addition to an increase in social ills that manifested as a surge in alcoholism, drug use, and criminality among officers and enlisted soldiers. In 1999, 10 percent of all potential draftees had alcohol or drug abuse problems; 30 percent had poor health or psychological problems.<sup>102</sup> Ten years later, nearly 50 percent of Russian conscripts had some criminal record, according to the chairman of the military collegium of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation, who handles legal statistics and crime reports for the military.<sup>103</sup>

Issues of criminality manifested in different ways based on one's rank in the military. NCOs experiencing poverty and poor wages were more likely to engage in hazing, and NCOs often abused conscripts by demanding they find money and cigarettes or other in-kind demands by a certain deadline or risk beatings or harassment.<sup>104</sup> Soldiers and Russian NGOs understood that in the 2000s, NCOs and junior officers needed more money and used hazing practices as a way to

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<sup>99</sup> Gennadiy Pulin, "First Hand: When the Army Was on a Break," *VPK. Voenno-Promyshlennyi Kur'er*, No. 17, May 2006.

<sup>100</sup> Pallin, 2009, p. 160.

<sup>101</sup> Tor Bukkvoll, "Their Hands in the Till: Scale and Causes of Russian Military Corruption," *Armed Forces and Society*, Vol. 34, No. 2, January 2008.

<sup>102</sup> Deborah Yarsike Ball, "Seduced and Abandoned: Russian Civil-Military Relations Under Yeltsin," in Michael H. Crutcher, ed., *The Russian Armed Forces at the Dawn of the Millennium*, Carlisle Barracks, Pa.: U.S. Army War College, February 2000, p. 132. Suicide accounted for 27 percent of all military fatalities in 1998: 60 percent of those suicides were conscripts, and the rest were officers and warrant officers.

<sup>103</sup> Turchenko, 2010.

<sup>104</sup> Human Rights Watch, *Hazing in the Russian Armed Analysis and Solutions to the Problem [Неуставные отношения в Российской Армии: Анализ и пути решения проблемы]*, Moscow, October 2004.

get it.<sup>105</sup> Those in the lower and middle officer ranks engaged in petty theft, such as embezzling their units' funds or local equipment to sell on the black market (often the mafia), according to criminal investigations.<sup>106</sup> General officers were charged with similar schemes but at larger scales; for example, overstating costs for their units to syphon the excess, embezzling millions of rubles from MoD coffers (in one case, 250 million rubles for housing projects), or even selling military equipment internationally via arms smugglers (for example, multiple naval officers sold navy torpedoes and missiles and aerial gravity bombs to China via a cut-out in Tajikistan for \$18 million).<sup>107</sup>

So entrenched was this problem that during the New Look reforms in 2008–2009—when 30–50 percent of officer positions were to be eliminated—officer crime in the Russian military actually increased, mostly because of theft. During the 2008–2009 officer reductions, the MoD's Commission on Military Affairs of the Public chamber said that “many officers, when it was announced that they would be dismissed, simply decided to grab from the Army for the rest of their lives.”<sup>108</sup> In total, the military's chief prosecutor estimated that criminal corruption during this time of transition in 2008–2009 cost the Russian military 3 billion rubles.

### *Desertion*

Desertion was another major retention issue during the 1990s through early 2000s, when conscripts abandoned their posts because of excessive bullying and unsafe or unhealthy service conditions. In keeping with Soviet practice, conscripts often served in areas very far away from their families, making it more difficult for them to desert. However, many still tried and often traveled great distances to return to their hometowns or simply disappeared for lengthy periods of time. For example, the General Staff published some statistics on this issue in 2002, when it noted that 2,270 servicemen had deserted their units that year. However, the Committee of Soldiers' Mothers, a Russian human rights organization devoted to improving service conditions for conscripts, believed that the number of desertions probably was closer to 10,000 annually.<sup>109</sup> The Committee of Soldiers' Mothers estimated that only 30 percent of desertions were recorded. They based this assessment on foot traffic in their offices and the fact that the MoD would wait ten days after the soldier was missing to report a desertion (most deserters were caught within ten

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<sup>105</sup> Gregory Katz, “A Russian Soldier's Story,” *The Atlantic*, June 2006.

<sup>106</sup> Ball, 2000, p. 125.

<sup>107</sup> Turchenko, 2010.

<sup>108</sup> Turchenko, 2010.

<sup>109</sup> Diederik Lohman, *The Wrongs of Passage: Inhuman and Degrading Treatment of New Recruits in the Russian Armed Forces*, Human Rights Watch, Vol. 16, No. 8(D), 2004a.

days, either by local military units, police, or families that returned them), and that units attempted to cover up desertions to save face from higher commands.<sup>110</sup>

Table 2.1 provides a summary of systemic issues within the Russian military personnel system from 1990s through 2009.

**Table 2.1. Summary of Systemic Issues, 1990s Through 2009**

<b>Problem</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Proficiency Issue?</b>	<b>Recruitment Issue?</b>	<b>Retention Issue?</b>
Undermanning and low readiness	Russia's inherited military was chronically undermanned, and force structure was poorly devised for challenges that the Russian military would face.	X		
Training quality and lack of funds	Poor and irregular training and broader economic issues created lack of funds for more.	X		
Military prestige and popular support	Endemic problems led to a decrease in prestige and subsequent decline in popular support for military service.		X	X
Hazing and other service conditions	Extremely poor service conditions—particularly hazing of conscripts and junior officers—decreased the incentive to join or stay in the military.	X	X	X
Draft evasion	Because of service conditions, families were desperate to keep their male family members from serving.		X	
Health problems and personnel deferments	Poor health conditions of eligible male Russian population made recruitment more difficult and costly.		X	
Military disillusionment	Deep-seated morale crisis within the military caused both recruitment and retention problems.	X	X	X
Wage issues	Financial problems led to arrears and poor pay compared with other sectors.		X	X
Criminality and corruption	Pervasive issues stemming from criminality and corruption throughout the ranks affected many parts of the military.	X	X	X
Desertion	Poor service conditions led some service members to desert.			X

<sup>110</sup> Diederik Lohman, *Neustavnyye Otnosheniya v Rossiyskoy Armii Analiz i Puti Resheniya Problemy [Hazing in the Russian Armed Analysis and Solutions to the Problem]*, Moscow: Human Rights Watch, October 2004b.



## Early Attempts at Reform, 1990s–2000s

Russian manning and proficiency reforms began long prior to the military’s 2008 announcement of the New Look defense reforms. Our analysis of the period between 1991 and 2008 shows that Russian strategists attempted several times to address multiple personnel issues noted previously, and that several ideas being implemented as of this writing trace their origins to this period of experimentation and learning. Although Russian leadership pursued several methods of personnel reforms during this period, such efforts remained relatively low-priority on the agenda. As Russia military scholar Bettina Renz argues, “the fact that military reform was not a top priority does not mean that there was no awareness that reforms were a necessity, at least in principle.”<sup>111</sup>

Several issues plagued early efforts in this period, mainly severe financial problems and entrenched military resistance to the concept of transformation. However, even these failed attempts showed the Russian military’s ability to learn from mistakes in policy and adapt. Our analysis of reform attempts from the 1990s through the 2000s shows a pattern of experimentation, listening, analysis, as well as integration of lessons learned. The MoD’s initial reform attempts in the personnel proficiency and personnel policy spheres improved over time as experience and financial resources improved. These initial attempts informed the New Look reforms of the Russian military that began in 2008. This section will review these early reform attempts and the problems they were attempting to resolve, and provide observations on why they were unsuccessful.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, a major professionalization debate centered on conscripts. As Renz argues, “the consensus view [in the 1990s and early 2000s] was that the Russian military could never be fully modernized unless the large and mostly conscript-based army was abandoned in favor of smaller and more affordable professional units.”<sup>112</sup> Geostrategic concerns, entrenched conservative views within the military bureaucracy, financial constraints, and a preeminent role of military capacity in Russia’s understanding of its great power status all contributed to Russia’s inability to move to an all-volunteer army during this period.<sup>113</sup>

As early as the 1980s, General Secretary of the Soviet Union Mikhail Gorbachev attempted to downsize the military’s force strength and introduce professional enlisted soldiers. His motivations were largely economic, because at the time, the Soviet military reportedly consumed up to 15 percent of gross domestic product (GDP). However, resistance to volunteer enlisted soldiers came from the Soviet officer corps, who were heavily indoctrinated into the tenets of

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<sup>111</sup> Renz, 2018, p. 54.

<sup>112</sup> Renz, 2018, p. 68.

<sup>113</sup> Renz, 2018, pp. 68–69.

communism. Many believed that contract service personnel were essentially mercenaries and thus would have a lower will to fight and less patriotism.<sup>114</sup>

The MoD experimented with two approaches to ameliorate manning problems in the 1990s: employing contract-based service members and calling up reservists. Initial efforts to hire contract soldiers met numerical targets, but these efforts were expensive and lacked the funding necessary to sustain the program. Recruit quality was also an issue. In addition, Pallin explains, “a considerable proportion of the contract-employed personnel were women and there were reports of ‘family operation’—commanders manning their units with wives, children and friends.”<sup>115</sup> With a lack of qualified officers to serve in command, the Armed Forces began calling up reservists. By the late 1990s, MoD leadership remained unhappy with the quality of the reservists who were reporting for duty and continued to face the issues described previously.<sup>116</sup>

Between 1994 and 1996, then-President Boris Yeltsin proposed that conscription be ended within a decade. Yeltsin’s motives likely were political because, during this time, conscription was very unpopular, and the first war in Chechnya was going poorly. That professionalization effort failed, as previous RAND analysis has noted, “from a lack of guidance, military buy-in, and funding.”<sup>117</sup> The contract program was tested during the First Chechen War, and it did not yield its intended results after resignations over pay-related issues. According to the IISS, pay for contractors “was significantly lower than that of a commissioned officer or a warrant officer and only slightly exceeded the pay of a conscript.”<sup>118</sup>

As discussed previously, a third attempt at reforming the military personnel system was made in the early 2000s. This effort resulted in several targeted experiments on selected units: The expressed goal was that all enlisted and senior sergeant ranks could be professionals one day.<sup>119</sup> Shifting to a contract force became a priority for Putin, particularly in places like Chechnya, where conflict had broken out again. However, it was difficult to recruit professionals during this period. By this time, the Russian public generally was against using Russian conscripts in Chechnya. During a 2003 press conference, Putin stated,

Only professionals should, of course, serve in “hot spots.” Conscripts, young boys of 18–19 years should not be there. Professional people, who chose this as their profession consciously and consciously take the risk, should be there.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Dale Herspring, *The Kremlin and the High Command: Presidential Impact on the Russian Military from Gorbachev to Putin*, Lawrence, Kan.: University Press of Kansas, 2006a, pp. 37–38.

<sup>115</sup> Pallin, 2009, p. 109.

<sup>116</sup> Pallin, 2009, p. 109.

<sup>117</sup> Radin et al., 2019b, p. 61.

<sup>118</sup> IISS, 2020, p. 22.

<sup>119</sup> Shlykov, 2011.

<sup>120</sup> Putin, quoted in Pallin, 2009, p. 159.

Perhaps recognizing broader societal concerns about sending conscripts to war zones, the government tried to shift in response. Although the Russian government promised to rely only on contract soldiers for the conflict in 2003, the military was still using conscripts in 2004.<sup>121</sup>

Two separate trial programs to reform the personnel system were initiated at the prestigious 76th Guards Air Assault Division of the VDV in Pskov. The first (unsuccessful) attempt took place between 2001 and 2003. One reason the program failed is that the promised refurbished dormitories for contract personnel had not been built yet, meaning this initial cohort of personnel faced the options of living in tents or old dorms (sometimes, the MoD rented cheap lodging in the local town to house contract personnel).<sup>122</sup> Working hours and job duties were not clear, and few social incentives were offered. As a result, the military estimated that it had to ask or review 120–150 personnel to bring one serviceman in via a contract.<sup>123</sup> However, this failed trial taught the military a few things that it would try to implement for the second attempt in 2004. The MoD recognized the urgent need to deliver on social promises and develop a method to man formations with contract personnel by making their job duties and working hours different and more palatable than those of conscripts, as well as the need to retrain officers to command professional enlisted.

Specific units of Russia’s Airborne Forces and permanently ready forces in other services were used as a trial magnet program for contract service from 2004 to 2007 (the formal name of this program was the *Federal Target Program for the Transfer of Units and Formations of Permanent Readiness to the Contract Manning Principle*). During this recruiting campaign, professional soldiers were promised better conditions with housing, pay, and realistic combat training: the opportunity to become a professional soldier. However, the military still was unprepared to back up these promises because of inexperience and lack of supports. This initial three-year trial effort was not considered successful because only 20 percent of the initial wave of contract service personnel re-enlisted, and there were cases of contract terminations (resignations) halfway through the contract period.<sup>124</sup> Poor wages, lack of housing for single and married contract personnel, inadequate training, and similar job duties and harsh treatment from officers (who were still untrained in how to command professional enlisted personnel) were contributing factors to this initial experiment’s unsuccessful outcome.<sup>125</sup> Despite these two successive flops, the MoD conducted extensive polling and analyzed the event. Ultimately, the

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<sup>121</sup> Pallin, 2009, p. 57.

<sup>122</sup> Aleksey Naydenov, “How to Attract a Contract Soldier” [“Чем привлечь контрактника”], *Armeiskii sbornik*, No. 9, September 30, 2005.

<sup>123</sup> Aleksander Kolmakov, “Contract Service: Pskov Experiment Results and Lessons” [“Служба по контракту. Псковский эксперимент: итоги и уроки”], *Rossiiskoe voennoe obozrenie*, No. 2, 2004.

<sup>124</sup> Anton Lavrov, “Towards a Professional Army,” *Moscow Defense Brief*, Vol. 4, No. 48, 2015; Renz, 2018, p. 24.

<sup>125</sup> Konstantin Makienko, “Armed Forces New Look: The Personnel Issues” [“Вооруженные силы нового облика: проблемы комплектования”], *VPK. Voенно-Promyshlennyi Kur’er*, No. 29, 2010.

military would integrate many lessons from this experiment in the following years and codify them in the New Look Reforms that began in 2008, discussed in subsequent sections.

Another mid-2000s attempt at military reform was made when former Chief of the General Staff Yury Baluyevsky attempted to reorganize military structures, creating the prototype for what would become the Operational Strategic Commands (OSK) of today. However, Baluyevsky's proposals added another superstructure to the top-heavy command and control chain while failing to address personnel issues in the lower ranks. In this plan, the Military District commanders and Naval Fleets retained their original chains of command, and the VDV was to be subordinate to the Ground Forces High Command. The effort quietly failed.<sup>126</sup> However, perhaps the biggest change under Baluyevsky's command was to reduce conscription service length from two years to one in a phased approach between 2006 and 2008. Although this shift ameliorated some of the issues associated with conscription, it also created new readiness-related problems for the Armed Forces: Less time in service meant less skilled conscripts and double the number of recruits needed to achieve manpower requirements each year.<sup>127</sup> During this time, the MoD made other attempts at gaining the trust of conscripts and families, but these attempts proved to be ineffective. They included providing postal addresses and phone numbers of commanders to parents, giving parents the right to visit units twice annually, and letting mothers and fathers accompany their children into the military commissariats during drafting.<sup>128</sup>

## Reform of the Military Personnel System: The New Look Defense Reforms

The Russian military needed a structural, readiness, and personnel overhaul. The defense reform programs initiated in 2008 were approved to modernize the Russian military comprehensively by 2020. As the previous section suggests, the reforms announced in 2008 were not completely new; the seeds of Russia's personnel policy overhaul were sown in the tumultuous decades prior through trial and (many) errors.

### *The 2008 Georgia War and Origins of the New Look Reforms*

In 2008, Russia fought a five-day war against the Republic of Georgia. In that campaign, multiple problems with combat performance emerged. The Russian military at the time, under the new leadership team of General Nikolay Makarov (who was Chief of the General Staff) and new Defense Minister Anatoly Serdyukov (who came from Russia's tax service), was given a public rationale for implementing a bold vision of reform and transformation. This goal—to

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<sup>126</sup> Илья Крамник, "Reform from Serdyukov-Makarov" ["Реформа Сердюкова–Макарова"], *Natsional'naiia oborona*, No. 12, 2011.

<sup>127</sup> Renz, 2018, p. 69.

<sup>128</sup> Gavrilov, 2006.

comprehensively improve the Russian military—was shared by then-President Dmitry Medvedev and then–Prime Minister Putin.

In a departure from norms, the Russian military and military scientific community openly discussed successes and shortcomings in the aftermath of the 2008 August war.<sup>129</sup> Although Russian forces generally achieved their operational goals for that conflict (effectively preventing Georgia from joining NATO through occupation of the Georgian separatist republics of South Ossetia and Abkhazia), the actual military performance left much to be desired. Russia acknowledged numerous failures, including friendly fire casualties, faulty or dated intelligence, command and control failures at multiple levels, siloed planning among different branches of services, equipment failures, combat losses from Georgian air defenses, and lack of experienced pilots.<sup>130</sup>

Makarov was quite explicit about his disappointments with combat performance. He noted as examples that (1) the Air Force at the time did not have enough experienced pilots in each air regiment, (2) only 3 percent of Russia’s Air Force at the time met the highest readiness standards, and (3) the Air Force deployed pilots from multiple units and training centers for Georgia missions.<sup>131</sup> This cobbling together of operational aircraft is thought to have contributed to multiple unforced errors and combat losses during the campaign because units were unaware of one another’s actions and locations.<sup>132</sup>

A few examples of operational success appear to have validated the move toward greater professionalization. While slightly more than 10 percent of Russia’s Ground Forces were contract servicemen as of 2008,<sup>133</sup> the units deployed in Georgia were made of professional contract soldiers, and their combat performance mostly validated the benefits of trained professionals over poorly trained and perhaps unwilling conscripts. The first benefit was availability: Most forces were deployed rapidly at the Kremlin’s command, and the units largely performed as expected. There was no reporting of widescale human rights violations by Russian forces along the lines of the conflicts in Chechnya a decade prior. However, some evidence suggested that some Russian forces and South Ossetian proxies committed human rights

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<sup>129</sup> “Russian Air Force Chief Discusses Reform, Training, Modernization, Projects,” *Interfax*, August 5, 2009; Keir Giles, “A New Phase in Russian Military Transformation,” *Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, Vol. 27, No. 1, 2014, p. 156.

<sup>130</sup> Anton Lavrov, “Timeline of Russian-Georgian Hostilities in August 2008,” in Ruslan Pukhov, ed., *The Tanks of August*, Moscow: Centre for Analysis of Strategies and Technologies, 2010b; “The Akatsia Didn’t Smell,” *Vremya Novosti*, November 6, 2009; Timothy Thomas, “The Bear Went Through the Mountain: Russia Appraises Its Five-Day War in South Ossetia,” *Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 1, 2009, p. 32.

<sup>131</sup> Anton Lavrov, “Russian Air Losses in the Five Day War Against Georgia,” in Ruslan Pukhov, ed., *The Tanks of August*, Moscow: Centre for Analysis of Strategies and Technologies, 2010a, p. 103.

<sup>132</sup> Lavrov, 2010b.

<sup>133</sup> Makienko, 2010.

violations against civilians; the European Human Rights Council ruled in 2021 that Russia failed to stop its proxies or investigate these actions after the 2008 ceasefire agreement.<sup>134</sup>

In the aftermath of this conflict, Russia's New Look defense reforms were introduced. According to Makarov, the personnel needs embedded in these reforms were

- improving the organization and staff structure of the armed services
- transferring all Russian units to *permanently ready* status (i.e., being capable of deployment with a short period, typically 24–48 hours)
- moving to a *mixed manning* system with far more contract servicemen than conscripts
- maintaining a slightly smaller established strength of force (1.134 million to 1 million billets)
- re-equipping Russia's General Purpose Force (GPF) with modern equipment
- integrating new approaches to operational combat training in relation to other regional threats faced by Russia and bring them to “a qualitatively new level.”<sup>135</sup>

With an eye toward the wars of the 21st century, Makarov and General Staff leaders wanted to bridge the gap between well-developed military theory on what these future wars would entail and what the Russian military was built for and capable of in 2008. The goal was to transform the inherited post-Soviet military into a force that could meet these challenges through a comprehensive rearmament program and personnel policy overhaul. As Makarov noted in 2008, “it is time to stop preparing troops for the wars of the past; we must teach them to wage war against a strong, technically equipped enemy, taking into account everything new that appears in military theory.”<sup>136</sup> Makarov also wanted to recruit full or partial college graduates into the military because he believed they would grasp technical issues much faster, noting that “beginners will master high-quality communications, become qualified operators of computers, anti-aircraft missile systems, and master other professions.”<sup>137</sup>

### *Core Principles of Russia's Defense Reforms as of 2008*

The uneven military performance during the Georgia conflict therefore can be considered the public rationale for beginning a comprehensive (and expensive) reform program that already had

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<sup>134</sup> The European Human Rights Council ruled in 2021 that some Russian forces and South Ossetian separatist forces participated in looting, improper detention of civilians, and burning homes of ethnic Georgians in the aftermath of the conflict. Furthermore, the council ruled that because Russia had effective control of the separatist regions in the aftermath of the conflict, it failed to prevent human rights violations by South Ossetian forces and adequately investigate these claims (European Court of Human Rights, Registrar of the Court, “Judgment in the Case Concerning the Armed Conflict Between Georgia and the Russian Federation in August 2008 and Its Consequences,” press release, January 21, 2021).

<sup>135</sup> Viktor Litovkin, “The General Staff Informs the Abroad” [“Генштаб информирует за границу”], *Nezavisimoe voennoe obozrenie*, No. 46, 2008.

<sup>136</sup> Litovkin, 2008.

<sup>137</sup> A. Yakovlev, “Soldier with Advanced Training” [“Солдат с высшей подготовкой”], *Na strazhe Rodiny*, No. 33, 2008.

been attempted in several forces since the 1990s. Russian defense and civilian leaders promptly announced the New Look reform program that would occur between 2008 and 2020. These reforms, the most comprehensive reorganization and modernization efforts for the Russian military since World War II, had the following five lines of effort:

1. Reorganizing the structure of the Armed Forces by disbanding low-strength units, consolidating command chains, creating new unit structures, creating operational strategic commands instead of service-specific command chains, and transferring all remaining units to permanent readiness standards.
2. A massive procurement and modernization program that would lead to 70 percent new or modernized equipment by 2020.
3. Revising military training programs to improve individual proficiencies.
4. Reforming professional military education for officers and professional NCOs.
5. Improving social issues and “humanizing” military service by overhauling manning policies and benefits.<sup>138</sup>

Our analysis next focuses on MoD policies to improve personnel proficiency, recruiting, and retention, which roughly correlate with lines of effort three, four, and five of the New Look reform efforts. In subsequent chapters of this report, we will assess the implementation and modification of these different policies up to 2021.

## New Policies to Improve Personnel Proficiency, Recruiting, and Retention

In this section, we discuss the Russian military’s policy objectives as they pertain to proficiency, recruiting, and retention, as they were first laid out in 2008.

### *Improving Proficiency Through Downsizing and Restructuring*

To seek to transform the Russian military into a force capable of fighting modern wars of the 21st century, the military leadership knew that they had to fundamentally overhaul individual proficiency within all services. To do that, they first had to radically restructure the force, reduce billets, and change command relationships. Military leadership at the time felt that fewer personnel and fewer understrength units on the books would allow more funds to flow to remaining personnel and units.

In 2008, only 13 percent of Russia’s military units, on average, met the highest readiness standard of *permanent readiness*, which means a unit is manned at 85–100 percent and can deploy from home garrison with 24–48 hours’ notice, according to Russian military leaders at the time.<sup>139</sup> Service-specific readiness rates provided at the time are as follows: 3 percent of

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<sup>138</sup> Nikolai Makarov, “Results of Construction of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation in 2009” [“Итоги строительства вооруженных сил российской федерации в 2009 году”], *Rossiiskoe voennoe obozrenie*, No. 1, 2010.

<sup>139</sup> Radin et al., 2019b, Appendix D.

Russia’s Air Force met criteria for permanent readiness, 17 percent of the Ground Forces met this standard, and 50 percent of the Russian Navy was estimated to meet criteria for readiness.<sup>140</sup> The Russian military decided to eliminate all low-strength units that were sapping funds and energy. Between 2008 and 2012, many Russian units, particularly lower-strength or -cadre units and those with aging or nonoperational equipment and storage bases, were eliminated.<sup>141</sup> Russia’s force posture reductions were significant (as shown in Table 2.2).

**Table 2.2. Russian Force Reductions by Service, 2008–2012**

Service	2008 Units	2012 Units	Percent Reduction
Ground Forces	1,890	172	–90
Air Force	340	180	–48
Navy	240	123	–33
Airborne Forces	6	5	–17

SOURCE: Andrei Maraychev and Aleksandr Sergunin, “Russian Military Reform: Institutional, Political, and Security Implications,” *Defense and Security Analysis*, Vol. 29, No. 4, 2013.

To accompany these force reductions, the military also shed thousands of personnel. The overall number of Russian military billets was reduced from 1.13 million to 1 million.<sup>142</sup> The officer corps was to be reduced from 330,000–355,000 billets to 150,000 billets, although the target number would shift up to 220,000 by 2011.<sup>143</sup> This reduction was rationalized by senior defense leaders to be more in line with the officer-to-enlisted ratios of other leading and modern militaries.<sup>144</sup>

Personnel reductions were also disproportionate by rank because of the personnel structure in 2008. The military wanted to move to a pyramid-shaped officer cadre with more junior officers and fewer senior officers. Senior MoD leaders noted that the current structure was very heavy around the middle, so the largest reductions were planned for field-grade officer levels of captain (65 percent planned reduction), major (75 percent reduction), colonel (56 percent reduction), and

<sup>140</sup> Dmitry Solovyov, “Russian Army Not Fit for Modern War: Top General,” Reuters, December 16, 2008; Mark Galeotti, *The Modern Russian Army: 1992–2016*, Oxford, UK: Osprey Publishing, 2017.

<sup>141</sup> Charap et al., 2021, p. 88.

<sup>142</sup> Vadim Soloviev, “Military Reform 2009–2012” [“Военная реформа 2009–2012 годов”], *Nezavisimoe voennoe obozrenie*, No. 44, 2008.

<sup>143</sup> Pavel Felgenhauer, “Slashed Russian Officers Re-Called to Military Service and Promised Double Pay,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Vol. 8, No. 23, February 3, 2011.

<sup>144</sup> “Russian Defense Minister Anatoly Serdyukov: ‘Nobody Is Going to Take Off Shoulder Straps from Military Doctors!’” [“Министр Обороны России Анатолий Сердюков: ‘Погоны с военврачей никто снимать не собирается!’”], *Na boevom postu*, No. 27–28, 2008.



general (20 percent reduction).<sup>145</sup> The rank of warrant officer was slated to be eliminated (estimates put this figure at 50,000–90,000 warrant officers).<sup>146</sup> Warrant officers historically have been considered important parts of Russian military units for their time in service; they provide continuity and a bridge between officers and enlisted. They would be replaced, in the MoD’s view, by a new a professional NCO corps of around 80,000 professional sergeants in the Ground Forces, VDV, and Navy.<sup>147</sup> MoD headquarters billets in Moscow would be reduced from 10,523 to 8,500, and MoD civilians were also to be reduced from 750,000 to 600,000.<sup>148</sup> Ultimately, the targeted billet reductions proved difficult to reach (even with 40,000 empty billets and other officers at retirement age) before Serdyukov was ousted because of personal and corruption scandals in 2012.<sup>149</sup> The difficulty in reducing billets was caused by multiple factors, including (1) the costs of providing these separated individuals with promised housing and pensions and (2) a prevailing preference by some senior officers to use junior officers instead of professional NCOs, made worse by a persistent shortage of sergeants, to maintain order within units.<sup>150</sup> By the time Shoigu and Chief of the General Staff Vitaly Gerasimov assumed command in 2012, the military had revised its ideal active duty manpower goals for 2020 to 220,000 officers, 520,000 contract personnel, and 260,000 conscripts.<sup>151</sup>

### *Improving Proficiency Through Training and Military Education Overhauls*

The next focus of reform was overhauling the Russian training system to improve individual proficiency. Unit and service training and trends are outside the scope of this report, but there are several policies that the Russian military instituted to improve individual performance across the services. Conscripts were to begin an intense 90-day basic training program in their units with

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<sup>145</sup> Soloviev, 2008. In 2008, the planned reductions would be captains from 90,000 to 40,000; majors from 95,550 to 25,000, colonels from 25,665 to 9,114; and generals from 1,1107 to 886.

<sup>146</sup> Soloviev, 2008.

<sup>147</sup> Soloviev, 2008.

<sup>148</sup> Soloviev, 2008.

<sup>149</sup> Kramnik, 2001; Thomas Grove, “Putin Sacks Defense Minister Amid Scandal,” Reuters, November 6, 2012.

<sup>150</sup> I. Kaverin, “Reforms Have Started” [“Реформа стартовала”], *Voennyi Vestnik Iuga Rossii*, No. 47, 2008; and Shlykov, 2011, where, in the words of one retired officer who penned a series of blistering attacks on the Russian military’s manning decisions between 2008 and 2011:

Reducing the service life while doubling the number of conscripts in the absence of junior commanders was, in my opinion, an irresponsible decision, the consequences of which the army will have to unravel for a long time. If the results of this have not yet been fully manifested, it is only thanks to the striking by historical standards steps taken by Anatoly Serdyukov to humanize military service. Here is the loading of recruits with sports, and the permission for them to have mobile phones and go on leave in civilian clothes, and two obligatory days off a week.

<sup>151</sup> “The Number of Contract Service Members Begins to Exceed the Number of Conscripts” [“Число контрактников в ВС начинает превышать число призывников”], *Vzglyad*, April 28, 2015; Vladimir Ostankov, “No Strategic Reserves” [“Стратегических резервов нет”], *VPK. Voенно-Promyshlennyi Kur’er*, Vol. 10, No. 528, March 19, 2014.

longer hours and more physical activity during the day.<sup>152</sup> This accelerated and compressed training cycle was designed for individual soldiers to gain as many skills as possible in a 12-month period, but it also had the benefit of providing less downtime and energy for after-hours misbehavior, such as hazing in the barracks.<sup>153</sup> By 2008, a commander of the Moscow Military District noted that training intensity levels had recently returned to Soviet levels. He noted the importance of busy training days on proficiency and even morale: “Without combat training there can be no strengthening of military discipline. . . . No viewing of patriotic films and endless drills can achieve the proper level of military discipline. Combat training disciplines and unites teams.”<sup>154</sup>

The military also had to create a training program for professional enlisted troops during this time that would allow these troops to deepen their technical skills according to their military utility. The military education system that existed in 2008 was designed to support a larger and less technically skilled military. As part of the New Look reforms, the education system was downsized: Some military facilities were eliminated, and this was accompanied by a reduction in military education officers (from 17,500 to 5,000). Training courses and materials updated as well, with the first batches of officers fully trained with new materials entering the Armed Forces around 2016.<sup>155</sup> After the failed contact service experiment from 2004 to 2007, the Russian military leadership realized that they needed to urgently retrain officers in how to command professional enlisted personnel and provide them a new paradigm for commanding a more–highly educated, skilled, and long-term workforce. This became a major focus area of early military education reform efforts, in addition to integrating new Russian operational concepts. So significant was this effort that some military services, such as the Air Force, paused enrollment of officer-cadets for three years to revise their education and training programs.<sup>156</sup>

In developing recruitment and retention strategies (discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, respectively), the Russian military needed to differentiate the types of daily jobs and skills that professional soldiers would acquire when compared with conscripts. There is also a practical component to this differentiation: The more complicated the duty position (for example with new and emerging technical equipment), the more time in position a soldier needs and the more

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<sup>152</sup> MoD, “An Experiment Is Being Carried Out in the Ground Forces to Determine the Possibility of Three-Month Training of Servicemen to Perform Tasks in Conditions of Armed Conflict” [“В Сухопутных войсках проводится эксперимент по определению возможности трехмесячной подготовки военнослужащих к выполнению задач в условиях вооруженных конфликтов”], webpage, July 25, 2011.

<sup>153</sup> Pavel Bruntalsky, “The Soldier Has a Day Off . . . Saturday and Sunday” [“У солдата выходной . . . Суббота и воскресенье”], *VPK. Voенно-Promыshlennyy Kur'er*, No. 20, 2010.

<sup>154</sup> Vasily Fatigorov, “Deputy Commander of the Troops of the Moscow Military District Lieutenant General Vladimir Chirkin: ‘I Pass My Experience to Subordinates’” [“Заместитель командующего войсками Московского военного округа Генерал-лейтенант Владимир Чиркин: ‘Свой опыт передаю подчиненным’”], *Krasnaya zvezda*, No. 8, 2008.

<sup>155</sup> Soloviev, 2008; Kramnik, 2011.

<sup>156</sup> Oleg Falichev, “Syria Lessons” [“Сирия уроков”], *VPK. Voенно-Promыshlennyy Kur'er*, Vol. 31, 2016.

unsuitable a conscript is to manage advanced equipment. New, modern equipment and increased time in the field, in the air, and at sea also were meant to not only increase proficiency but also to attract contract service personnel. As previous RAND analysis has noted, the benefits of this expanded training program were many: The program served to “increase combat proficiency in a compressed conscription cycle or contract term but also to raise the prestige of military service through word of mouth when conscripts and *kontraktniki* can claim they are doing meaningful combat training” rather than noncombat duties, such as cooking, cleaning barracks, or groundskeeping.<sup>157</sup> As in the West, these functions were outsourced to civilian providers to allow conscripts and contract personnel to focus on core military proficiencies. It also was thought that civilian caterers would provide better-tasting, nutritious, high-caloric food to support the weight of malnourished or underweight conscripts through a revamped dietary program. Cleaning would be done by civilian staff while the soldiers were out for their morning training events.<sup>158</sup>

## Policies to Improve Recruitment and Retention

As shown in Table 2.1, several of the problems identified by the New Look reforms posed recruitment and retention issues, including

- low prestige and negative public perceptions of the military
- hazing
- draft evasion
- disillusionment among service members
- low wages
- poor-quality housing
- criminality and corruption
- desertion.

In response, the MoD enacted a series of personnel policy changes. Many of these focused on improving the tangible benefits of military service, such as higher pay, better-quality housing, and enhanced opportunities for education and professional development, while also improving conditions by reducing hazing and allowing service on bases closer to soldiers’ homes. Other changes were meant to improve perceptions of the military by promoting the intangible benefits of military service, such as pride in serving in the nation’s most trusted institution and doing one’s patriotic duty.

The following two chapters examine in more detail the specific recruitment (Chapter 3) and retention (Chapter 4) policies enacted under the reforms.

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<sup>157</sup> Radin et al., 2019b, p. 57.

<sup>158</sup> Bruntalsky, 2010; Kramnik, 2011.

## Chapter 3. Recruiting Military Personnel

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In its effort to attract and retain the personnel needed to create a more professionalized military, the Russian military introduced major changes in recruitment policies and practices.<sup>159</sup> In this chapter, we discuss who the Russian military sought to recruit prior to 2022, who the military has attracted, and how the military has pursued recruitment initiatives. We further examine the contemporary Russian societal context in which military recruitment has taken place.

Four principal conclusions emerge from this analysis:

1. Faced with the need to create a more nimble and effective military force in the context of demographic pressures and legacy of post-Soviet socio-economic deprivation, Russia invested significant resources and effort in improving military recruitment. Although the reforms emphasized increasing the appeal of contract service, other reforms aimed to facilitate conscription and quality of conscripts.
2. In recent years, the principal motivation for youth to join the military was economic rather than patriotic. Recognizing that satisfying the former and fostering the latter is essential for recruitment, reforms included significant enhancements and updates to the pay and social benefit structures and wide-ranging military-patriotic efforts targeted toward pre-conscription-age youth.
3. There is some evidence that reform efforts paid off: As of 2021, at least 70 percent of the current military force and all key units and positions were staffed with contract personnel, and both conscripts and contract personnel were older and better-educated than at the onset of the reforms; fewer people dodged the draft under peacetime conditions; and Russian society overall has held the military in high regard and supported the mixed-model military service.
4. Challenges remain, including rigid military culture and persistent hazing, insufficient socio-economic benefits of military service, unclear success of military-patriotic efforts, poor physical and mental health of pre-conscription youth, and the overall high price tag of making recruitment of high-quality military personnel sustainable.

### What Kinds of Recruits Has the Russian Military Sought?

The Russian military has sought to create a mobile, combat-ready, largely professional force that is staffed with well-educated, physically fit, eager-to-learn individuals.<sup>160</sup> According to the Chief of the Main Organizational and Mobilization Directorate of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, Deputy Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces,

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<sup>159</sup> In this chapter, we refer to *military recruitment* as the activity of attracting people to and selecting them for military training and employment, both on a contract basis (i.e., voluntary service) and through conscription.

<sup>160</sup> Vladimir Putin, “Being Strong: National Security Guarantee for Russia” [“Быть сильными: Гарантии национальной безопасности для России”], *Rossiyskaya gazeta*, February 20, 2012.

Colonel-General Evgeniy Burdinsky, the MoD has actively sought new forms of military service that would maximize the talent and professional skills needed for Russia’s new, modernized Army.<sup>161</sup> In his view of the Russian military future, 80 percent of conscripts would be young athletic men in good health with university or vocational degree and skills in a corresponding occupation, patriotically minded and highly motivated for military service, which they—along with the rest of the society—consider to be prestigious and respected.<sup>162</sup>

When it comes to contract service members—the *kontraktniki*—the desired criteria were listed on the MoD site, as of December 2021: Russian speakers, between ages of 18 and 40, considered healthy both physically and psychologically,<sup>163</sup> and having no criminal record.<sup>164</sup> This standard was dropped in November 2022, allowing Russia to mobilize those with a criminal record with the exception of particular crimes.<sup>165</sup> The results of comprehensive testing are expected to guide the selection committee’s determination of whether and in which types of force each candidate should serve. For example, the Russian Aerospace Forces (VKS) and other elite divisions accept only those with impeccable health and high test scores.<sup>166</sup> Candidates who signed their first contract typically are given a three-month trial period, after which the commander of the military division where the selected candidate was sent for the initial training signs as well.

## What Kinds of Recruits Has the Russian Military Attracted?

### *Conscripts*

In the years between 2013 and 2018, the characteristics of a typical conscript changed, including the average age and level of education. During this five-year period, the proportion of 18-year-old conscripts went down from 23 to around 15 percent, while the proportion of

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<sup>161</sup> Evgeniy Burdinsky, “Conscript: Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow” [“Призывник: вчера, сегодня, завтра”], Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation, July 28, 2019.

<sup>162</sup> Burdinsky, 2019.

<sup>163</sup> See criteria for physical fitness at MoD, “Physical Fitness Criteria” [“Требования по физической подготовке”], webpage, undated-q; MoD, “Conscription Criteria and Admission Conditions for Individuals with Vocational and University Degrees” [“Условия приема для граждан не пребывающих в запасе и получивших высшее или среднее профессиональное образование”], webpage, undated-d; the psychological testing determines the candidate’s intelligence quotient, psychological resilience, speed of cognitive processing, memory, and temperament, along with other individual and professional characteristics considered important for the military service.

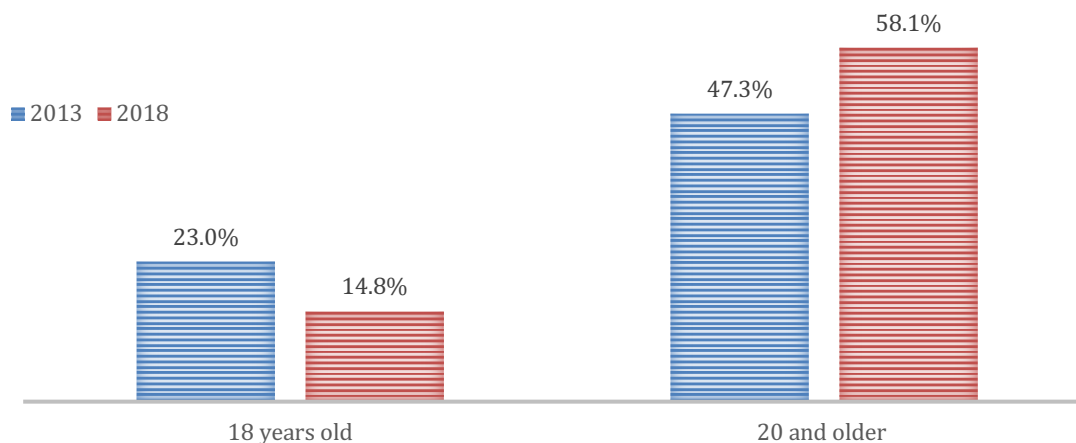
<sup>164</sup> Moscow Mayor’s Office, “How to Enter the Contract Military Service” [“Как поступить на военную службу по контракту”], webpage, undated.

<sup>165</sup> Jerusalem Post, “Putin Signs Law to Mobilize Russians Who Committed Serious Crimes—RIA,” November 4, 2022.

<sup>166</sup> Moscow Mayor’s Office, undated.

conscripts who were older than 20 years old increased from around 47 percent to 58 (see Figure 3.1).<sup>167</sup>

**Figure 3.1. The Age of Conscripts in 2013 and 2018**



SOURCE: Minoborony Rossii, “Briefing of the Chief of the Main Organizational and Mobilization Directorate of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation—Deputy Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation Colonel-General E.V. Burdinsky on Fall Draft-2021” [“Брифинг начальника Главного организационно-мобилизационного управления Генерального штаба Вооруженных Сил Российской Федерации — заместителя начальника Генерального штаба Вооруженных Сил Российской Федерации генерал-полковника Бурдинского Е.В.”], video, YouTube, September 30, 2021.

At the same time, the percentage of conscripts with vocational degrees rose from around 45 percent in 2013 to 66 in 2020,<sup>168</sup> and the proportion of conscripts with just a high school diploma went down from 47 to 42 percent in 2018.<sup>169</sup> About 20 percent of conscripts in 2021 had a university degree.<sup>170</sup> In addition, in 2018, more conscripts entered the military service with professional and educational (beyond high school) experience, while the number of those who never worked or studied decreased.<sup>171</sup> These changes could be attributed partially to the amendments to the mobilization law, allowing the deferral of the service for those receiving vocational education or master’s degrees.

<sup>167</sup> Burdinsky, 2019.

<sup>168</sup> Minoborony Rossii, 2021.

<sup>169</sup> Burdinsky, 2019

<sup>170</sup> “More Conscripts in the Russian Army Have Advanced Degrees,” *Classic War, Army-2019 Forum*, June 30, 2019.

<sup>171</sup> Burdinsky, 2019; Sergei Shoigu, “The Russian Army Has Been Drastically Updated,” *Red Star*, March 13, 2019.

Furthermore, when compared with 2012, the number of people deemed fit for military service based on their health and physical fitness assessment had increased by 9 percent by 2019.<sup>172</sup> As an example, in Moscow in 2020, 81.5 percent were found to be fit for service, compared with 72.8 percent in 2014.<sup>173</sup> Other regional reports in media seem to echo these trends.<sup>174</sup> Notably, the criteria and approach for the evaluation of service fitness became more stringent in 2021 to help exclude people with cardiovascular risks and those who previously had tuberculosis; consequently, the nationwide percentage of people fit for service fell from 78 percent in 2020 to 73.5 percent in 2021.<sup>175</sup>

These changes can have implications for military capabilities. As noted previously, Russian military journal articles have emphasized that conscripts with a full or partial college education can be taught more advanced skills in a shorter period of time.<sup>176</sup> Furthermore, having a greater percentage of people who are considered fit for service expands the pool from which to draw conscripts at a time when demographic pressures are significant.

### *Kontraktniki*

Contract service members accounted for the majority of the Russian military as of December 2021. According to Deputy Minister of Defense Nikolay Pankov, the number of contract service members doubled between 2012 and 2020.<sup>177</sup> In 2020, 405,000 contract service members (and 225,000 conscripts)—nearly 70 percent of military personnel—served in the Russian Armed Forces.<sup>178</sup> As Shoigu noted, all junior commanding positions (sergeant and senior sergeant), combat units of special forces, marines, battalion tactical groups, as well as operators of complex equipment were staffed with contractors by September 2021.<sup>179</sup> A transition was made to a new

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<sup>172</sup> Burdinsky, 2019.

<sup>173</sup> Victor Bondarev, “Patriotism Means Responsibility for One’s Country” [“Патриотизм подразумевает ответственность за Отечество”], *Voennye komissariaty Rossii*, August 11, 2021.

<sup>174</sup> “Conscripts in Irkutsk Region Became Healthier” [“Призывники в Иркутском регионе стали здоровее”], *Oblastnaya gazeta*, October 13, 2021; Yulia Konova, “The Conscript Health Has Improved Somewhat in the Novosibirsk Region” [“Здоровье призывников из Новосибирской области незначительно улучшилось”], *Tsargrad*, October 19, 2021.

<sup>175</sup> “Russia Elevated Requirements for Conscript Health” [“В России повысили требования к здоровью призывников”], RIA Novosti, September 9, 2021.

<sup>176</sup> For example, as noted previously, “with such a contingent . . . it will be easier for officers to serve. In the shortest possible time, beginners will master high-quality communications, become qualified operators of computers, anti-aircraft missile systems, and master other professions. With such soldiers, in a month or two, you can deal with squads, calculations, bring knowledge and skills to automatism” (Yakovlev, 2008).

<sup>177</sup> “The Russian Army Will Have More Than Half a Million Contract Service Members” [“В российской армии будет полмиллиона контрактников”], *Interfax*, December 18, 2020.

<sup>178</sup> “The Proportion of Conscripts Has Reduced to 30 Percent” [“Доля призывников в российской армии сократилась примерно до 30%”], TASS, March 15, 2021; Galina Mislivskaya, “Shoigu: The Number of Contract Military Personnel Has Exceeded 400,000” [“Шойгу: Число контрактников превысило 400 тысяч человек”], *Rossiyskaya gazeta*, March 25, 2020.

<sup>179</sup> “Russia Plans to Increase the Number of Contract Personnel” [“В России планируют увеличить число контрактников в Вооруженных Силах”], RIA Novosti, September 21, 2021.

system of manning contract servicemen for combined arms formations and military units, marines, and airborne forces. At present, in each regiment and brigade, two battalions are staffed by contract soldiers and the third with conscripts. This approach makes it possible to have battalion tactical groups ready for immediate use in the formations and military units. Prior to the 2022 invasion of Ukraine, Russian journalists claimed that the staffing of military units and formations exceeded 95 percent.<sup>180</sup> Recovered Russian documents from Ukraine suggest that this was not universally the case, and gaps remained in actual staffing.<sup>181</sup>

People who signed military contracts appear to have been older than a typical conscript (an average of 26–28 years old, according to a 2015 account),<sup>182</sup> with some professional experience in their background (e.g., 87 percent experienced challenges in building a civilian career);<sup>183</sup> the majority had a vocational degree (70 percent) and about 25 percent had a university degree.<sup>184</sup> As one head of the selection center suggested in 2021, “a typical situation is a former conscript who came back to his rural town, spent some time with friends and family, couldn’t find a job, and decided to come back to military service . . . stability is the main competitive advantage of the military service as compared to other employers.”<sup>185</sup> Still, according to some accounts, around 20 percent of contracts are broken within the first months.<sup>186</sup>

### *Health of Candidates for Military Service*

Although proportionally more youth drafted for conscription are deemed fit for service when compared with the years prior, in 2021, Shoigu lamented that nearly 20 percent of young people remain ineligible because of poor health and 40 percent of conscripts demonstrate insufficient physical fitness, skills, and talents.<sup>187</sup> Academic research on the health of Russian adolescents of pre-conscription and conscription age also paints a grim picture. In the years between 2008 and 2018, there was a reported rise in a variety of diseases, predominantly within the musculoskeletal

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<sup>180</sup> Aleksandr Tikhonov, “One Should Always Put Forth Ambitious Goals” [“Амбициозные задачи нужно ставить перед собой всегда”], *Voennyi Vestnik Iuga Rossii*, No. 44, 2021.

<sup>181</sup> Michael Kofman and Rob Lee, “Not Built for This Purpose: The Russian Military’s Ill-Fated Force Design,” *War on the Rocks*, June 2, 2022.

<sup>182</sup> Ivan Petrov, “The Ministry of Defense Stated the Average Age of the Russian Contract Soldier” [“В Минобороны назвали средний возраст российского контрактника”], *Rossiyskaya gazeta*, February 19, 2015.

<sup>183</sup> Yuriy Bychenko and Taisiya Balandina, “Professional Development of the Military Personnel Serving by Contract” [“Развитие профессионального потенциала военнослужащих, поступивших на военную службу по контракту”], *Vestnik Nizhegorodskogo universiteta im. N. I. Lobachevskogo. Seriya: Sotsial’nyye nauki*, Vol. 4, No. 56, 2019.

<sup>184</sup> MoD, “Fourth Management Agency of Principal Human Resources” [“Четвертое управление Главного управления кадров”], webpage, undated.

<sup>185</sup> Igor’ Pushkarev, “Shoigu Did a Great Job, Honestly. Who Joins the Contract Military Service and Why” [“Шойгу молодец, честное слово”. Кто и зачем идет сегодня служить по контракту в армию России”], *Znak*, July 28, 2016.

<sup>186</sup> This is despite the fact that military contracts are apparently very difficult to break (MilitaryArms, “Military Contract Service” [“Военная служба по контракту”], webpage, September 6, 2019.).

<sup>187</sup> Bondarev, 2021.



system (rose 124 percent), circulatory system (rose 80 percent), and endocrine system (rose 66 percent).<sup>188</sup> Youth mental health continues to be a notable obstacle to Army service as well. For example, between 2014 and 2019, the incidence of youth psychological and behavioral disorders grew by 43 percent.<sup>189</sup> Furthermore, the physical readiness of most recruits and conscripts has been below satisfactory when evaluated against military standards.<sup>190</sup> The persistent physical and psychological health challenges of Russia's youth are a formidable barrier to recruiting high-quality forces, both for conscription and contract service.

## What Motivates Young Russians to Join the Military?

What drives young Russians to join the military? The Western institutional-occupational model, cited in Russian military literature and discussed in more detail in Chapter 4, frames these motivations through two categories: *occupational benefits*, defined by tangible rewards, including housing; compensation; prioritization for higher education; and benefits to the family, such as spousal opportunities and child care; and *institutional benefits*, defined by the intangible values and norms of service, including order and discipline, patriotism, and the prestige of serving in the Armed Forces.<sup>191</sup> Within the context of this model, occupational benefits appear to be the most salient in determining whether an individual Russian citizen will join contract service. As in the West, the balance between occupational and institutional benefits appears to be a point of concern, with Russian sociologists noting and military professionals lamenting the preeminence of material benefits and the relatively low importance of intangible motives, such as patriotism or a desire to serve.<sup>192</sup>

These motivational trends have been stable, as revealed both in the surveys conducted from 2004 to 2007 and in more-recent studies.<sup>193</sup> In both periods, nationwide and regional data suggest

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<sup>188</sup> Aleksandr A. Sogiyaynen and Leonid P. Chicherin, "Health and Quality of Life of the Conscript-Age Citizens as the Basis for Optimizing Their Medical Care" ["Состояние здоровья и качества жизни граждан призывного возраста как базис для оптимизации их медицинского обеспечения"], *Byulleten' Natsional'nogo nauchno-issledovatel'skogo instituta obshchestvennogo zdorov'ya imeni N.A. Semashko*, Vol. 4, 2018.

<sup>189</sup> Nikolay A. Bohan, Vyacheslav D., Evseev, and Anna I. Mandel, "Prevalence of Psychological and Narcological Disorders among Persons of the Draft Age in Russian Regions," *Social and Clinical Psychiatry*, Vol. 29, No. 3, 2019.

<sup>190</sup> Olesya A. Ivanova and Tatiana A. Stepanova, "Monitoring Health and Physical Fitness of the Conscript-Age Youth" ["Мониторинг здоровья и физической подготовленности молодежи призывного возраста"], *Fizicheskaya kul'tura: vospitaniye, obrazovaniye*, Vol. 6, 2017.

<sup>191</sup> David R. Segal, "Measuring the Institutional/Occupational Change Thesis," *Armed Forces and Society*, Vol. 12, No. 3, 1986.

<sup>192</sup> Irina Surkova, "There Is an Occupation to Defend One's Motherland: Motivational Preferences for the Military Career Choice" ["Есть такая профессия Родину защищать: мотивационные предпочтения выбора карьеры военного"], *Mir Rossii*, Vol. 22, No. 2, 2013; Valeriy Astanin, "Conscript or Contract" ["Призыв или контракт"], *Voennye komissariaty Rossii*, February 20, 2021.

<sup>193</sup> Valentina Pavlova, "Motivation of the Volunteers for the Contract Military Service" ["Мотивация добровольцев на военную службу по контракту"], *Rossiiskoe voennoe obozrenie*, Vol. 11, No. 46, November

that those considering whether to serve focused on the socio-economic benefits, housing supports, and military prestige, as well as law, order, and discipline within the service. Research comparing those who were interested in joining the contract military service with those who were not suggests that the former were more motivated to improve their economic situation and gain access to education; they showed greater ambition, eagerness to master their occupation, realize their potential, and test their capabilities.<sup>194</sup> Recruits from smaller cities, rural areas, and poorer families see military service as an opportunity to improve their own and their families' economic situation; recruits from Moscow tend to see the military service as an attractive professional opportunity.<sup>195</sup> When selecting professional orientations, the new recruits also tend to be guided by pragmatic objectives. While useful for filling immediate vacancies, such extrinsic and pragmatic motivation for military service generally is associated with lower levels of satisfaction; lower willingness to endure service-related limitations, inconveniences, and demands; greater uncertainty about one's future; ambivalence about staying in the military service; and mistrust and skepticism for the command staff.<sup>196</sup>

## New Recruitment Policies and Practices Are Multifaceted and Well Funded

As described in Chapter 2, military recruitment suffered greatly following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Although historically Russians have held the military in high regard, the economic deprivation and instability in the post-Soviet years and the perceived failures of the Chechen wars hurt the military's image and the prestige of the military service. Military service became unappealing, and rates of draft evasion were high.<sup>197</sup>

The shortages of conscripts were so drastic and draft evasion so vast that quality standards fell drastically: Military "conscript hunters" often ignored potential conscripts' criminal histories, ongoing drug use, and poor mental and physical health. Surveys conducted in the early

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2007. See, e.g., VTsIOM, "Russian Army-2016: Military Preparedness, Social Mission, Societal Role" ["Армия России-2016: боеготовность, социальная миссия, роль в обществе"], webpage, February 18, 2016; see also Klimenko and Posukhova, 2018b; and Aleksandr A. Voronov, Veronika E. Gorkovenko, and Dmitriy V. Filin, "Basic Motivations of the Choice to Join and Acquire Occupation of the Academic Institutions of the Air Space Force of the Russian Federation" ["Основные мотивы выбора и приобретения профессии курсантами образовательных учреждений Воздушно-космических сил Российской Федерации"], *Prakticheskiy marketing [Практический маркетинг]*, Vol. 249, No. 11, 2011.

<sup>194</sup> See discussion in Maksim V. Kiselev and Aleksandr V. Golov, "Motivation of the People Entering the Military Contract Service in Russia" ["Мотивация граждан, поступающих на военную службу по контракту в армию Российской Федерации"], *Molodoy uchenyy [Молодой ученый]*, Vol. 6, No. 110, pp. 695–698.

<sup>195</sup> Klimenko and Posukhova, 2018b.

<sup>196</sup> See Larisa Petrovna Kazakova and Denis Igorevich Radke, "Personality Traits of the Military University Cadets with Various Types of Motivation to Enter the Military Service" ["Личностные особенности курсантов военного вуза с различными типами мотивации поступления на военную службу"], *Problemy sovremennogo obrazovaniya*, No. 5, 2020; and Cristel Antonia Russell, Susanne W. Gibbons, P. A. Abraham, E. R. Howe, P. Deuster, and D. W. Russell, "Narrative Approach in Understanding the Drivers for Resilience of Military Combat Medics," *Journal of the Royal Army Medical Corps*, Vol. 164, No. 3, 2018.

2000s showed that a very large share of conscripts were underweight, suffered from mental health problems, had never been employed, were uneducated, and generally did not wish to enter military service. For example, in the Leningrad district, at least one of these issues was true for 80 percent of those drafted in the fall of 2002.<sup>198</sup> A nationally representative survey of Russian households in 2003 showed that poor, low-educated, rural households were much more likely to have their sons enlisted when compared with urban, wealthy, and better-educated families.<sup>199</sup> In 2008, the MoD admitted that those who signed up for service did not represent “the best segment of the youth of the country” but were individuals who “did not manage to get on in civilian life.”<sup>200</sup> Putin himself recognized the social inequality that was inherent to Russia’s draft system: “The guys who get drafted are mostly from poor, rural or working class families, those who were not able to enter a university and use a deferment. We must take steps to increase the prestige of the military service and turn it from duty to privilege.”<sup>201</sup>

Drastic improvements to the quality of military recruits were essential for Russia to achieve the goal of creating a more nimble, lean, and professional military force. Although the importance of reforming the military was a declared priority in the early years of post-Soviet transition, it is only in the past decade that Russians saw a heavy investment of effort and funds put toward military restructuring. Allocation of funds to attract high-quality personnel constituted a large part of the investment.<sup>202</sup> In the decade prior to 2022, the dominant efforts to enhance military recruitment focused on increasing Russians’ interest in serving—or, at least, reducing their dread at the prospect of it. Doing so was at the center of the personnel policies of military reforms.<sup>203</sup> Rather than focusing solely on professionalizing the military, the reforms focused on improving conditions both for the conscript service and the professional army/*kontraktniki* as a “necessary compromise between the tasks at hand and what the country can afford at this time.”<sup>204</sup> These improvements included expanding opportunities for better educated and talented youth and propaganda campaigns to raise military prestige. Furthermore,

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<sup>198</sup> Viktor Batmazov, “Strengthening Military Discipline and Fostering a Healthy Atmosphere Among Military Personnel” [“Основные направления укрепления воинской дисциплины и формирования здоровой атмосферы в воинских коллективах”], *Voennaia mysl*, No. 121, 2003.

<sup>199</sup> Michael Lokshin and Ruslan Yemtsov, “Who Bears the Cost of Russia’s Military Draft?” *Economics of Transition*, Vol. 16, No. 3, 2008. See also Ekaterina Mitrofanova and Alyona Artamonova, “The Sequence of Life Events of Russian Men Serving and Not Serving in the Military,” *Demographic Overview*, Vol. 2, No. 5, 2015.

<sup>200</sup> Margarete Klein, “Towards a ‘New Look’ of the Russian Armed Forces? Organizational and Personnel Changes,” in Roger N. McDermott, Bertil Nygren, and Carolina Vendil Pallin, eds., *The Russian Armed Forces in Transition: Economic, Geopolitical and Institutional Uncertainties*, Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2012, p. 38.

<sup>201</sup> Putin, 2012.

<sup>202</sup> As an example, in September 2021, the proposed budget allocated 73 billion rubles (around \$973.5 million) for the following three years to enhance the number of contract service members (“Russia Plans to Increase the Number of Contract Personnel,” 2021).

<sup>203</sup> Aleksei Lavrentiev, “New Image of the Military: With Consideration of Threat” [“Новый облик армии: с учетом адекватного реагирования на угрозы”], *Na strazhe Rodiny*, No. 99, 2008.

<sup>204</sup> Putin, 2012.

another prominent strategy—based on the premise that sustainable military recruitment demands both financial incentives and an emotional pay-off—focused on youth military-patriotic education.

### *Practices and Policies to Facilitate Conscription*

#### Improving Conditions for Conscript Service

Several changes were made in an effort to improve conditions in the conscription-based military service and improve the image of conscription service. As one major step, the conscription term was shortened to one year. This move to a great extent mitigated the problem with *deds*—the *second*-year conscripts who often exercised their seniority through violence and hazing—and made the time commitment to military service more palatable for reluctant recruits. The overall conditions of conscript service improved: The nonmilitary chores (such as cooking), previously conducted by conscripts, have been outsourced to civilian contractors; conscripts are provided with adequate clothing and food; and the military barracks feature more comfortable living than in years prior and include better recreation facilities and gyms.<sup>205</sup> The service environment underwent *humanization*: Whenever possible, draftees can use mobile phones and wear civilian clothes when off-duty.<sup>206</sup> Prior to 2022, the MoD provided public assurances that conscripts would not be forced to serve in hot spots abroad and that only volunteers from among *kontraktniki* could be sent to combat.<sup>207</sup> While on the whole Russians continued to be reluctant to be drafted, there was a reduction in the rate of draft-dodging under peacetime conditions (see additional discussion in following sections),<sup>208</sup> and the prestige of the conscript service rose.<sup>209</sup>

Other efforts to humanize the service included new policies that conscripts could serve locally near their families and could spend time off base on the weekends. This announcement was a departure from the Soviet and immediate post-Soviet eras, when conscripts served far away from home and families would attempt bribes to have their sons serve at home or in

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<sup>205</sup> Bruntalsky, 2010.

<sup>206</sup> However, smartphone use has been prohibited; this began with the draft in spring 2021.

<sup>207</sup> That Russian conscripts will not take part in combat operations and combat tasks will be performed only by contract servicemen has been promised by top Russian defense officials on multiple occasions (see “Russian Military Personnel: Conscription,” webpage, undated, for more-detailed discussion)

<sup>208</sup> In an interview with Yuriy Gavrilov, Evgeniy Burdinsky stated that between 2014 and 2018, the number of those who evaded conscription (i.e., did not show up when summoned) decreased from 6,157 to 1,613 (see Yuriy Gavrilov, “The Spring Recruitment for the Military Has Begun. 135 Thousand People Will Become Soldiers” [“Начался весенний набор в армию. Солдатами станут 135 тысяч человек”], *Rossiyskaya gazeta*, March 31, 2019a).

<sup>209</sup> *Kommersant* reports that, in Evgeniy Burdinsky’s interview with Echo Moskvy, he said that “in two years, from 2016, the number of citizens who dodge draft has halved. Now it is 1.6 thousand people.” He attributed the reduction in draft-dodging to the fundamental change in the attitude of young people toward military service (“The Ministry of Defense Announced that the Number of Draft Dodgers Has Reduced Twofold” [“Минобороны сообщило о снижении вдвое числа уклонистов от призыва”], *Kommersant*, October 7, 2018).

garrisons with favorable reputations.<sup>210</sup> Furthermore, these changes allowed conscripts to avoid mandatory on-base weekends with poor or no supervision, which is often when hazing would occur.<sup>211</sup>

### Expanding the Recruiting Pipeline

At the same time that the MoD made conditions more attractive for conscripts, it also shored up loopholes and inefficiencies in the drafting process to reduce evasion. This tightening of intake also was motivated by Russia's demographic troubles, which are likely to worsen until 2024 before they begin to rebound slightly: Russia has needed the draft process to be as efficient as possible.<sup>212</sup> The military, realizing that a large percentage of military-age males received exemptions and deferments, slimmed down the number of such deferments and exemptions.<sup>213</sup> In 2019, a new law allowed those who were previously deemed ineligible (e.g., only child, sibling of a person who died in service) to waive their right to forego military service and enlist.<sup>214</sup> Other laws and amendments established tougher punishments and new deterrents for draft-dodging and further narrowed opportunities for deferral. For example, Russian men who never served in the military can no longer occupy positions within the state or municipal offices for ten years.<sup>215</sup> In addition, the draft age was raised and the pursuit of higher education changed to a short-term deferment and not an exemption in practice.

The Russian military also announced an overhaul to local military commissariats, known as *voenkomaty*, where physical and psychological assessments central to fitness-for-service decisions take place.<sup>216</sup> For example, one change is that the conscription boards would be rotated periodically and not allow long-term local corruption schemes to take hold, as had occurred in the past. The MoD concluded that the longer the military commissariat personnel were in place in their local town, the more they had an opportunity to perhaps engage in fraudulent activity with like-minded doctors, who would accept bribes from families to have their sons deferred or exempted from military service. Despite these efforts, the assessment processes continue to suffer from irregularities, lack of independence, and overall deficient protections for candidates

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<sup>210</sup> Lohman, 2004a.

<sup>211</sup> Makienko, 2010.

<sup>212</sup> Radin et al., 2019b, p. 64.

<sup>213</sup> Radin et al., 2019b, p. 55.

<sup>214</sup> Additions to the Article 22 and 51 of the Government of the Russian Federation, "Federal Law on Military Duty and Military Service" ["Федеральный Закон о воинской обязанности и военной службе"], March 28, 1998.

<sup>215</sup> Aleksandra Tomei, "The Military Commissar of the Moscow Region—About Draft-2020 and Patriotic Upbringing" ["Военный комиссар Подмосковья—о весеннем призыве-2020 и патриотическом Воспитании"], Moscow Regional Government, June 5, 2020.

<sup>216</sup> Gavrilov, 2019a.

who are dealing with physical and mental health challenges that should prevent them from serving.<sup>217</sup>

The MoD also wanted to make the conscription process more efficient, so it implemented a nationwide digital draft summons notice that went straight to cell phones in addition to the traditional mailed notice; this was so conscripts could not claim that they “failed to receive” their draft summons. Still, such practices as *one-day conscriptions* (when men of conscript age are brought to the military commissariat and illegally sent to the location of service within one day)<sup>218</sup> and the drafting of recent university graduates (who should be given a post-diploma immunity from immediate draft)<sup>219</sup> have been common. In 2021, Shoigu recognized the need for further modernization of draft practices in general and the outdated approaches of the military commissariats in particular.<sup>220</sup>

### *Practices and Policies to Facilitate Recruitment into Contract Service*

The contract service received a major makeover as well. The Russian government created the Federal Target Program (FTP) to improve (1) recruiting and retention of contract service personnel and (2) service conditions for these personnel that would last from 2009 through 2015.<sup>221</sup> In this FTP for contract service, recruits were to be treated as professionals and not simply more-experienced conscripts. The philosophy of their command, living conditions, and training programs were being designed to treat them “as adults who have deliberately chosen to serve.”<sup>222</sup>

The reformists recognized that to attract higher-quality personnel, the military service must offer significant benefits and guarantees, housing, salaries, and benefits that matched or came close to what qualified specialists could get in civilian sectors of the economy.<sup>223</sup>

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<sup>217</sup> Andrei Voronin, “Looking Back on 2019: Worse Is Possible, Though Not Desirable” [“Итоги 2019: хуже можно, но, пожалуйста, не нужно!”], *Soldatskiye materi Sankt-Peterburga*, December 31, 2019.

<sup>218</sup> Anna Konstantinova, “Speedy Call: Military Commissariats Send Conscripts to the Army in One Day” [“Быстрый зов. Военкоматы отправляют призывников в армию за один день”], *Mediazona*, December 25, 2020.

<sup>219</sup> Aleksandra Georgevich, “The Urgent Vacation” [“Каникулы срочного режима”], *Novaya gazeta*, June 28, 2021.

<sup>220</sup> “Shoigu Compared Military Commissariats to Closets in Need of Cleaning” [“Шойгу сравнил военкоматы с гардеробами и пообещал привести их в порядок”], *Interfax*, June 9, 2021.

<sup>221</sup> Konstantin Raschepkin and Viktor Pyakov, “The Way to Professionals” [“Путь в профессионалы”], *Na boevom postu*, No. 69–70, 2008.

<sup>222</sup> Raschepkin and Pyakov, 2008.

<sup>223</sup> To accommodate these changes, personnel expenditures have risen multifold during the period of the reforms and accounted for the largest share of defense spending; see Gil Barndollar, “The Best or Worst of Both Worlds? Russia’s Mixed Military Manpower System,” blog post, Center for Strategic and International Studies, September 23, 2020.

## Resolving Housing Challenges

Because housing historically has been one of the principal recruitment draws into the military service,<sup>224</sup> the Russian government went to great lengths to ensure that provision of housing for military families was a promise it could keep. Addressing housing was an early priority for the MoD, and the military housing program has been revamped and revised. Previously, the MoD focused on constructing designated apartments for contract personnel (e.g., in 2008, the MoD wanted to have available 320,000 such apartments by 2012) and repeatedly had fallen short of needed quotas;<sup>225</sup> the new housing provision approach provided service members with mortgage assistance. On signing their second contract, contract service members now automatically join a military mortgage accrual program by opening a special bank account, into which the government adds funds annually. The amount of money added is the same regardless of the rank or type of military specialization and increases with each year of service. Once there is enough money for a down payment and the service member is ready to buy, they qualify for a special, lower-rate military mortgage. After completing the down payment and buying the property, the accruing funds from the account go toward mortgage payments. If a service member retires after 20 years of service (or before then, in some specified occasions, such as an illness), the government will pay off the remainder of the mortgage.<sup>226</sup> Rather than forcing military families into the specifically allocated units like the previous arrangement did, the new system allows for greater flexibility in the type and location of housing and resolves the need to centrally negotiate service members' housing needs and availability. Given that housing often might feel unattainable and mortgages might seem expensive to Russian families, this particular social support is a great perk rarely matched by other industries.

## Improving Compensation and Conditions of Service

Raising pay for officers and contract service personnel was one of the key tasks of the New Look reform program to improve recruitment and also retention.<sup>227</sup> By 2008, around 30 percent of officers holding the rank of major and below and professional enlisted were earning wages at or below the poverty line, according to data from the Russian Health and Social Development Ministry.<sup>228</sup> As one senior officer put it in 2010,

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<sup>224</sup> Leonid Hairemdinov, "Social Guarantees That Inspire Long-Term Military Service" ["Гарантии, вдохновляющие на длительный срок службы"], *Krasnaya zvezda*, No. 84, August 2, 2019.

<sup>225</sup> Soloviev, 2008; and Makarov, 2010.

<sup>226</sup> If the service member leaves the service earlier, they will have to pay back the money that the government gave them toward housing (with few exceptions).

<sup>227</sup> Makarov, 2010.

<sup>228</sup> "Over One-Third of Russian Junior Officers, Contract Soldiers Below Poverty Line" ["Более трети российских младших офицеров, контрактников за чертой бедности"], *Interfax*, December 12, 2008.

The most important thing now is to make the military service attractive. To do this, it is necessary to provide a serviceman, especially an officer, so that he does not think about his daily bread but can serve peacefully.<sup>229</sup>

The reforms have increased personnel salary and support expenditures by several times. While the salaries of contract personnel might not match high-paying civilian occupations at the time of this writing, the beginner pay of an average *kontraktnik* is near and in some cases exceeds the average beginner pay within the civil sector. With an increase in years of service, *kontraktniki* salaries increase systematically and in accordance to a set pay schedule;<sup>230</sup> there also is a robust system of monthly monetary additions and bonus pay. Moreover, contract service members receive guaranteed health care in military hospitals, once-a-year free travel to a vacation destination for some service members and their families,<sup>231</sup> and a service apartment or financial subsidy to get an apartment rental at the location of service.<sup>232</sup> Furthermore, to reduce corruption and other financial graft in the service, the military introduced an automated payment system so that wages would be deposited directly into soldiers' accounts, eliminating the previous method of wage payment (senior commanders delivering wages to their subordinates on base) that led to criminal activity, such as siphoning, or other anomalies, such as wages being withheld as punishment.<sup>233</sup>

Efforts to increase wages appear to have been recognized: In 2014, a poll of servicemen conducted by the Sociological Center for the Russian Armed Forces found that 55 percent of contract personnel said that pay and benefits were their primary reason for enlisting.<sup>234</sup> By 2016, after targeted increases, pay and benefits associated with these positions met and surpassed those of some blue and white collar jobs.<sup>235</sup> Other financial incentives for contract service included free meals, free uniforms, free health care, inexpensive rates for accommodation at military resorts (so-called health sanatoriums), free health and life insurance, and promised Saturdays and Sundays off work.<sup>236</sup>

As another improvement, in response to a frequent grievance of insufficient child care options for military families, children of service members were given priority for placement in state-sponsored child care centers inside and near military installments. In some cases, child care

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<sup>229</sup> “Service and Allowance” [“Служба у довольствия”], *Na boevom postu*, No. 41–42, June 5, 2010.

<sup>230</sup> MoD, “Social Benefits Package of the Contract Service Member” [“Социальный пакет военнослужащего-контрактника”], webpage, undated-y.

<sup>231</sup> For those who serve in some of the Northern regions, see MoD, 2019d.

<sup>232</sup> MoD, “Social Benefits Package of the Contract Service Member,” webpage, undated-y.

<sup>233</sup> Radin et al., 2019b, p. 70.

<sup>234</sup> Radin et al., 2019a, p. 62, citing Nadja Douglas, “Civil-Military Relations in Russia: Conscript vs. Contract Army, or How Ideas Prevail Against Functional Demands,” *Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 4, 2014.

<sup>235</sup> “Russian Military Allows Replacement of Conscription with Contract Service” [“Военные Силы России позволяют заменять призыв контрактной службой”], *RT*, February 26, 2016.

<sup>236</sup> “For You, Contract Soldiers” [“Для вас, контрактники”], *Boevaya Vakhta*, No. 69, September 12, 2009.



centers have been built specifically to address the needs of military families nearby.<sup>237</sup> Other notable draws toward the military service were privileges in university and vocational college admissions and an early retirement age (after only 20 years of service).

### Expanding the Recruiting Pipeline

The efforts to recruit into military contract service intensified and became more systematic between 2012 and 2022. To attract more people by lowering the time commitment, the term of the first contract was reduced from three years to two. Initially, entering the contract required prior conscription service; gradually, the criteria of eligibility widened to include those without military experience if they have a vocational or university degree. In 2017, the opportunity to join the military by contract was expanded to high school graduates after they served three months under conscription.<sup>238</sup> As of December 2021, the MoD website also listed a number of jobs that those with nine years of school education can perform under military contract.<sup>239</sup>

In addition to recruiting from the general public eligible for service, individuals undergoing conscription service were able to sign up for contract service during or following the completion of their conscription term. Recent legislation allowed conscripts who were close to the end of their term to sign up for contract service to be able to serve in “hot spots.” One negative outcome of this attempt to widen the recruitment pipeline, even prior to the February 2022 invasion of Ukraine, was that these permissions, together with external pressures on the unit commanders to convince conscripts to join the contract service, created an incentive for commanders to coerce conscripts into signing by promising higher-than-actual salaries, misleading conscripts about the possibility of completing the contract early, and bullying (in some cases).<sup>240</sup>

Contract service personnel could apply for particular positions and to particular units, according to the MoD, and the contract is concluded between the recruit and the commander of the military unit.<sup>241</sup> Of course, some locations and positions are more popular than others, so competition is most likely higher for those billets. The MoD tried to balance this by offering incentives for remote locations, for example, pay bonus or *double service time*, meaning one year serving on a hardship tour counted as two years of service.<sup>242</sup>

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<sup>237</sup> For example, Vladimir Sosnitsky, “Families of Servicemen of the Russian Unit in Gudauta Received a Kindergarten for the Garrison” [“Детский сад для гарнизона получили семьи военнослужащих российского соединения в Гудауте”], *Krasnaya Zvezda*, No. 85, August 5, 2019.

<sup>238</sup> Katya Arenina, “Would Have Been Considered Missing in Action: How Contract Service Members Run from the Russian Army” [“Был бы потом без вести пропавшим: Как и почему контрактники бегут из российской армии”], *Vazhniye Istorii*, October 29, 2020.

<sup>239</sup> In Russia, nine grades of schooling constitute *basic education*; 11 years of schooling are needed to meet the secondary education requirement (Government of the Russian Federation, undated).

<sup>240</sup> Arenina, 2020.

<sup>241</sup> MoD, “10 Steps to Enlist in the Military” [“10 шагов к поступлению на военную службу”], webpage, undated-dd.

<sup>242</sup> “For You, Contract Soldiers,” 2009.

## Diversifying Recruitment Approaches

As of 2021, at least 84 screening centers had been established across the majority of regions to facilitate selection from the pool of potential recruits and popularize the contract military service through informational activities intended to persuade potential recruits.<sup>243</sup> While many recruitment centers work with potential recruits in person, initial intake also can happen remotely. To further extend the reach to the regions where permanent centers do not exist, several mobile centers were implemented in 2017. Such centers are fully autonomous, carry the necessary equipment to facilitate all necessary activities, and only take 30 minutes to deploy.<sup>244</sup> As of 2018, 19 mobile units were in operation.<sup>245</sup>

Additionally, in an attempt to find new formats for military service popularization and recruitment, a series of events—a mix of information, propaganda, and entertainment—were piloted in 2014.<sup>246</sup> Such events feature local politicians, active service members, entertainers, and media. Between 2014 and 2018, over 1,500 such events took place across Russia, and 670,000 people attended. Thousands of people expressed interest in learning more about the military service; 100,000 passed the preliminary screening and 30,000 submitted applications.<sup>247</sup> Representatives from the recruitment units also traveled to high schools and universities within their jurisdiction, where they share information about contract military service and encourage graduates to consider applying. In recent years, these efforts often have been facilitated through video conferencing, which became even more popular during the COVID-19 pandemic. Recently, at least one region has successfully used virtual reality technologies to better acquaint candidates with different military specializations.<sup>248</sup>

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<sup>243</sup> “Eight Thousand People Decided to Join the Contract Service During the ‘Armiya’ and ‘ArMY’ Forums” [“На ‘Армия’ и ‘АрМИ’ восемь тысяч людей решили пойти на контрактную службу”], RIA Novosti, August 31, 2021.

<sup>244</sup> Yuriy Belousov, “To Attract to Contract Military Service” [“Привлечь на службу по контракту”], *Krasnaya zvezda*, No. 37, September 4, 2018.

<sup>245</sup> MoD, “Fourth Control Agency of the Human Resources” [“Четвертое управление главного управления кадров”], webpage, undated-cc; “Eight Thousand People Decided to Join the Contract Service during the ‘Armiya’ and ‘ArMY’ Forums,” 2021.

<sup>246</sup> Examples of such events here: Vesti Khabarovsk [Вести Хабаровск], “Special Report. Recruiting for Contract Military Service” [“Специальный репортаж. Агитация на контрактную службу в армию”], video, YouTube, October 3, 2014.

<sup>247</sup> MoD, undated-cc.

<sup>248</sup> Yuriy Belousov, “Innovations in Army Recruitment” [“Иновации армейской агитации”], *Krasnaya zvezda*, No. 15, February 12, 2021; the same region is now examining virtual reality (VR) capabilities for some of the psychological assessments.

## *Expanding Opportunities for Talented Youth*

### Scientific Companies

The Russian military also has established more opportunities for science-minded individuals to contribute to military service while furthering their expertise. The number of scientific companies (also called *scientific squadrons* in the military literature)<sup>249</sup> has grown from only four functional scientific companies with 160 people in service in 2013 to 17 such companies with 664 people in service in 2018.<sup>250</sup> Five of these companies (and at least 200 people) are a part of the Innovation Technopolis ERA, located in the southern city of Anapa. To ensure that the most-talented youth are scouted, the search for candidates for the scientific companies takes place across 62 jurisdictions throughout Russia. There is stiff competition for each available slot in the scientific companies—up to 25 people per one vacancy, in some cases. Particularly popular are military specialties that have to do with robotics, information technology, and biomedicine.<sup>251</sup> These specialties will be discussed in further detail in subsequent chapters.

### Partnerships for Training and Apprenticeships

In recent years, partnerships have been developed with factories and vocational education colleges—arrangements through which vocational students go through military service, where they build on their education and then join factories to continue related work. Three hundred and sixty-two graduates of vocational schools participated in these partnerships between 2012 and 2018. Finally, at least four science-industry squadrons have been formed, where eligible employees from partner enterprises go to fulfil their service requirements to then go back to their pre-service jobs. The majority of such conscripts have university degrees in technical disciplines. Such partnerships give rise to collaborative projects, experiments, and new pilot programs. The conscripts receive new knowledge, which they later bring to the military-industrial enterprises in their region.<sup>252</sup>

All in all, as of 2021, 60,000 people were serving in the military as conscripts without interrupting their pursuit of higher education. Many of these conscripts joined the contract

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<sup>249</sup> These scientific companies are Russian military units that were developed in collaboration with Russian academic institutions and research and science institutes. The objective of such companies is to develop and innovate technologies.

<sup>250</sup> In 2021 there were 18 companies, according to Sergei Shoigu, “Russian Military Forces Have Made a Drastic Developmental Leap” [“Вооруженные Силы России сделали огромный рывок в развитии”], *Voennye komissariaty Rossii*, June 29, 2021.

<sup>251</sup> Gavrilov, 2019b.

<sup>252</sup> MoD, “The Selection of the Conscripts to Serve in Science Squadrons of the Military Technopolis ‘ERA’ Has Completed” [“В Военном инновационном технополисе ‘ЭРА’ завершился отбор операторов для прохождения военной службы в научных ротях”], webpage, October 15, 2021c.

service following their conscription term and managed complex systems, such as the Iskander system, and strategic air defenses, such as the SA-20 and SA-21 systems.<sup>253</sup>

### Opportunities for Athletes

The Russian military also sought to attract individuals with notable performance in sports through the creation of dedicated sports squadrons. In 2021, there were five squadrons staffed with members or candidates for 29 of Russia’s Olympic teams; the majority of these nearly 700 service members were enlisted and brought high-level athletic abilities and recognized sports accomplishments.<sup>254</sup> Many of the athletically talented youths—especially those with expertise in hand-to-hand combat, wrestling, karate, boxing, kickboxing, and target shooting—spend their military service in special forces units.<sup>255</sup>

### *Military Propaganda in Support of Recruitment*

Finally, the MoD deployed propaganda efforts to facilitate military pride and, thereby, recruitment; this propaganda has included television and social media ads,<sup>256</sup> historical exhibits,<sup>257</sup> and massive contemporary military entertainment parks.<sup>258</sup> These efforts have focused on the grandeur and might of the Russian military both in the present and in the past, highlight historical victories and Russia’s perseverance, and shape an image of the Russian military as a prestigious, well-funded, and modern institution. Television channels *Zvezda (Star)* and *Pobeda (Victory)* have served as hubs for content that evokes military nostalgia and pride both for the past and the present.<sup>259</sup> Also, the political rhetoric of the 2010s decade reveals that Russian military pride is central to Russia’s search for the new unifying national idea. The grandiose commemorations of the victory in the Great Patriotic War, heightened and persistent perceptions of external threat from the encroaching West, and the showcasing of contemporary victories in Crimea and Syria have been used to raise the military prestige in the eyes of the public, in hopes that such propaganda would facilitate recruitment.

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<sup>253</sup> Shoigu, 2021.

<sup>254</sup> “Ministry of Defense Summarizes the Outcomes of the Fall Draft” [“Министерство Обороны подвело итоги осеннего призыва”], RIA Novosti, December 31, 2020.

<sup>255</sup> Viktor Schepilov, “New Recruits from the Capital Are Getting Physically Stronger” [“Столичный новобранец физически крепчает”], *Военные комиссариаты России*, October 1, 2021; and Burdinsky, 2019.

<sup>256</sup> See, for example, Minoborony Rossii, “Contract Service in the RF Armed Forces” [“Служба по контракту в ВС РФ”], video, YouTube, September 7, 2020.

<sup>257</sup> MoD, “The Central Museum of the Ministry of Defense Opens Exhibition: Nurnberg. Beginning of Peace” [“В Центральном музее Вооруженных Сил открылась выставка ‘Нюрнберг. Начало мира’”], webpage, December 8, 2021d.

<sup>258</sup> Patriot Park, “Information [Информация]”, webpage, undated.

<sup>259</sup> Shoigu, 2021. The effectiveness of these efforts is questionable, however; see Pavel Luzin, “How Successful Is Russia’s Military Propaganda Media?” *Moscow Times*, July 10, 2019.

## Youth-Focused Military-Patriotic Education

Russian leaders have long recognized lagging patriotic motivation for military service as a critical gap that needed be filled to enhance both recruitment and retention.<sup>260</sup> The importance of filling this gap was reflected in Russia’s whole-of-government push and outsized investment to raise patriotism in general and military patriotism in particular.<sup>261</sup> According to *Novaya gazeta*, the budget for federal programs mentioning patriotism grew 40 times in the period between 2016 and 2020, from 280 million rubles (around \$4 million) to 11.3 billion (around \$153 million)—this is without considering regional spending, presidential grants, and expenditures on building large-scale projects.<sup>262</sup> Altogether, according to *Novaya Gazeta*, a total of 73 billion rubles (around \$990 million) were spent on patriotic projects between 2015 and 2020.<sup>263</sup>

Because of the emphasis on youth, the Ministry of Education became the lead on the 2021–2024 federal project for “Patriotic Education of Russian Citizens.”<sup>264</sup> With 13.7 billion rubles (around \$182.4 million) allocated, the project aims to engage at least 24 percent of Russian citizens in patriotic education through such activities as creation of a new patriotic youth movement “I am proud,” involving at least 600,000 youths in the Yunarmia movement (see the following section), attracting at least 25 million views to online patriotic education lessons, and engaging at least 640,000 people in patriotically minded events and activities across Russia.<sup>265</sup> In the following section, we discuss some of these and other prominent efforts in youth-focused military-patriotic education.

### Military-Patriotic Curricula in All Secondary Schools

As of December 2021, every public school in Russia was mandated to implement a military-patriotic curriculum. Per federal law, “On Military Duty and Service,” all secondary-level and vocational students had to receive basic knowledge in the area of defense through basic safety and security classes.<sup>266</sup> Furthermore, in an apparent attempt to streamline efforts to enhance ideological and patriotic education within all schools, a new position was proposed and piloted in

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<sup>260</sup> James Burk, “Patriotism and the All-Volunteer Force.” *Journal of Political and Military Sociology*, Vol. 12, No. 2, Fall 1984. Putin named patriotism as Russia’s new and only possible “national idea”; see “Putin Discussed Russia’s National Idea” [“Путин рассказал о национальной идее России”], TASS, May 10, 2020.

<sup>261</sup> Government of the Russian Federation, 1998.

<sup>262</sup> Katya Bonch-Smolovskaya, Antonina Asanova, Vladimir Prokushev, and Artyom Stchennikov, “Love for State Petty Change. How the Authorities Burn Tens of Billions of Rubles on ‘Patriotic’ Projects: An Investigation by the Novaya” [“Любовь к отеческим грошам. Как власти сжигают десятки миллиардов рублей на ‘патриотических’ проектах: исследование Новой”], *Novaya gazeta*, No. 21, February 26, 2021.

<sup>263</sup> Bonch-Smolovskaya et al., 2021.

<sup>264</sup> Bondarev, 2021.

<sup>265</sup> Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation, “Federal Project on Patriotic Education” [“Федеральный проект ‘Патриотическое воспитание’”], webpage, undated.

<sup>266</sup> Moscow Mayor’s Office, “Six Hundred Moscow High School Students Participated in the Military Education Summits at the ‘Avangard’” [“Военные учебные сборы в центре ‘Авангард’ стартовали для 600 московских старшеклассников”], webpage, March 9, 2021.

2021: *School advisors for upbringing*, who, according to general understanding, will work to facilitate students' ideological and patriotic indoctrination within schools.<sup>267</sup> This position echoes that of a youth counselor in Soviet schools, who was in charge of students' socialization and their ideological and moral stance.

## DOSA AF

The majority of military-patriotic activities thus far have occurred outside school walls, ushered by a variety of governmental institutions, near-governmental organizations, or NGOs. Probably the most long-standing among such organizations is the Volunteer Society for Cooperation with the Army, Aviation, and Navy (DOSAAF). Established in 1927 as a paramilitary sports organization, it survived the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and, after years of languishing, received new support from the government, regained its old name,<sup>268</sup> and was given an expanded mission to conduct pre-conscription military-patriotic education in 2009. At that time, DOSAAF became an official amalgamate of civil society and government with a mission to provide new, high-quality pre-conscription youth training, including military-patriotic education; applied military, aviation, and technical sports; and military specialties.<sup>269</sup> As of December 2021, there were 81 regional DOSAAF centers. There is some indication that the DOSAAF's work has been effective: According to military officials, an increasing percentage of those who underwent pre-conscription training in DOSAAF (8 percent in 2017; 14 percent in 2018; 20 percent in 2019) went on to enter military service and were comparatively well prepared for it.<sup>270</sup>

## Avangard Centers

As of December 2021, a relatively new initiative—said to be a pet project of Minister Shoigu—was ramping up across Russia: Avangard youth centers that deliver military-patriotic education and basic military training to youth. The mission of the Avangard centers is to “develop a team spirit; [a] sense of responsibility for oneself, one's family, and close ones;

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<sup>267</sup> Ella Rossman, “Advisor for Upbringing in School: Who They Are and Who They Will Advise. Questions Without Answers” [“Советник по воспитанию в школе: кто это, кому и что он будет советовать. Вопросы без ответов”], *Mel*, March 3, 2021; Makar Sitkin and Irina Lukianova, “School Political Instructors: Who Are the Upbringing Advisors, What They Will Do, and Who They Are Going to Bring Up. Remembering Old Pioneer Leaders” [“Школьные политруки. Кто такие советники по воспитанию, зачем они нужны и как будут воспитывать. Вспоминая старших пионервожатых”], *Novaya gazeta*, September 10, 2021; and Bonch-Osmolovskaya et al., 2021. Notably, officials deny such direct connection to ideological upbringing; see Anna Shukshina, “Kazakova Explained What an Upbringing Advisory Will Do in Schools” [“Казаква рассказала, чем должен заниматься советник по воспитанию в школах”], *Parlamentskaya gazeta*, October 25, 2021.

<sup>268</sup> It was named ROSTO between 1991 and 2009.

<sup>269</sup> DOSAAF Rossii [ДОСААФ России], “DOSAAF of Russia: History” [“ДОСААФ России: История”], webpage, undated.

<sup>270</sup> Burdinsky, 2019; Gavrilov, 2019a.

acquaint youth with state-of-the-art defense technologies; and improve their physical fitness.”<sup>271</sup> The centers also facilitate the five-day basic military training camps for which all male junior high and equivalent students must now sign up. Centers are open in 22 different jurisdictions across Russia,<sup>272</sup> with plans to open the Avangard centers in each city with a population of 100,000 or more.<sup>273</sup> Recently, DOSAAF and the Avangard centers signed a partnership agreement to implement common projects and complement each other’s efforts.

### Yunarmia (Young Army)

This relatively new movement—the *All-Russia Young Army National Military Patriotic Social Movement Association* (also called *Yunarmia*)—was established in 2016.<sup>274</sup> Similar in many ways to Soviet-style youth movements of Pioneers and Komsomol, Yunarmia is a voluntary children-youth movement aimed at raising “a citizen and patriot” through the focus on four main areas of development: spiritual and moral, social, physical, and intellectual.<sup>275</sup> Since its establishment in 2016, Yunarmia has developed a presence in 85 regional jurisdictions, acquired membership of 861,000 children (a nearly 150,000 increase from 2015), conducted over 15,000 activities, and held 3,553 camps as of 2021.<sup>276</sup> With a vast network within the country’s schools and clubs, Yunarmia’s function is, in part, to serve as a binding element across different “military-patriotic pre-conscription activities.”<sup>277</sup>

### Challenges Remain

Russia’s efforts to facilitate sustainable recruitment of high-quality military personnel have been diverse and well funded. Still, challenges remain.<sup>278</sup> Despite notable improvements, the service and living conditions (as of December 2021) varied depending on the military division and the region of service, and many service members complained about the poor state of the military living facilities.<sup>279</sup> Far from all military service members were satisfied with available

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<sup>271</sup> Avangard [Авангард], “About the Center” [“О Центре”], webpage, undated.

<sup>272</sup> Bondarev, 2021.

<sup>273</sup> Burdinsky, 2019.

<sup>274</sup> Yunarmia [Юнармия], homepage, undated.

<sup>275</sup> Yunarmia, undated.

<sup>276</sup> Yunarmia, undated.

<sup>277</sup> Hannah Alberts, “Next-Generation Fighters: Youth Military-Patriotic Upbringing Bolsters the Russian Military’s Manning and Mobilization Potential,” blog post, Center for Strategic and International Studies, September 22, 2020.

<sup>278</sup> Yuriy Vychenko and Vyacheslav Ershov, “Project-Based Development of the Cultural Human Capital of the Military Contract Service Members” [“Проектное развитие культурного человеческого капитала военнослужащих-контрактников”], *Izvestiya Saratovskogo Universiteta*, Vol. 17, No. 3, 2017.

<sup>279</sup> e.g., Arenina, 2020.

housing supports, which initially drew many of them into service.<sup>280</sup> Although military salaries improved greatly, they were not considered high, and many people in high-demand occupations (for example, in computer engineering, information technology, or medicine) could find better-paid opportunities outside military service.<sup>281</sup> Among those who reported being “fully satisfied” with their living conditions were women, conscripts, service members of younger age and still early in their service, commanding officers, and service members with a high school education.<sup>282</sup> Older service members and those with university degrees tended to be less satisfied with their salaries and bonus structures. Service members also wanted better-quality medical care and recreation opportunities while on base;<sup>283</sup> those with families found it daunting, even prior to the 2022 invasion of Ukraine, that they could be called to “go to the fields”—military training—on short notice with no clarity about when they might return.

Another notable obstacle to attracting and keeping high-quality personnel has been military culture: This continued to feature dehumanizing relationships along the command vertical, with limited accountability for mistreatment. Russian military culture has discouraged and even punished service member initiative.<sup>284</sup> This might make some of the brightest candidates refrain from pursuing military service and a career in the armed services.

Relatedly, although the data on hazing along with other inner issues within military service are kept secret,<sup>285</sup> the accounts of *dedovshchina* seeped through in service members’ private blogs on social media and in high-profile criminal cases.<sup>286</sup> Although shortening the conscription term has improved the situation somewhat, this did not address one of the root problems that led to hazing: the routine and persistent shortage of sergeants in the military, which leads to poor

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<sup>280</sup> See Maksim Kalinin, “Satisfaction with the Housing and Monetary Benefits Among Military Service Members” [“Удовлетворение жильем и денежным довольствием военнослужащими”], *Alleya nauki*, Vol. 2, No. 29, 2019b; and Bychenko and Balandina, 2019.

<sup>281</sup> Bychenko and Balandina, 2019; and Ruslan Kurbanov, “Monetary Benefit of the Contemporary Military Service Member” [“Денежное довольствие современного военнослужащего”], *Meridian*, Vol. 18, 2020, p. 27.

<sup>282</sup> Kalinin, 2019b.

<sup>283</sup> Maksim Kalinin, “Factors of Satisfaction with The Military Social Security System” [“Факторы удовлетворенности системой социальной защиты военнослужащих”], *Proceedings of the Higher Educational Institutions. Volga Region. Social Sciences [Izvestiya vysshikh uchebnykh zavedeniy. Povolzhskiy region. Obshchestvennyye nauki]*, Vol. 2, No. 50, 2019a, pp. 141–151.

<sup>284</sup> For one such example, see Aleksei Ivanchin, “Army Service Has Taught Me That Initiative is Punishable: A Soldier’s Account of Army Service” [“Армейская служба научила меня, что инициатива наказуема: Солдатский рассказ про службу в армии”], 360, November 15, 2016.

<sup>285</sup> Government of the Russian Federation, Federal Law No. 5485-1, “Law on State Secret Information” [“Закон о Государственной тайне”], June 21, 1993.

<sup>286</sup> The accounts of hazing were confirmed (see “Shamsutdinov’s Fellow Service Member was Sentenced to a Suspended Sentence and a Fine for Hazing” [“Сослуживца Шамсутдинова приговорили к условному сроку и штрафу за дедовщину”], *Interfax*, March 3, 2020). A shooter in one such case was convicted to 24.5 years in penal colony (see “Conscript Shamsutdinov Sentenced To 24.5 Years For Shooting 8 Colleagues” [“Призывник Шамсутдинов осужден на 24,5 года за расстрел 8 сослуживцев”], *Interfax*, January 21, 2021).



supervision.<sup>287</sup> Instead, junior officers still were viewed as resources to plug gaps. In addition, though *dedovshchina* largely used to be a phenomenon among conscripts, it later spread into contract service.<sup>288</sup> A recent journalistic investigation of hazing convictions recorded in the state system uncovered more than 1,500 verdicts between 2016 and 2020.<sup>289</sup>

Although military-patriotic education efforts have been wide ranging, the payoff on this grand investment is so far unclear.<sup>290</sup>

## Societal Context for Military Recruitment: Trust, Support, and Growing Patriotism

As Russia has transitioned from a primarily conscription-based military to one dependent on professional force, the societal context of military recruitment has become increasingly significant. Overall, trust in and approval of the military rose significantly in the decades following the post–Cold War period. Support for military service increased as well, although this occurred predominantly among older populations who were ineligible for service.

### *The Military Is Russians’ Most Trusted Institution*

According to various polls, the military was, as of 2021, Russians’ most trusted and approved institution,<sup>291</sup> including for Russian youth.<sup>292</sup> While trust in the military had fallen significantly following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, it recovered and remained consistently high during the course of Russia’s military campaigns in Ukraine (2014) and Syria (see Figure 3.2).

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<sup>287</sup> Shlykov, 2011. Several retired colonels noted that they considered it a grave mistake to first reduce the draft period and flood the units with larger numbers of conscripts while simultaneously cutting the officer corps significantly and eliminating warrant officers, without having first created a professional NCO corps of enlisted sergeants to support these changing dynamics within the units. The Russian military attempted to do everything at the same time, which could have been a recipe for disaster. Still, the colonels’ fears of chaos within units did not come true during this transitional period, possibly because of more-structured training days and better pay at multiple levels.

<sup>288</sup> Arenina, 2020. In a recent poll, 55 percent of military respondents said they experienced some sort of hazing in the past six years.

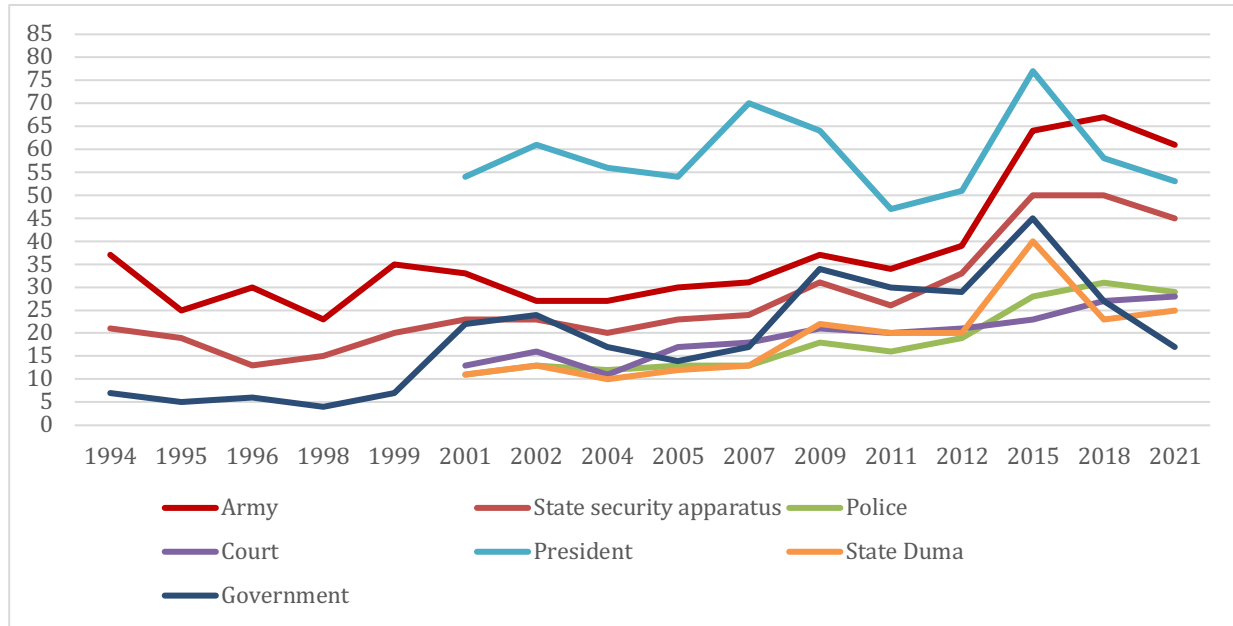
<sup>289</sup> Aleksandra Georgevich and Vladimir Prokushev, “The Military Law Is for Everyone” [“Армейский устав один”], *Novaya gazeta*, No. 103, September 20, 2020.

<sup>290</sup> “Patriotism Costs Russian Regions 900 Million Rubles Annually” [“Патриотизм обходится регионам России в 900 млн руб в год”], BBC News, April 11, 2017.

<sup>291</sup> Levada Center, “Trust in Public Institutions,” webpage, October 12, 2021.

<sup>292</sup> Lev Gudkov, Natalia Zorkaya, Ekaterina Kochergina, Karina Pipiya, and Alexandra Ryseva, *Russia’s ‘Generation Z’: Attitudes and Values 2019/2020*, Moscow: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung in the Russian Federation, 2020.

**Figure 3.2. Trust in the Army and Other Institutions**



SOURCE: Levada Center, 2021b.

Trust in Russia’s military capabilities increased steeply between 2015 and 2021 and reached 85 percent in 2021.<sup>293</sup> At the same time, the perception of military threat from other countries fell (see Figure 3.3).<sup>294</sup> Although the Russian federal budget allocated more for the national defense than for the national economy in 2022,<sup>295</sup> only 12 percent of Russians prioritized military expenditures, whereas 82 percent prioritized government investment in citizens’ welfare.<sup>296</sup>

<sup>293</sup> Levada Center, “Military Threat,” webpage, January 3, 2019.

<sup>294</sup> Levada Center, 2019.

<sup>295</sup> Ivan Tkachev, “Military Expenditures Ascend to Second Place in the Federal Budget” [“Военный раздел поднимется на второе место в бюджете России по расходам”], *RBC*, October 3, 2021.

<sup>296</sup> Vladimir Dergachev and Mikhail Nesterov, “Record Number of Russians Called Army Service Each Man’s Duty” [“Рекордное число Россиян назвали армейскую службу долгом каждого мужчины”], *RBC*, June 18, 2019.

**Figure 3.3. Perceived Threat and Army Preparedness**



SOURCE: Levada Center, 2021b.

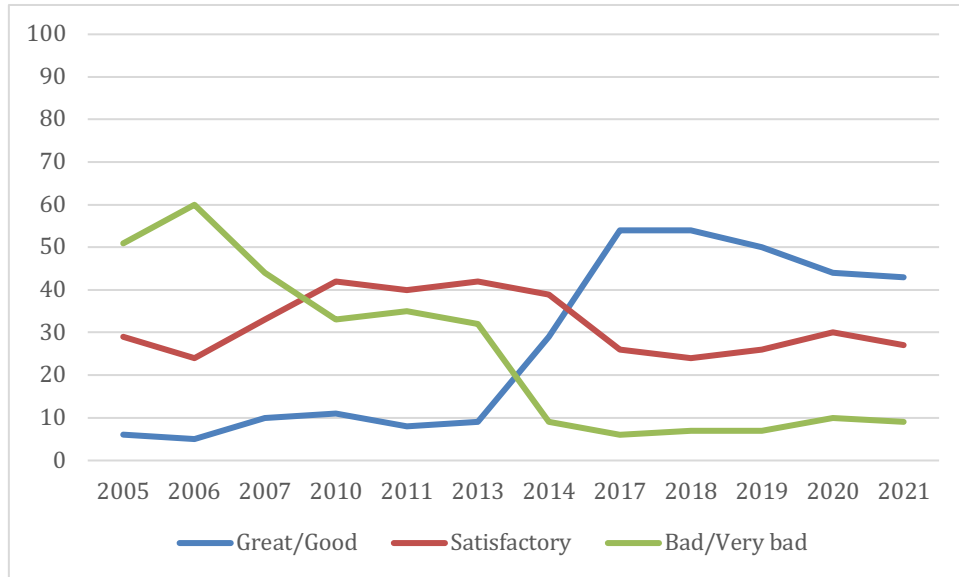
### *Army Service Is Considered Essential, Particularly Among Those Who Do Not Have to Serve*

The years immediately prior to 2022 saw an increase in positive assessment of military service conditions (see Figure 3.4) and service’s prestige (see Figure 3.5).<sup>297</sup> As of July 2021, 61 percent believed that every “true man” should serve in the Army—an opinion that has received a visible boost in the recent years (see Table 3.1).<sup>298</sup>

<sup>297</sup> Public Opinion Foundation [Фонд Общественное мнение], “Conditions in the Military. Conscription: On Prestige of the Military, Conscripts and Contract Personnel and Attitudes Toward Conscription” [“Положение дел в армии. Срочная служба. О престиже военных, призывниках и контрактниках и отношении к срочной службе”], webpage, March 2, 2021. Still, in August 2017, only 10 percent of Russians named serving in the military as the most respected occupation in the modern society; see Levada Center, “Kids and Professions,” webpage, September 29, 2017.

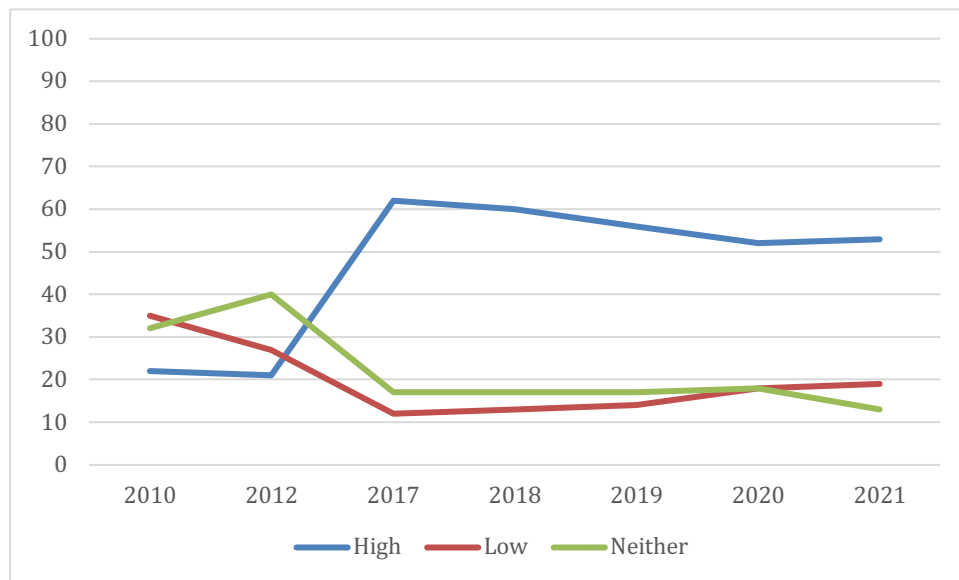
<sup>298</sup> Levada Center, “Military Conscription,” webpage, July 13, 2021a.

**Figure 3.4. Assessment of Conditions in the Military Service**



SOURCE: Public Opinion Foundation, 2021.

**Figure 3.5. Perceived Prestige of Military Service**



SOURCE: Public Opinion Foundation, 2021.

**Table 3.1. Should Men Serve in the Army?**

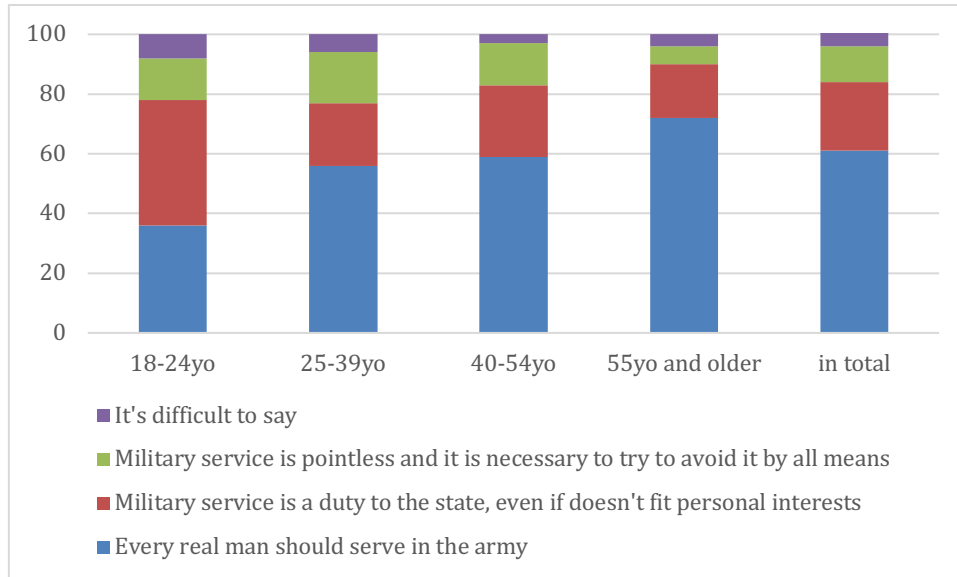
	1997	2000	2010	2014	2015	2019	2021
Every real man should serve in the Army	41	44	44	41	42	60	61
Military service is a duty, even if it doesn't meet personal interests	28	24	30	41	40	24	23
Military service is pointless and it is necessary to try to avoid it by all means	24	23	18	15	15	12	12
It's difficult to say	8	9	8	4	3	4	5

SOURCE: Levada Center, 2021a.

However, consistent age differences arose in these assessments. The view that every “true man” should serve in the Army was particularly popular among the respondents who were 55 years and older (72 percent), whereas only 36 percent of Russians aged 18–24 believed the same (see Figure 3.6 for the age breakdown). Across all age groups, an average of 12 percent considered military service to be pointless. Another national poll showed somewhat similar trends: In March 2021, 67 percent considered military service to be a necessary “school of life,” whereas 23 percent considered it to be a waste. The former opinion was most common among the older respondents (70 percent of people over the age of 46 expressed this opinion versus 53 percent of those younger than 30), whereas the latter opinion was more common among younger people (39 percent among those younger than 30 years old versus 14–21 percent among those older than 46). People with university degrees also appeared to question the utility of the service more than others (31 percent versus around 20 percent of those without university education).<sup>299</sup> Similarly, the majority of the respondents who were younger than 30 believed that military service should be a matter of personal choice (58 percent), whereas the majority among the older groups (up to 75 percent in the respondents age 60 and older) believed that service should be obligatory for every young man (see Figure 3.7).

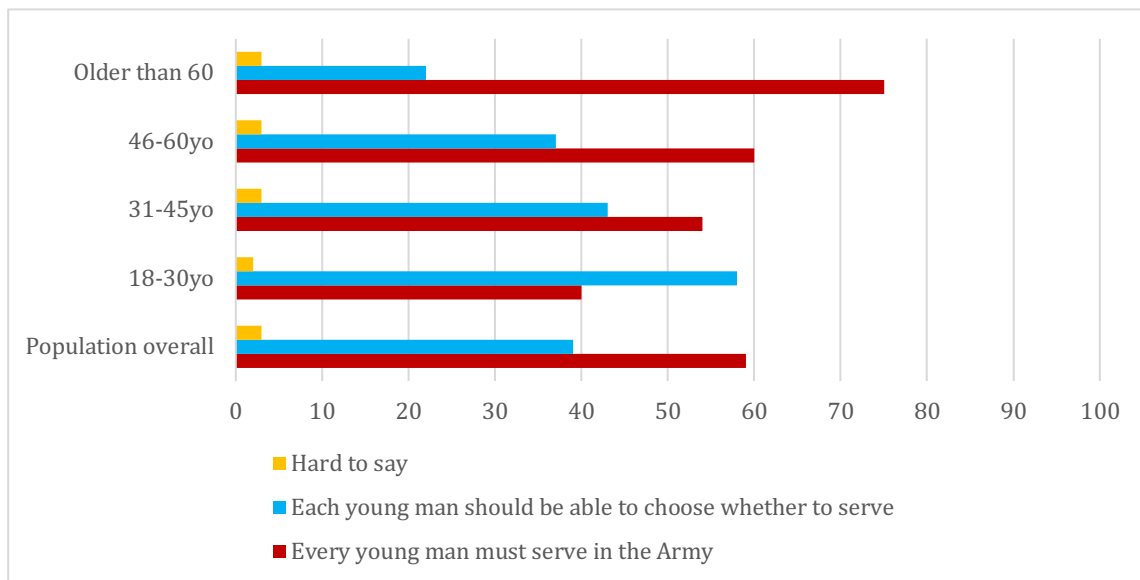
<sup>299</sup> Public Opinion Foundation, 2021.

**Figure 3.6. How Do You View the Service in the Russian Army?**



SOURCE: Public Opinion Foundation, 2021.

**Figure 3.7. Should All Men Serve in the Army?**



SOURCE: Public Opinion Foundation, 2021.

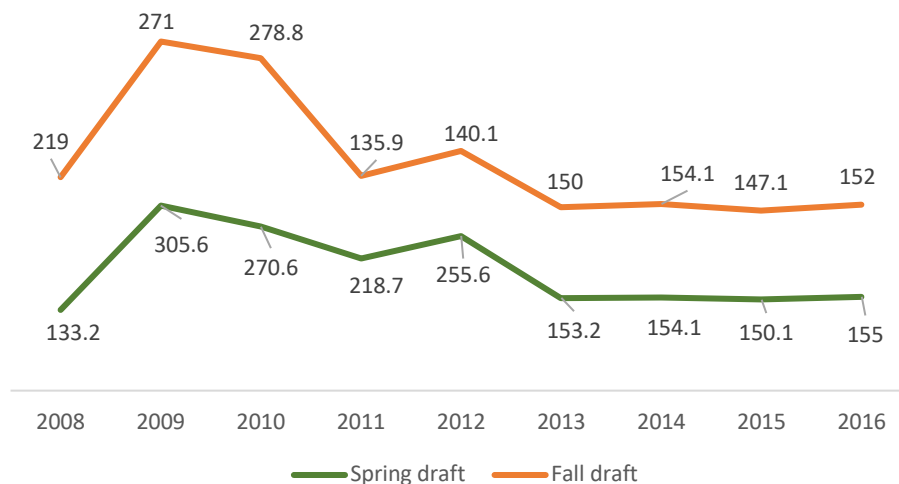
Research in 2020 that surveyed the parents of adolescent boys found that at least 50 percent believed that the situation in the military had improved in the preceding two to three years.<sup>300</sup> In

<sup>300</sup> VTsIOM, “Military Service Readiness and Hazing” [“Готовность к службе в армии и неуставные отношения”], webpage, December 21, 2020.

particular, when asked to name up to three principal improvements, parents most frequently noted positive changes in military technology and equipment (28 percent), relationships between commanders and subordinates (i.e., reduction in *dedovshchina*; 16 percent), improved socio-economic benefits (8–10 percent), quality of food and overall service conditions (12–13 percent), and discipline and order (9 percent). In this population, 68 percent responded that they would like for their son to serve in the military, and the majority justified this with the view that the military as a “school of life” needed for every man (56 percent) or that service is a duty that each man should fulfill (32 percent).

Increases in support for military service appear to have been reflected in the lower number of people attempting to evade the draft under peacetime conditions. Within the five-year period from 2013 to 2018, the number of draft evaders reduced significantly, from an estimated 6,200 in 2013 to 1,600 in 2018 (see Figures 3.8 and 3.9). Most often, such reductions in draft evasion were attributed to the shortened conscription term, improved service conditions, and reductions in *dedovshchina*. (Although data were not yet available on the number of draft evaders during the April 2022 conscription drive, media accounts suggest that fear of compulsory military service in the Ukraine war might be causing many would-be conscripts to seek alternatives.<sup>301</sup>)

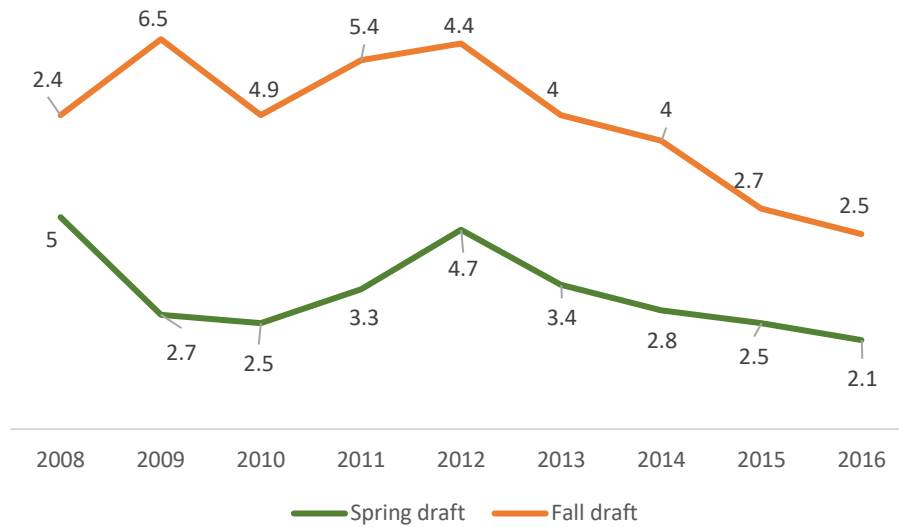
**Figure 3.8. Trends in Number of Conscripts (in thousands)**



SOURCE: Data from the MoD Military General Prosecutor’s Office, as reported in Alexandra Dzhordzhevich and Anastasia Kurlova, “To the Full Urgency of the Law” [“По всей срочности закона”], *Kommersant*, April 1, 2017.

<sup>301</sup> Mary Ilyushina, “As Russia Drafts Young Men, Some Fear Ending Up on Ukraine’s Front Line,” *Washington Post*, April 1, 2022.

**Figure 3.9. Percentage of Draft Evaders**



SOURCE: Data from MoD Military General Prosecutor's Office, as reported in Dzhordzhevich and Kurlova, 2017.

Both during peacetime and wartime, Russia's general population, and its youth specifically, are provided with minimal information about what is happening with the military.<sup>302</sup> The proportion of those who are actively engaged in the preparations for military service beyond the basic requirements (through their local clubs and schools) has been historically low in post-Soviet times, but such engagement appears to have been growing in popularity (and availability) in the years preceding Russia's 2022 military invasion of Ukraine.<sup>303</sup>

### *Many Russians Support a Mixed Model of Military Service*

Opinions on whether Russian military should follow a contract-only or a mixed model of service appear to be more uniform across age groups. Consistently, Russians prefer some version of a mixed conscript-contract mode of service: The conscript-only approach is the least popular option.<sup>304</sup> In a recent Levada poll, nearly half of Russians supported the idea of mixed forms of service (part conscription, part contract; 48 percent in 2021) and the next-biggest group (34 percent) thought that the Army should operate on a contract basis only. Again, the conscript-only option was least popular (17 percent).<sup>305</sup>

<sup>302</sup> VTsIOM, 2016.

<sup>303</sup> For example, see Olga Libanska, "Youth Military-Patriotic Clubs Are Experiencing Boost in Popularity," *Hype*, April 25, 2019.

<sup>304</sup> Public Opinion Foundation, 2021.

<sup>305</sup> Levada Center, 2021a.



## *A Rise in (Passive) Patriotism*

As of 2015,<sup>306</sup> 70 percent of Russians expressed pride in contemporary Russia—a significant increase since 2006, when only 50 percent of Russians expressed the same sentiment. Similarly, as of 2019, over 70 percent of Russians considered themselves patriots, an increase from only 57 percent in 2006.<sup>307</sup> Of note, however, is that young people, when compared with people in other age categories, are more willing to admit that they do *not* consider themselves to be patriots (27 percent in this age group vs. an average of around 19 percent in older cohorts). Russians’ belief that the majority of fellow Russians are patriots also have strengthened since 2014, likely energized by the events in Ukraine and Crimea; still, even at the highest point of this belief in 2018, only 41 percent considered themselves patriots.<sup>308</sup>

Russian pride and patriotism appear to be rooted in Russia’s history, particularly its victory in the Great Patriotic War (what Russians call World War II).<sup>309</sup> For many, patriotism is vaguely defined as knowledge and respect for Russia’s history, literature, and scientific discoveries.<sup>310</sup> A 2014 study showed that the majority of Russians define *patriotism* as the love for their country (68 percent). When sociologists contrasted the passive definition of patriotism as *love* with a more active construal of patriotism as *work* for the good of the country, significantly fewer people supported this view (22 to 27 percent on average, and only 19 to 20 percent among youth).<sup>311</sup>

The majority of Russians, regardless of age, believe that the choice to be a patriot is every citizen’s personal business.<sup>312</sup> At the same time, at least half of Russians (particularly in older age groups) believe that patriotism can be instilled through patriotic education (although 18–30-year-olds are notably more skeptical),<sup>313</sup> and the majority (69 percent on average; 81 percent among older respondents) support bolstering patriotic education.<sup>314</sup> Only 24 percent oppose patriotic education, although this number reaches nearly half for younger respondents (48 percent).

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<sup>306</sup> This was the year of the last available polling data during the writing of this report.

<sup>307</sup> Public Opinion Foundation, 2019.

<sup>308</sup> Public Opinion Foundation, 2019.

<sup>309</sup> Levada Center, “Pride and Identity” [“Гордость и идентичность”], webpage, October 19, 2020c. Other areas of great pride have been the country’s leading role in space exploration, its annexation of Crimea (measured since 2017), and Russian literature and science.

<sup>310</sup> Marlene Laruelle, “Patriotic Youth Clubs in Russia. Professional Niches, Cultural Capital and Narratives of Social Engagement,” *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 67, No. 1, January 2015.

<sup>311</sup> Levada Center, “Substitution of Concepts: Patriotism in Russia” [“Подмена понятий: Патриотизм в России”], webpage, May 27, 2014. People with a university education were more likely to construe patriotism as work for the good of the country.

<sup>312</sup> Public Opinion Foundation, 2019; and Levada Center, 2014.

<sup>313</sup> Public Opinion Foundation, 2019.

<sup>314</sup> Public Opinion Foundation [Фонд Общественное мнение], “Is Patriotic Education Needed?” [“Нужно ли патриотическое воспитание?”], webpage, June 20, 2020.

## Conclusions

As noted in previous chapters, Russian leaders have desired a nimble, efficient, professional military force, staffed with highly motivated, physically fit, well-educated military personnel. Many barriers stood in the way of achieving this ambitious goal because the state of the military, service conditions, and social upheaval of the post-Soviet years made military service a highly unappealing option. During the years between 2008 and 2022, the Russian military invested vast resources and efforts to seek to overcome these challenges, yielding some improvements in service conditions and benefits both for conscript and contract personnel, reductions in military hazing, new and expanded service opportunities for scientists and athletes, and the overall effort at humanization of military service. The resulting force was smaller and more nimble and better trained, educated, and regarded than it had been in the first two decades following the fall of the Soviet Union. By December 2021, contract military service members constituted at least 70 percent of the overall force, with presence in key battalions, units, and positions. Draft-dodging was reduced prior to the 2022 conflict in Ukraine, and while conscripts still might have lacked enthusiasm for service, increasing numbers appeared to view the conscription year as an accepted inevitability rather than a dreaded prospect.<sup>315</sup> Polling suggested that Russians trusted their military, viewed military service positively, and on balance supported its mixed conscript-contract nature. As of 2021, passive patriotic sentiment appeared to be on the rise, and with vast investments in military-patriotic education, this sentiment could eventually transform to active intent to protect one's country.

Despite these improvements, important caveats exist. Even prior to Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, people of conscription age (1) were significantly less likely to consider military service a necessity when compared with people in other age groups, (2) preferred to see a fully professional volunteer force, and (3) were less patriotic. The conflict in Ukraine has further exposed the extent to which Russian military culture continues to be rigid and, often, brutal, in addition to the potential hazards associated with combat duty. During peacetime, military pay still lags behind the benefits from better-paying civilian jobs. The health of Russian youth, both physical and psychological, continues to be rather poor, which is an important barrier in the context of demographic pressures. Although Russia's efforts to facilitate recruitment were notable, the challenges it has faced continue to be formidable.

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<sup>315</sup> Svyatoslav Ivanov, "Do Russians Want to Serve?" ["Хотят ли русские служить?"], *gazeta.ru*, February 22, 2016.

## Chapter 4. Retaining Military Personnel

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The purpose of this chapter is to review key issues of retention in the Russian military in the period preceding 2022. It is divided into three parts. First, we use the institutional-occupational model (introduced in Chapter 3) to conceptualize retention in the contemporary Russian military. This model was first developed by military scholars in the United States in the 1970s and is cited frequently by Russian military scholars. Second, we review some of the key features of the Russian military that relate to retention, including terms of service, generic career progression, and where Russia might have specific retention objectives. Third, we review some of the Russian literature on military retention, focusing on select topics of interest to military leaders.

In general, we find that Russia sought to professionalize its force structure in recent years, and retention was a key feature of these efforts. Professional militaries spend resources to train and prepare their personnel. Thus, retaining them is key for Russia to receive a sufficient return on this investment. Using the institutional-occupational model discussed in Chapter 3, we find evidence that the Russian military was attentive to both institutional benefits (e.g., maintaining good order and discipline, promoting a sense of patriotism, and managing public perceptions) and occupational benefits (e.g., increasing compensation of contract personnel, improving the well-being of their families, and creating educational and professional development opportunities).

This chapter discusses four conclusions from this review:

1. The Russian military's retention-related concerns and priorities shifted over time, and uncertainty remained about its objectives, even prior to the 2022 invasion of Ukraine.
2. Prior to 2022's special military operation, the Russian military likely had been uninterested in retaining all of its conscripts, contract personnel, and officers under peacetime conditions.
3. The Russian military has used both tangible (e.g., housing, compensation, family well-being) and intangible (e.g., good order and discipline, patriotism) benefits to retain personnel.<sup>316</sup>
4. Motivations for personnel to serve and continue serving appear to have varied by geographic region.

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<sup>316</sup> We refer to tangible benefits as *occupational benefits* in this chapter. Furthermore, we refer to intangible benefits as *institutional benefits*.

## Conceptualizing Military Retention in Russia

As noted in Chapter 3, the Soviet military relied on a universal service model for its personnel system, which was a form of mass conscription.<sup>317</sup> The Russian military inherited this system after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. During the 1990s, the Russian military downsized this force from an estimated 3.4 million personnel in 1990 to about 1.2 million in 1998.<sup>318</sup> During the 2000s, the Russian military increasingly focused on the professionalization of its existing force structure, which required resources dedicated to the recruitment, training, and retention of military professionals.

In this chapter, we focus on the retention part of Russia's efforts at military professionalization. We define *retention* as the “rate at which military personnel voluntarily choose to stay in the military after their obligated term of service has ended.”<sup>319</sup> While the personnel systems of the U.S. and Russian military are markedly different, we found some evidence that Russian military scholars have looked to U.S. efforts at professionalization during its transition to an all-volunteer force between 1968 and 1974.<sup>320</sup>

As the United States experienced over the past 50 years, there are significant costs to creating and maintaining a professionalized all-volunteer force. We propose that the Russian military is seeking to incorporate some features that are similar to the United States' all-volunteer force within its existing military manpower and personnel system. This could explain why the Russian military continues to rely on a hybrid personnel system that includes both conscripts and contract personnel at varying levels across the different branches of service within the MoD.

We begin with three basic assumptions. First, the Russian military incurs costs in recruiting, training, and retaining these personnel (e.g., salaries, benefits, housing, leadership training). Second, we Russian military leaders have preferred to retain some, but not all, of these professional personnel based on evolving manning requirements at various ranks, specialties, and services. Third, the Russian military has had a finite amount of resources that it can dedicate to retaining these professionals. Under these assumptions, we review recent, publicly available research on the Russian manpower and personnel system. In the next section, we review our

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<sup>317</sup> David E. Rohall, V. Lee Hamilton, David R. Segal, and Mady W. Segal, “Downsizing the Russian Army: Quality of Life and Mental Health Consequences for Former Organizational Members, Survivors, and Spouses,” *Journal of Political and Military Sociology*, Vol. 29, No. 1, Summer 2001.

<sup>318</sup> Rohall et al., 2001.

<sup>319</sup> Lawrence Kapp, *Defense Primer: Active Duty Enlisted Retention*, Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, IF11274, updated December 22, 2021.

<sup>320</sup> Some examples include Nikita Alekseevich Ermolov and Ekaterina Nikolaevna Karlova, “Motivation for Military Service as a Subject of Theoretical and Empirical Research in Military Sociology” [“Мотивация к военной службе как предмет теоретических и эмпирических исследований в военной социологии”], *Academy*, Vol. 1, No. 28, 2018; Ekaterina Nikolaevna Karlova, “The Transformation of Military Professionalism in Modern Society” [“Трансформация военного профессионализма в современном обществе”], *Observer [Обозреватель]*, Vol. 9, 2015; Igor Stanislavovich Shatilo, “Disarmament and Prospects for the Evolution of Military Structures” [“Разоружение и перспективы эволюции военных структур”], *Vlast*, Vol. 5, 2017.

sample of Russian research that highlights what types of issues might have been salient to Russia’s military leaders prior to the February 2022 invasion of Ukraine.

## Retention Trends in the Russian Armed Forces

This section defines the meaning of *retention* in the Russian military, focusing on balancing the needs of optimizing a personnel structure with the costs of this optimization. As with any organization, Russian military leaders, under normal conditions, cannot and do not want to retain all their personnel and therefore will focus on strategies to retain some and not others. These priorities might change over time. This section continues with a discussion on the terms of service and general career progression within the Russian military. We then focus on key issues and objectives in the retention of three classes of Russian service members: conscripts, contracted enlisted personnel, and officers.

### *Defining Military Retention*

The fundamental goal of a retention strategy before the latest invasion of Ukraine is to balance the force and optimize the personnel structure to meet existing and future demands of the military in question. If too few people or too few in select fields are retained, military services could experience a shortage of technical experts and experienced leaders, decreased efficiency, and lower job satisfaction. If too many people remain in service, a force could need to limit promotion opportunities, involuntarily separate individuals, end up with a top-heavy force,<sup>321</sup> and struggle with increasing personnel-related costs. Overall, retention affects unit readiness, morale, training requirements, and recruitment, among other key elements of a military force.<sup>322</sup>

Military retention has been defined various ways to explore specific concerns.<sup>323</sup> Some definitions emphasize the rate at which personnel voluntarily continue serving at the end of an obligated term of service. Others focus on the ratio of personnel that stop serving (for a variety of

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<sup>321</sup> Kapp, 2021.

<sup>322</sup> RAND Corporation, “Military Personnel Retention,” webpage, undated.

<sup>323</sup> Although the issue of personnel retention is widely discussed in Russian economic and business literature, we could not find a clear-cut definition of this concept in the Armed Forces context. Academic articles in this field tend to analyze it through the lenses of satisfaction and motivation to stay in the military, even when directly citing the Western models. For example, see Ekaterina Karlova, “The Historical Experience of American Military Sociology” [“Исторический опыт американской военной социологии”], *Sotsiologicheskiye issledovaniya*, No. 4, 2014. However, military journals are more explicit in their discussions of the need to retain service members. These deliberations mostly are clustered around the early 2000s, when the problems with retaining the newly contracted recruits and young officers were especially striking. Some military journal articles directly use the term *retain* in the titles (e.g., Aleksandr Yevdokimov, “We Will Be Able to Recruit. But What About Retaining?” [“Набрать сможем. А удержать?”], *Armeiskii sbornik*, September 30, 2004, p. 9; Maksim Sidorov, “How to Retain Young Officers in the Armed Forces?” [“Как удержать в армии молодых офицеров?”] *Na boevom postu*, No. 73, November 3, 2001; Ivan Kovtun, “Contract Military Service. Recruit—We Will Recruit. Can We Retain?” [“Служба по контракту. Набрать—наберем. Сможем ли удержать?”], *Rossiiskoe voennoe obozrenie*, Nos. 11–12, November 30, 2004), but do not provide any definition.

reasons) within a period of obligated service versus personnel that began or completed a contract to serve. And still others focus on retention at stages of a military career from initial training all the way through retirement.<sup>324</sup> And, although aggregated retention figures (objectives and achieved) are often advertised, combined numbers almost always obscure successes and failures to optimize the desired numbers of various ranks or job-specific specialties. Even when Russian numbers are made public, “the precise impact of manning shortfalls is hard to quantify, because official figures on recruitment and retention are consistent only in their unreliability.”<sup>325</sup>

The issue of conscription complicates the question of Russia’s military retention goals and progress. Senior Russian officials have had varying perspectives on the benefits of short-term conscription service, in which traditional retention is not the objective, and there are disagreements within the MoD and there have been shifting policies in recent years. Some senior Russian officials have viewed the conscription service as developing a “large strategic reserve with at least some military training,”<sup>326</sup> instilling patriotism, and binding Russian society to its military.<sup>327</sup> Furthermore, some conscripts effectively are recruited to serve under a contract enlistment term or attend officer-producing military academies, and numerous individuals serving in other elements of the Russian state security services might have begun their careers in the military. These cases likely would not be considered a complete retention loss in the context of overall return on investment to the state, even if military retention numbers alone do not suggest so. Some personnel also will be found ineligible or undesirable for retention or otherwise administratively separated from service.

Acknowledging these challenges, we primarily focus on Russian military personnel that voluntarily committed to a new, fixed term of service within the MoD when their current obligated term of service ended. The following description of conventional career progressions highlights the most common decision points presented to Russian service members as of December 2021.

### *Terms of Service and Career Progression*

Using the definition of retention described previously,<sup>328</sup> distinctions in terms of service are important to understanding the Russian Armed Forces’ retention objectives and performance. Since 2007, Russians drafted to be conscripts serve a one-year term, after which they move to the mobilization reserve, sign an enlistment contract, or attend a military school that would lead to

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<sup>324</sup> Vasile Sminchise, “Military Retention. A Comparative Outlook,” *Journal of Defense Resources Management*, Vol. 7., No. 1, July 2016.

<sup>325</sup> Giles, 2017.

<sup>326</sup> Grau and Bartles, 2016.

<sup>327</sup> Barndollar, 2020.

<sup>328</sup> We define *retention* as the “rate at which military personnel voluntarily choose to stay in the military after their obligated term of service has ended.” For more details, see Kapp, 2021.

an officer commission. Whether completing a 12-month conscription period or signing an enlistment contract without serving time as a conscript, a typical first enlistment contract obligates the individual to a two- or three-year period of service.<sup>329</sup> Newly enlisted service members have a three-month probationary period, during which the commander of their military training unit determines whether to discharge or retain individuals for continued service.<sup>330</sup>

Typically, if individuals do not wish to continue their service following the completion of their first enlisted contract period under peacetime conditions, they are placed into the mobilization reserve along with conscripts who successfully completed their year of service. If first-term contract soldiers wish to continue their service in the latter half or at the completion of their first enlisted contract, they generally have two options: attend a military educational institution on a path toward becoming an officer or sign a second enlistment contract for another two- or three- year term of enlistment. Within the second term of enlistment, personnel become eligible to attend an NCO academy. Those attending an NCO training program (such programs are conducted at existing military universities) sign a contract to complete the 34-month training and then serve a minimum of three more years.<sup>331</sup> If individuals do not choose to attend a military school on a path toward becoming an NCO or officer, they can also sign a third enlistment contract. During this third contracted enlistment term of service and subsequent ones, enlisted personnel might be eligible to attend a school to become a warrant officer (*praporshchik/michman*), take courses to become a junior officer, or continue with subsequent enlistment contracts.

The path toward becoming an officer might start at the end of a conscription term, following an enlistment contract, or directly from a civilian educational institution. If accepted to one of several military academies, these cadets complete a four- or five- year period of education and training. The academies place a large emphasis on tactics and military occupational specialty (MOS) proficiency; therefore, newly commissioned lieutenants go directly from their academy to take command of their first platoon.<sup>332</sup> A common first term of service for officers (and warrant officers) is five years.<sup>333</sup>

The rest of an officer's peacetime career path includes terms of service with breaks for attending additional training and education programs. For example, a maneuver officer in the Ground Forces will move through junior officer assignments to master their specific branch of arms before attending a yearlong training course, such as the Combined Arms Academy, and

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<sup>329</sup> Grau and Bartles, 2016.

<sup>330</sup> Major Charles K. Bartles, "Russian Armed Forces, Enlisted Professionals," *NCO Journal*, March 11, 2019.

<sup>331</sup> MoD, "Promotion from an Enlisted to a Non-Commissioned Officer, Contract Service," webpage, undated-t.

<sup>332</sup> Grau and Bartles, 2016.

<sup>333</sup> Valentyn Badrak, Lada Roslycky, Mykhailo Samus, and Volodymyr Kopchak, "Russia's Desperation for More Soldiers Is Taking It to Dark Places," blog post, Atlantic Council, April 24, 2017.

then return to the operational force to command a regimental- or brigade-sized unit.<sup>334</sup> This general description of terms of service and possible career paths is depicted in Figure 4.1, using terminology explained in Tables B.1 and B.2 in Appendix B. Dashed lines represent likely opportunities for service members to exit the Armed Forces.

Similar to most hierarchical organizations, the Russian Armed Forces cannot have and does not want every individual progressing through full career paths depicted in Figure 4.1 to become a senior officer, warrant officer, or NCO. As with other militaries, it is assumed that Russian officials have retention objectives at each echelon and type of contract, objectives that are constantly in flux given the needs of the military and policies that are regularly debated (as with the ratio of conscripts and contract enlistments) and updated.<sup>335</sup> Although the details of these fluctuating objectives and how well specific retention goals are being met are not publicly announced, a closer look at retention trends helps describe the overall state of Russia's military manpower situation as of December 2021, particularly in terms of retaining contract or professional troops.

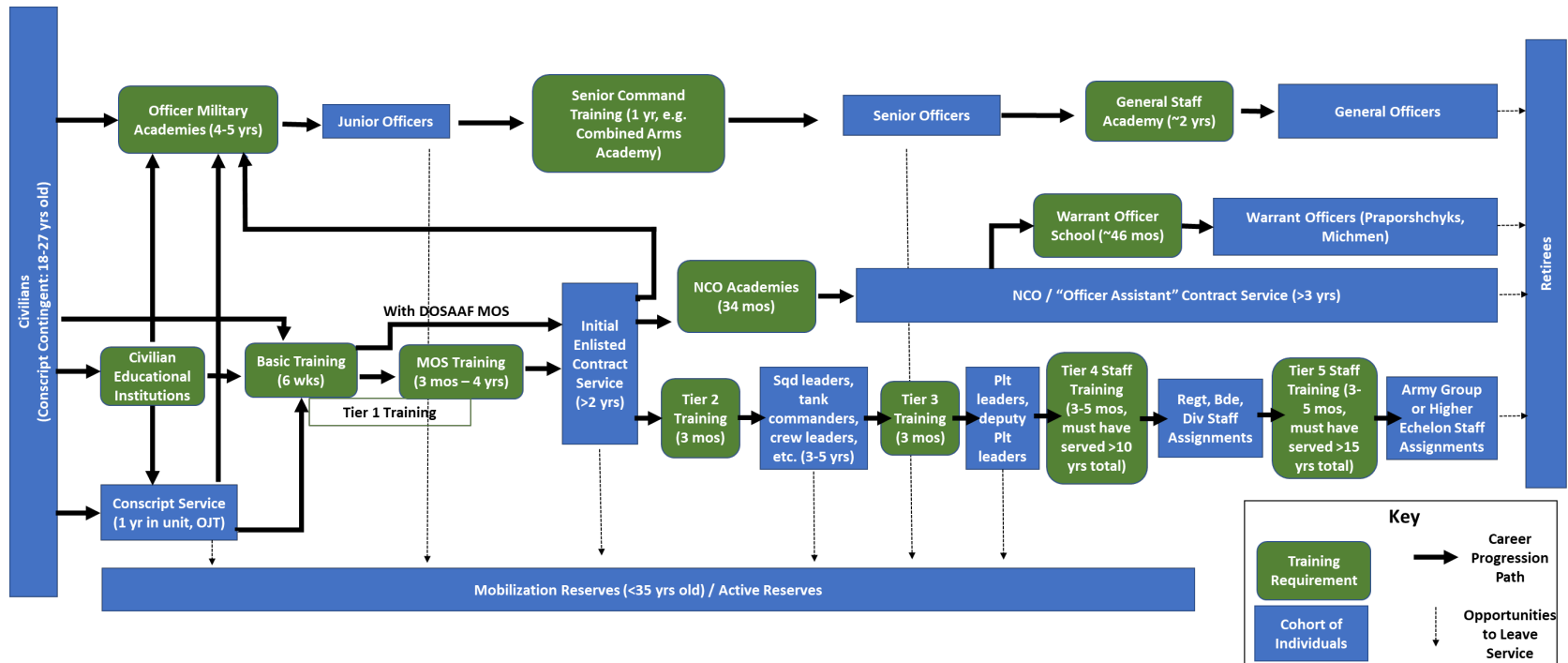
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<sup>334</sup> Grau and Bartles, 2016.

<sup>335</sup> James V. Marrone, *Predicting 36-Month Attrition in the U.S. Military: A Comparison Across Service Branches*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-4258-OSD, 2020.



Figure 4.1. Career Progression of Individuals Within the Russian Armed Forces



SOURCE: RAND analysis of data from E. Vatulkin, V. Zatsepin, N. Kardashevskiy, Ye. Khrustalev, and V. Tsymbal, *Problems and Practice of the Transition of the Military Organization of Russia to a New Recruiting System* [Проблемы и практика перехода военной организации России на новую систему комплектования], Gaidar Institute for Economic Policy [Институт экономики переходного периода], No. 75, September 22, 2004; MoD, "Promotion from an Enlisted to a Non-Commissioned Officer," webpage, undated-s; Grau and Bartles, 2016; Bartles, 2019.

NOTE: OJT = on-the-job training.

## *Retaining Conscripts*

Typically, the majority of conscripts who complete their 12-month term of service join the mobilization reserve as intended and in support of the benefits described in the Chapter 2 conscript-contract discussion. Some of these individuals also will join the ranks of other government organizations, including agencies comprising Russia's larger security apparatus. Additionally, the Duma drafted a bill to allow qualified conscripts to fulfill their commitment in the Federal Security Service (FSB) during their conscription service to "replenish security agencies with young promising specialists." Similar programs are said to exist for the civil service emergency department, Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR), and National Guard.<sup>336</sup> Furthermore, recent Russian laws have "given priority to individuals who have done military service in filling top civil service positions."<sup>337</sup>

Arguably, this could be considered a form of retention. The relatively small investment made in one year of conscript training is carried forward into other forms of government service. However, with a sole focus on military retention, those conscripts that choose to continue their service within Russia's Armed Forces generally have two paths, as outlined in Figure 4.1: (1) sign an enlistment contract to become a professional soldier (some who join the mobilization reserve also later return to sign an enlistment contract) or (2) attend a military academy as a commissioning source to become an officer.<sup>338</sup> The former route, conscripts agreeing to sign on for an enlistment contract, has been Russia's traditional recruitment pool for contract soldiers, although the MoD does not offer statistics for how many come from conscripts versus those recruited directly into contract service from the civilian population (a practice only in place since 2012).<sup>339</sup>

In recent years, the MoD instituted a program that likely increased initial enlistment contracts but has complicated official figures and retention issues. On being called up for conscription, draftees have had the option of signing a two-year enlisted contract instead of serving their mandatory one-year conscription term. It is unclear whether these individuals were counted toward conscription quotas (after all, these individuals technically did not evade the draft) or additional enlisted contracts. In addition, although the numbers of individuals who were drafted and then accept this initial offer is unknown, it is likely that many individuals preferred the better incentives and service conditions of a professional soldier over those of conscripts.<sup>340</sup>

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<sup>336</sup> "Conscripts Were Offered Permission to Conclude a Contract with the FSB" ["Военнослужащим-срочникам предложили разрешить заключать контракт с ФСБ"], RIA Novosti, November 1, 2021.

<sup>337</sup> Igor Rozin, "Why Doesn't Russia Ditch Conscription?" *Russia Beyond*, November 26, 2020.

<sup>338</sup> Vatulkin et al., 2004.

<sup>339</sup> Roger McDermott, "Russia's Glacial Progress Toward a Professional Army," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Vol. 11, No. 201, November 11, 2014.

<sup>340</sup> Bartles, 2019.

Contract service members enjoy similar rights as officers, in that they have clearly defined working hours, can afford to live in an apartment instead of barracks, have job security, and enjoy other freedoms and benefits unknown to most conscripts (discussed in more detail later).<sup>341</sup> Thus, if the MoD counts drafted individuals who choose the relatively short “two-and-done” contract as professional soldiers (which they are, by Russia’s definitions),<sup>342</sup> the relative ratio of contract enlistments to conscripts undoubtedly has increased. However, the quality of a two-year contract soldier compared with a one-year conscript (previously a two-year conscript) might not be as significant as the title suggests, a topic we return to in the next chapter. Furthermore, it is not clear that individuals who choose a short, two-year contract enlistment are much more likely to remain in the military past their initial commitment. According to one analysis in 2017, despite increased emphasis on recruiting contract soldiers, numbers of overall professional service members remained stagnant, which likely is attributable to fewer individuals choosing to serve additional terms after their initial short-term contract than the MoD desired.<sup>343</sup>

### *Retaining Contract Enlisted Personnel*

As noted in the preceding chapter, while conscripts remained a large share of military personnel, Russia continued its modernization efforts toward increasing the percentage of professional or contract (*kontraktniki*) service members in the years leading up to the February 2022 invasion of Ukraine. Most combat units in the Ground Forces, for example, included professional soldiers as of 2020,<sup>344</sup> and in 2020, the MoD claimed that there were almost twice as many contract personnel as conscripts,<sup>345</sup> a claim that has been reiterated by other sources. Working from a total of 295,000 contract troops at the end of 2014, Moscow’s prior goal was to have 500,000 service members on contract by 2021,<sup>346</sup> but that goal was later dropped. By March 2020, the last date that numbers were updated publicly, the MoD announced that it had reached 405,000 contract service personnel and updated its goal to reach 475,000 by 2027.<sup>347</sup> In December 2022, the MoD updated these numbers again to an aspirational goal of 695,000, with no target date provided.<sup>348</sup> Thus, although official figures are difficult to verify and national

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<sup>341</sup> Nikolai Litovkin, “Will Russia Be Able to Win a War Without Conscripts?” *Russia Beyond*, April 22, 2019.

<sup>342</sup> Bartles, 2019.

<sup>343</sup> Aleksandr Golts, “How Many Soldiers Does Russia Have?” *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Vol. 14, No. 114, November 8, 2017b.

<sup>344</sup> Bowen, 2020b.

<sup>345</sup> MoD, “Russian Defense Ministry Board Session, 2020,” webpage, 2020b.

<sup>346</sup> “The Russian Army Will Have More Than Half a Million Contract Service Members,” 2020.

<sup>347</sup> Yuriy Gavrilov, “It Will be Possible to Get a Contract Service Online” [“На контрактную службу можно будет устроиться онлайн”], *Rossiyskaya gazeta*, March 12, 2020.

<sup>348</sup> IISS, “Chapter Five: Russia and Eurasia,” *Military Balance*, Vol. 121, Abingdon, UK, 2021, p. 170; Associated Press, “Russian Military Announces Plan to Expand, Create New Units,” December 21, 2022.

objectives continue to shift, if reported increases over the past decade are to be believed, it is fair to say that Russia has made progress toward making professional enlistment a more attractive career option (more in the following paragraphs) both to potential recruits and existing members of the Armed Forces.<sup>349</sup>

However, the ratio of contract to conscript service members differs across services and even more so among specific job specialties, suggesting varying retention and recruitment balances and objectives across the MoD. For example, the Airborne Forces (VDV) may have had a composition of close to 80 percent professional soldiers by 2022.<sup>350</sup> Russia's navy also pushed to maximize the number of contract service members crewing naval vessels and could have professional sailors operating all submarines and 90 percent of surface ships, as of 2018.<sup>351</sup> Similarly, the VKS has been said to have filled its combat units—particularly those with complex systems—with contract service members, while assigning conscripts to less demanding support billets.<sup>352</sup> While specific retention or growth objectives are not made publicly available, these trends imply that Moscow prioritizes deliberately maintaining professional service members in some areas and continuing conscript service in others.

### *Retaining Officers*

The officer corps has seen drastic changes over recent decades. Tens of thousands of officers left the Russian military following the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the 2008 New Look reforms cut many more. These cuts shifted the officer rank composition across the Armed Forces from one of an egg shape to more of a pyramid: There were now significantly more lieutenants and the military lost about three quarters of all majors and two thirds of colonels.<sup>353</sup> The 2008 reforms also abolished all warrant officer (*praporshchik/michman*) positions, initially converting them to contract NCOs, but the MoD later brought back these ranks for those completing the 46-month warrant officer school.<sup>354</sup>

Whereas Western militaries rely heavily on a professional NCO corps, the backbone of the Russian Armed Forces remains its officer corps. Unlike in many Western models, Russian officers “are the primary trainers, disciplinarians, and repositories for institutional

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<sup>349</sup> Giles, 2017.

<sup>350</sup> “Russian Federation—Army,” *World Armies*, updated August 8, 2022.

<sup>351</sup> “Russian Federation—Navy,” *World Navies*, updated February 24, 2022.

<sup>352</sup> “Russian Federation—Air Force,” *World Air Forces*, updated June 20, 2022. In general, conscripts with only a year of service are given assignments with few training requirements, such as “drivers, cooks, laborers, or lower-level maintenance personnel,” according to Russian military expert Charles Bartles. Charles K. Bartles, “Russian Armed Forces: Enlisted Professionals,” Army University Press, March 11, 2019.

<sup>353</sup> Michael Gjerstad and Niels Bo Poulsen, “Russian Military Culture—The Achilles Heel of the Reform Process?” in Niels Bo Poulsen and Jørgen Staun, eds., *Russia's Military Might: A Portrait of Its Armed Forces*, Copenhagen: Djof Publishing, 2021.

<sup>354</sup> Grau and Bartles, 2016.

knowledge.”<sup>355</sup> Russian military units also tend to be smaller to facilitate officer command and control in the absence of strong NCO leadership and effective NCOs serving in unit staffs.<sup>356</sup> One consequence of this system is that there are relatively more opportunities for Russian officers to lead troops and more leadership billets the personnel system must fill. Still, as Russia continues to maintain its NCO corps and reintroduce warrant officers to conduct technical tasks, the ratio of officers to professional enlisted service members likely is growing closer to that of Western militaries.<sup>357</sup>

However, recent transformations of Russia’s officer corps have not been smooth. Initial reforms started by Serdyukov included a halt to accepting new cadets into military academies between 2009 and 2011. This was in response to a surplus of officers. At the time, there were no open positions for new lieutenants, and some were being assigned to NCO billets. However, this was followed by a major deficit in officer numbers by 2015 and 2016, to which the Main Directorate of Personnel responded by using “non-standard” methods to find thousands of officers to fill vacant billets. Most commonly, previously dismissed personnel were recalled, and “special recruiters” were sent to entice reserve officers to return to active service.<sup>358</sup> A few years after these initiatives were reportedly showing signs of success, the MoD announced that officer positions were staffed at more than 96 percent in 2020 which included about 13,000 new academy graduates entering service that year as well.<sup>359</sup>

## Motivators of Retention in the Russian Armed Forces

We found evidence that Russian military scholars have looked to the U.S military’s experience for insights on how to transition to a force structure that increasingly relies on volunteer personnel (contract soldiers) over conscripts. Thus, it is helpful to briefly review how this transition proceeded in the United States.

When the United States transitioned to an all-volunteer force, a key concern for policymakers was how to recruit, train, and retain high-quality personnel.<sup>360</sup> The U.S. military had to compete with other opportunities for talent (e.g., civil service, private employers, and competing civilian college benefits associated with the federal student loan program).<sup>361</sup> Furthermore, the U.S.

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<sup>355</sup> Grau and Bartles, 2016, p. 23.

<sup>356</sup> Grau and Bartles, 2016.

<sup>357</sup> Grau and Bartles, 2016.

<sup>358</sup> Aleksandr Golts, “The Russian Army Suffers Deficit in Officers,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Vol. 14, No. 25, February 27, 2017.

<sup>359</sup> MoD, 2020b.

<sup>360</sup> Bernard D. Rostker, *I Want You! The Evolution of the All-Volunteer Force*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, MG-265-RC, 2006; and David R. Segal, *Recruiting for Uncle Sam: Citizen and Military Man-Power Policy*, Lawrence, Kan.: University Press of Kansas, 1989.

<sup>361</sup> Segal, 1989.

military had to compete to retain talent after spending resources to train and develop talent over time. Consequently, the U.S. military invested in studies and analysis on the workplace dynamics of its units, training for its leaders, reenlistment bonuses, housing, various support programs, and health care for personnel and their families.

During the 1970s, policymakers and scholars in the United States began to focus on the motivations of service members to enlist and stay in the military as a career. One popular model from this work is the institutional-occupational model, which conceived of two sets of values that motivate the service of military personnel.<sup>362</sup> The first are *institutional values*, defined by values and norms that transcend the self-interest of individuals (e.g., service to the country). The second are *occupational values*, defined by self-interested goals that civilian employees seek out in the marketplace (e.g., salary, benefits). Some scholars proposed that service members are “pragmatic professionals” insofar as they might embrace both sets of values to varying degrees.<sup>363</sup>

Some Russian scholars have explicitly or implicitly cited literature on the institutional-occupational model that was developed in the 1970s.<sup>364</sup> We draw from this model to understand the tangible (pay and benefits) and intangible (unit cohesion, leadership, morale, patriotism) benefits that Russian military leaders could try to leverage to improve retention.

Additionally, these benefits are emphasized in reports presented by the military leadership at the annual expanded meeting of the Collegium (the board) of the MoD of the Russian Federation. Table 4.1 presents an overview of which topics were mentioned in Shoigu’s reports over the years (Appendix A displays a more detailed description of what specifically he highlighted as achievements).

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<sup>362</sup> Charles C. Moskos, Jr., “From Institution to Occupation: Trends in Military Organization,” *Armed Forces and Society*, Vol. 4, No. 1, November 1977; and Charles C. Moskos, “Institutional/Occupational Trends in Armed Forces: An Update,” *Armed Forces and Society*, Vol. 12, No. 3, Spring 1986.

<sup>363</sup> Segal, 1986.

<sup>364</sup> Ermolov and Karlova, 2018; and Kazakova and Radke, 2020.

**Table 4.1. Coding of Themes Related to Institutional and Occupational Benefits in Sergei Shoigu’s Reports at the Annual Expanded Meeting of the Collegium of the Ministry of Defense, 2014 to 2020**

Factors		2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Occupational	Housing	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Compensation	X					X	X
	Family well-being					X	X	X
Institutional	Good order and discipline			X			X	
	Patriotism	X				X	X	
	Public opinion of the military	X			X			

SOURCE: Select sample of Sergei Shoigu’s reports at the annual Expanded Meeting of the Board of the MoD.

As the table shows, housing remained a main motivator throughout the years. Every year, the report goes into detail about which types of housing were provided. Compensation is mentioned only in recent years, when increases and bonuses were introduced. Family well-being is also an emerging topic. The minister highlights the achievements in finding employment for the spouses of the service members and providing preschool care for their children. Good order and discipline are mentioned twice. The first mention was in 2016, when Shoigu reported on a decrease in the number of cases of hazing. In 2019, the emphasis was different: the moral and psychological well-being of service members. Patriotism is discussed more in the context of recruitment. However, the importance of a well-rounded, internally oriented system of patriotic education for service members also was featured in one of the reports. Finally, the positive shifts in public opinion toward the military are noted in 2017.<sup>365</sup>

### *Occupational Benefits*

We define *occupational benefits* as tangible rewards that motivate service members. These include pay, housing, health coverage, and family benefits, and largely are defined by the marketplace. In civilian society, employees negotiate with employers for these tangible benefits.<sup>366</sup> In general, our review of recent Russian military literature identified a focus on three types of occupational benefits: housing, compensation, and family support. Based on research on the U.S. military, we posit that these tangible benefits have represented a strategic human resources tool for military retention in Russia.<sup>367</sup> In turn, such improvement is likely to increase

<sup>365</sup> For more details on Shoigu’s statements and references to specific reports, please see Table A.1 in Appendix A.

<sup>366</sup> Chris Bourg and Mady Wechsler Segal, “The Impact of Family Supportive Policies and Practices on Organizational Commitment to the Army,” *Armed Forces and Society*, Vol. 25, No. 4, 1999.

<sup>367</sup> Beth J. Asch, *Setting Military Compensation to Support Recruitment, Retention, and Performance*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-3197-A, 2019.

service members' willingness to remain in the military.<sup>368</sup> Generally, while the institutional values discussed later in this chapter were important motivators to some Russian personnel, these intangible benefits did not appear to offset the need for these tangible benefits.

Housing is one type of occupational benefit for military service that directly affects the well-being of personnel and their families. Research on Western militaries has found consistent evidence that family well-being is a key variable for retention intentions of service members.<sup>369</sup> Thus, we assume that, under conditions similar to those that existed before the 2022 invasion of Ukraine, housing is an occupational benefit that will affect retention of contract personnel in the Russian military. To illustrate this assumption, one warrant officer in the Russian military with 14 years of experience said the following in an interview conducted sometime between 2006 and 2007:

I live with my parents and a brother in a three-room apartment with adjacent rooms. I am not on good terms with my relatives. In order to be placed on the waiting list for getting my own apartment from the military unit the total area of our apartment should be two square meters less. The total area includes rooms, the kitchen, the corridor, and the balcony. If I decide to marry we'll live on my balcony. If I choose to live in a hostel—it will be deterioration of living conditions. Thus I cannot get on the waiting list for another five years. It is a vicious circle.<sup>370</sup>

As discussed at length in earlier chapters, military housing has been an ongoing concern for Russian service members and their families dating back to the fall of the Soviet Union, and it remains a key factor in retention. One survey of 600 field-grade officers (majors, lieutenant colonels, and colonels) across Russia in 1995 found low levels of satisfaction with various “external rewards” of military life, including the state of housing.<sup>371</sup> In 2006 and 2007, another survey of 510 Russian soldiers showed that housing remained a top social problem for these personnel, with 67.7 percent self-reporting housing-related concerns.<sup>372</sup> And, in another survey from 2011 by the Sociology Center of the Russian Armed Forces that used a sample of 1,200

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<sup>368</sup> Nikolay Prokhorov, “Officer Contract” [“Офицерский контракт”], *VPK. Voенно-Promyshlennyy Kur'er*, No. 26, July 11, 2007.

<sup>369</sup> For examples, see Sarah O. Meadows, Terri Tanielian, Benjamin Karney, Terry Schell, Beth Ann Griffin, Lisa H. Jaycox, Esther M. Friedman, Thomas E. Trail, Robin Beckman, Rajeev Ramchand, Natalie Hengstebeck, Wendy M. Troxel, Lynsay Ayer, and Christine Anne Vaughan, “The Deployment Life Study: Longitudinal Analysis of Military Families Across the Deployment Cycle,” *RAND Health Quarterly*, Vol. 6, No. 2, January 13, 2017, PMC5568161; and Bourg and Segal, 1999.

<sup>370</sup> Surkova, 2010.

<sup>371</sup> Deborah Yarsike Ball and Theodore P. Gerber, “The Political Views of Russian Field Grade Officers,” *Post-Soviet Affairs*, Vol. 12, No. 2, 1996.

<sup>372</sup> Surkova, 2010.



officers across all services, housing was self-reported as a top issue of respondents.<sup>373</sup> Thus, it is no surprise that improving housing conditions was listed as one of the seven objectives in the social development strategy of the Russian military for the period up to 2020.<sup>374</sup>

The MoD prioritized the building of family housing units and private apartments for contract service personnel. Most older bases and housing were built in the Soviet era with a different military in mind: Bases built prior to the 1990s were designed with the expectation that a majority of personnel (60–70 percent) would be bachelor conscripts and living in dormitory housing and the rest would be in officer housing. There were insufficient job opportunities for wives, not enough schools, and poorly stocked and maintained on-base foodstuffs and home goods for purchase.<sup>375</sup> But with professional enlisted troops converting to more than 50 percent of a unit's manning and the need to improve service conditions, there became an acute need to rethink, redesign, and build new basing infrastructure. This applied not only to dormitories and apartment buildings but also amenities and social supports, such as elementary schools (especially in remote areas), social clubs, and recreational centers.<sup>376</sup> By 2008, the MoD planned to change on-base housing to around 30–50 percent family housing.<sup>377</sup> The funding allocated in 2008 would only cover housing for 30 percent of contract servicemen, but that is what the Russian military could afford at that time.<sup>378</sup>

After some tumult, four years later, the MoD prioritized housing in the following way: First priority went to all officers or professional enlisted who did not have housing (Moscow, Saint Petersburg, and Kaliningrad and surrounding regions were the most difficult regions in which to find housing), second priority was the mass construction of new units of housing to be built, and third priority was the mortgage assistance program, discussed in detail in the preceding chapter, which would assist soldiers to rent or purchase their own homes.<sup>379</sup> At one point, the MoD even considered using pre-fabricated housing—like that used by NATO militaries—but this appears to have been abandoned because of unfamiliarity or harsh Russian climates.

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<sup>373</sup> Vladimir Veremchuk and Dmitry Krutinin, “Image of the Commander of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation in Military Teams” [“Имидж командира Вооруженных Сил Российской Федерации в воинских коллективах”], *Sotsiologicheskiye issledovaniya*, Vol. 4, No. 348, 2013.

<sup>374</sup> Minister of Defense of the Russian Federation, “On the Establishment of a Commission of the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation for the Implementation of the Strategy of Social Development of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation” [“О создании комиссии министерства обороны Российской Федерации по реализации стратегии социального развития вооруженных сил Российской Федерации”], No. 241, 2008.

<sup>375</sup> Aleksey Naydenov, “How to Attract a Contract Soldier” [“Чем привлечь контрактника”], *Armeiskii sbornik*, No. 9, September 30, 2005.

<sup>376</sup> Victoria Lipinskaya, “Young Officers Wish to Serve, and Serve Well,” *Na Strazhe Zapoliar'ia*, No. 91, November 12, 2008.

<sup>377</sup> Vasily Lavrenyuk and Sergey Knyazkov, “In Search of Optimal Solutions” [В поиске оптимальных решений], *Krasnaya zvezda*, No. 141, August 9, 2008.

<sup>378</sup> Konstantin Raschepkin and Viktor Pyakov, “The Way to Professionals” [“Путь в профессионалы”], *Na boevom postu*, Nos. 69–70, 2008.

<sup>379</sup> Lavrenyuk and Knyazkov, 2008.

Between 2008 and 2015, Shoigu claimed that 244,000 family housing units and 226,000 bachelor apartments had been provided.<sup>380</sup> By 2014, 37,000 mortgage assistance subsidies were in use for officers and contract soldiers who met service conditions.<sup>381</sup> There were also plans to provide monthly renters' assistance of 3,600 rubles, plus 600 additional rubles for each family member.<sup>382</sup>

As described in Chapter 3, there have been several ways for Russian military personnel to receive housing in recent years. The government is obliged to provide housing for all contract service members, warrant officers, sergeants, sergeants first class, and officers within three months of signing the contract. They can either live in provided housing or be compensated for renting accommodation on their own. An accumulative mortgage system (*nakopitel'no-ipotechnaya sistema*) is the main way to get permanent housing.<sup>383</sup> It also is possible to receive support for purchasing housing at once (*zhilishchnaya subsidiya*). This option is open for those who served for 20 years or are under special circumstances, such as an inability to continue military service because of health issues for at least ten years. The size of the accommodation is strictly regulated on the basis of number of family members. Colonels, unit commanders, people with honorary degrees, professors at military higher education institutions, holders of advanced degrees, and service members involved in research can receive additional space.<sup>384</sup>

In one 2016–2017 survey of unnamed Russian military units, researchers reported that about 64 percent of contract personnel self-reported that their military work conditions would be unattractive to existing and future recruits. Furthermore, 66 percent of these respondents believed that a lack of proper housing could decrease the attractiveness of the military service.<sup>385</sup>

There is some evidence that the Russian military has made progress in improving housing conditions. For example, a 2018 survey of 410 personnel from the Aerospace Forces in the Moscow Region (of the Western military district) found that self-reported satisfaction with

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<sup>380</sup> “Shoigu Announced the Completion of Major Transformations in the Armed Services” [“Шойгу заявил о завершении масштабных преобразований в Вооруженных силах”], TASS, April 15, 2021.

<sup>381</sup> “Shoigu Announced the Completion of Major Transformations in the Armed Services,” 2021.

<sup>382</sup> Shoigu, 2021.

<sup>383</sup> After signing a contract, a service member can apply for this program. Each year, the government puts money in a designated account. After three years of service, service members can use these savings as a down payment for housing. For the duration of service, the government pays the mortgage. If the service member decides to leave the military and the tenure of service is less than ten years, the person has to reimburse the government for all expenses and continue to pay the mortgage (unless the housing has already been purchased).

<sup>384</sup> State Duma of the Russian Federation, 1998.

<sup>385</sup> Anna Morozova and Aleksander Fomin, “Social Assessment of the Quality of the Contingent of Military Personnel Serving Under Contract in the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation” [“Социальная оценка качества контингента военнослужащих, проходящих службу по контракту в вооруженных силах”], *Innovatsionnaya Ekonomika: Perspektivy Razvitiya i Sovershenstvovaniya*, Vol. 4, No. 22, 2017.

housing increased from 25.4 percent in 2005 to 65.85 percent in 2018.<sup>386</sup> This survey showed demographic differences in self-reported satisfaction with housing. For example, women reported more satisfaction with housing than men, younger service members were more satisfied than older members, and command staff reported more satisfaction than non-command staff. Furthermore, respondents who had joined the military more recently also tended to report greater satisfaction in the study, and the percentage decreased as the number of years in service increased. This study reported that 52.63 percent of members serving between one and five years were satisfied with their housing; that percentage declined to 38.46 for those serving between six and ten years, and further declined to 34 percent for those serving ten years or more.

Self-reported levels of satisfaction with military housing have varied by military district. For example, surveys of contract members in the Western and Central Military Districts in 2015 and 2016 suggest that some personnel continue to struggle with housing. One survey of 511 contract service members in the Nizhny Novgorod oblast in the Western Military District, conducted between 2015 and 2016, reported that only 8.6 percent of respondents said that they live in “comfortable” housing. In another survey of 267 contract service members in the Saratov Oblast in the Central Military District, conducted in 2016 and 2017, found that only 32.2 percent reported living comfortably in military housing.<sup>387</sup>

In December 2020, the MoD consolidated the allocation of residential housing for military personnel into a single entity.<sup>388</sup> In 2019, Russia reported that 7,000 service members received permanent housing: 1,900 lived in apartments, 5,100 received housing subsidies, and 33,000 families of personnel received housing.<sup>389</sup>

Furthermore, the Russian government reported that, in 2019, 300,000 service members were part of the savings and mortgage system that allowed the purchase of 100,000 permanent homes. Analysis of press statements published on the MoD website shows that efforts were focused on constructing or renovating private or corporate housing for service members, primarily in the Western and Southern Military Districts. In particular, the MoD reported on providing housing for service members in Moscow, Saint Petersburg, and Kaliningrad. The ministry emphasized specifically that 300 housing units for the VKS were provided in Tula. Those serving in the Caspian flotilla and young lieutenants in the Northern Caucasus (Southern Military District) received new corporate housing. Ninety families of submariners serving on Kamchatka in the

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<sup>386</sup> Maksim Kalinin, *Factors of Satisfaction with Military Service in the Russian Army: Sociological Analysis [Факторы удовлетворенности военной службой военнослужащих российской армии: Социологический анализ]*, dissertation, Penza State University, 2020.

<sup>387</sup> Yuri Bychenko, “Social Security in the Assessments of Military Personnel in Russia’s Regions” [“Социальная защита в оценках военнослужащих российских регионов”], *Research Briefs of the V. I. Vernadsky Crimean Federal University. Sociology. Pedagogy. Psychology [Ученые Записки Крымского Федерального Университета имени В. И. Вернадского. Социология. Педагогика. Психология]*, Vol. 6, No. 72, 2020.

<sup>388</sup> MoD, “FGAU ‘Roszhilkompleks’” [“ФГАУ ‘Росжилкомплекс’”], webpage, undated-e.

<sup>389</sup> MoD, “Social Development” [“Социальное развитие”], webpage, 2019b.

Eastern Military District and the service members in motorized rifle formations, railway battalions, or mixed aviation squadrons in Kyzyl (Central Military District) also were highlighted as receiving housing support in 2021.<sup>390</sup> Generally, despite being on the leadership agenda for a number of years (see Table A.1 in Appendix A), the issue has remained salient enough to be featured in practically all research investigating the satisfaction and motivational factors within the Russian military and to drive legislative changes, such as adding a clause allowing both married service members receive housing privileges separately (previously, one of the partners was disqualified from housing programs).<sup>391</sup>

### Improving Compensation

Compensation in the form of a salary is another occupational benefit. Our review of recent research on the Russian Armed Forces identified several lines of research on military compensation. First, there has been a debate on the role of compensation in motivating contract personnel to enlist. Similar to in the United States during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s,<sup>392</sup> some Russian scholars are debating the role of compensation to motivate Russian service members. These scholars have insisted that the higher values that the service entails are reflected even in the name: Russian service members received an allowance (*dovol'stvie*) and not a salary. Their primary motivation is nonmaterial (pride in serving their country, doing a job of “real men”).<sup>393</sup> However, the surveys of service members that will be further discussed indicate that, in reality, compensation (along with housing) typically is a top concern reported by service members. In the early 2000s, insufficient pay and inadequate housing were identified as the main reasons why young lieutenants decided to leave the military. Some considered that the compensation was not enough to compensate for their physical and mental load.<sup>394</sup> They left the service for this reason; even if their prospects of getting a better-paid job outside the military were slim, they would at least regain their personal freedom and live under less stress.<sup>395</sup>

The system of pay in the Russian Armed Forces consists of several components that vary for different groups of service members. First, the salary includes the base pay for military rank and the position the person holds. In addition to that, personnel receive various monthly bonuses for

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<sup>390</sup> MoD, “Department of Housing” [“Департамент жилищного обеспечения”], webpage, undated-w.

<sup>391</sup> Yuriy Gavrilov, “Each of the Military Spouses Will Receive Housing” [“Каждый из военных супругов получит жилье”], *Rossiyskaya gazeta*, No. 235, October 17, 2019b.

<sup>392</sup> Morris Janowitz, “From Institutional to Occupational: The Need for Conceptual Continuity,” *Armed Forces and Society*, Vol. 4. No. 1, Fall 1997.

<sup>393</sup> Yuriy Gavrilov, “Salaries of Military Personnel and Payments to Retirees Increased” [“Денежное довольствие военнослужащих и выплаты отставникам выросли”], *Rossiyskaya gazeta*, No. 10, January 20, 2018; and Andrey Khranchikhin, “Contract or Draft” [“Контрактная или призывная”], *Nezavisimoe voennoe obozrenie*, No. 40, October 27, 2017.

<sup>394</sup> Yevdokimov, 2004.

<sup>395</sup> Aleksey Kolesnikov, “How to Retain a Contract Service Member?” [“Как удержать контрактника на службе?”] *Nezavisimoe voennoe obozrenie*, No. 4, February 2, 2007.

tenure, qualifications, holding a law degree and performing legal work, security clearances, particular working conditions, performing tasks associated with risk, achievements, being an orphan or being left without parental care, or work experience in structural units for the protection of state secrets. Additional bonuses have included a performance award, annual financial aid, and allowance (percentage increase) for service in remote areas.<sup>396</sup> Table A.2 in Appendix A goes into details on the conditions that allow military service members to receive additional payment. These bonuses are established by law,<sup>397</sup> and they have contributed to job security that is sometimes mentioned as a significant advantage in a highly volatile Russian economy.<sup>398</sup>

Second, there have been debates surrounding inequality in military compensation. An extensive list of various additional payments—with some being more objective, i.e., depending on the tenure or titles, and some decided by military leadership based on the priorities at a given point in time—leads to differences in salaries even for those with some similarities (e.g., military experience). Nevertheless, the attempts to recruit and retain those that are the most needed could lead to dissatisfaction. In 2019, for example, the compensation for officers increased only modestly (by 3 to 4 percent), while sergeants and contract soldiers received a 20 percent raise and additional benefits.<sup>399</sup> In 2020, the increase was even more targeted and aimed at retaining those in scarce occupations, first of all, pilots and engineers.<sup>400</sup> In November 2021, another benefit was added for test pilots. To prevent test pilots (whose training costs at least 700 million rubles per person and lasts ten years)<sup>401</sup> from leaving the military for civilian enterprises, a new law raised the promotion ceiling for those individuals. Previously, test pilots were able to receive a rank one step higher than their position up to the level of major. By November 2021, it was possible to do that up to the rank of colonel.<sup>402</sup>

A 2015–2016 survey of 511 contract service members in Nizhny Novgorod oblast (Western Military District) and a 2016–2017 survey of 267 contract service members in Saratov oblast (Central Military District) reflect potential sources of this dissatisfaction.<sup>403</sup> The respondents

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<sup>396</sup> MoD, “Monthly Additional Payments” [“Ежемесячные дополнительные выплаты”], webpage, undated-bb.

<sup>397</sup> State Duma of the Russian Federation, “On the Monetary Allowance of Military Personnel and the Provision of Separate Payments to Them” [“О денежном довольствии военнослужащих и предоставлении им отдельных выплат”], 306-F3, webpage, 2011.

<sup>398</sup> Natal’ya Piskunova, “Stability, Reliability, Professionalism” [“Стабильность, надёжность, профессионализм”], *Krasnaya zvezda*, No. 2, January 13, 2017.

<sup>399</sup> Vladimir Mukhin, “For Sergeants—Additional Payments, for Officers and Retirees—Nothing. The Government Has Found Strange Ways to Keep Professionals in the Army” [“Сержантам—доплаты, офицерам и отставникам – ничего”], *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, December 17, 2019.

<sup>400</sup> Svetlana Bocharova and Aleksey Nikol’skiy, “Service Members in Deficient Specialties Will Receive Additional Payments” [“Военнослужащие дефицитных специальностей получат доплаты”], *Vedomosti*, August 4, 2020.

<sup>401</sup> Vladislav Kulikov, “Test Pilots Will Be Able to Get Higher Ranks” [“Летчики-испытатели смогут получать звания выше своей должности”], *Rossiyskaya gazeta*, November 30, 2021.

<sup>402</sup> Kulikov, 2021.

<sup>403</sup> Bychenko, 2020.

believed that while their quality of life had generally increased over the preceding few years, the pay did not grow enough to accommodate inflation. In both districts, the respondents were divided on the issue of their take-home pay: 47.4 percent of respondents in the Nizhny Novgorod region noted a raise in their pay over the past ten years, and 42.1 percent of respondents believed their compensation remained constant. The results for the Saratov region were 54.3 percent and 38.2 percent, respectively. Unfortunately, no additional demographic information has been provided to better understand this difference.<sup>404</sup>

A 2017 survey of 100 service members from Unit 48409 from Irkutsk (the 345th Missile Regiment, part of the Strategic Rocket Forces), representing the regiment management; division combat control support; and the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd missile divisions, suggested that the perception of pay varies based on one's motivation to join the Russian Armed Forces.<sup>405</sup> According to this study, on the one hand, those who choose a military career for material purposes were more likely to be dissatisfied with the compensation because there was a likelihood of some material benefit being inadequate. But, on the other hand, these individuals might also be easiest to retain. Those who treat compensation as an important factor of job satisfaction (such as, for example, 64 percent of respondents to this particular survey) might be easier to develop a retention strategy for compared with those who are more interested in other intangible benefits. Moreover, this study also looked into any differences in perceptions between those with higher and lower salaries. It found that, for this population, the respondents who were paid more were most likely to express satisfaction with their jobs. As the authors moved through the groups with lower salaries, they observed some downward shift in the satisfaction level.<sup>406</sup>

A 2018 survey of 410 representatives of a military unit of the VKS in the Moscow region (Western Military District), selected using quotas for gender and age, provides more-specific information on the demographic variation of satisfaction with the pay.<sup>407</sup> Generally, it shows that the prevailing majority of respondents were satisfied with their compensation. Roughly 70.73 percent were fully or partly satisfied with the base salary, 81.71 percent were satisfied with the receipt of additional monthly payments, 82.93 percent were satisfied with the performance bonuses that they were awarded, and 74.39 percent were satisfied with their annual support payments. More women reported being fully satisfied with their pay than men (35 percent versus 22.22 percent), and the difference across the age groups was slight. Commanders were generally more satisfied with their pay, although the percentage is still quite low (26.92 percent). Military personnel with secondary education were more satisfied than those with higher education (45.45 percent versus 20 percent). Those who serve a shorter period tend to be less satisfied (from one

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<sup>404</sup> Bychenko, 2020.

<sup>405</sup> Nataliia Fontalova, "The Influence of the Informal Military Team Structure on the Level of Job Satisfaction" ["Влияние неформальной структуры воинского коллектива на степень удовлетворенности трудом"], *Psychology in Economics and Management [Психология в экономике и управлении]*, Vol. 9, No. 2, 2017.

<sup>406</sup> Fontalova, 2017.

<sup>407</sup> Kalinin, 2019.

to five years—15.79 percent). Satisfaction increased with the length of service (from six to ten years, 38.46 percent), but then dropped off again for those serving more than ten years (22 percent).<sup>408</sup>

### Enhancing Family Well-Being

There is some evidence that problems surrounding housing and compensation in the Russian Armed Forces have been amplified for service members with dependents. According to one estimate, roughly 30 percent of contract service members get married in their first or second year of service, and by the end of the fifth year, this number reaches more than 90 percent.<sup>409</sup> The number of 18-year-olds among new recruits has decreased by 4 percent since 2016. Those joining the military are generally older and have more education, which affects their expectations.<sup>410</sup> During the late 1990s, the MoD’s Sociological Center reported that nearly one-quarter of the families of officers and about half of the families of contract service members (warrant officers, sergeants, and privates) had incomes below the poverty line. Those service members with four or more family members were living in extreme misery.<sup>411</sup> The difficulties remained in the early 2000s, which some married officers reported to stay even in hospital rooms or offices, transformed into temporary housing.

As the housing situation began to improve and compensation began to rise, attention shifted to family-related issues. Particularly concerning were child care and education for the children of military service members, as well as finding adequate employment for their spouses. Some service members live in closed military towns where the job opportunities for their spouses are extremely scarce. As the spouses could not find employment, in many cases, married officers—especially officers with children—experienced financial hardships.<sup>412</sup> Moreover, frequent relocation creates additional stress because spouses have to go through this process multiple times. The process also affects children, who are forced to change schools.<sup>413</sup> The schools were also lacking in many locations, so military families faced problems with the absence of or overcrowded child care and education facilities for their children.<sup>414</sup>

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<sup>408</sup> Kalinin, 2019.

<sup>409</sup> Dmitriy Makarov, “Contract Signed?” [“Есть контракт”], *Flag rodiny*, July 9, 2013, p. 73.

<sup>410</sup> Yuriy Gavrilov, “General Staff: Fewer 18-Year-Olds Are Recruited in the Armed Forces” [“Генштаб: В армию стали меньше призывать 18-летних”], *Rossiyskaya gazeta*, March 12, 2021.

<sup>411</sup> MoD, “Russian Army: Social Problems and Ways to Solve Them” [“Российская армия: социальные проблемы и способы их решения”], webpage, undated-v.

<sup>412</sup> Sidorov, 2001.

<sup>413</sup> Aleksander Kuznetsov and Denis Petrichenko, “Contemporary System of Social Protections of Service Members and Their Families” [“Современная система социальной защиты военнослужащих и членов их семей”], *Nauka i Sovremennost’ 2021 [Наука и Современность 2021]*, 71st International Scientific Conference of Eurasian Scientific Association [71я Международная Научная Конференция Евразийского Научного Объединения], Moscow, 2021.

<sup>414</sup> Kovtun, 2004; “Shoigu Announced the Completion of Major Transformations in the Armed Services,” 2021.

With the increasing focus on the professionalization of the Armed Forces, senior political leadership began paying attention to improving conditions for the families of service members. For example, in December 2017, during an annual meeting of the Extended Collegium of the MoD of the Russian Federation, Putin appeared to have requested that the MoD prioritize this work on family-related issues.<sup>415</sup> Formally, this meant that the MoD had to provide monthly reports on progress, which also drew media attention. For example, a year after Putin’s request, Minister of Defense Shoigu announced that it was fulfilled,<sup>416</sup> and he continued emphasizing achievements in this category in his reports,<sup>417</sup> speeches,<sup>418</sup> and interviews up to the time of this writing.<sup>419</sup>

To address these issues, the MoD instituted several benefits designed to support servicemen with families. This was done to retain and reenlist quality personnel in their 20s and 30s, who are likely married and have small children. These benefits include the following:

- 40-hour workweek
- free health care, health insurance and life insurance for the service member
- 45 days of annual vacation with free travel with service members and families (including travel time up to 15 days; for example, by train)
- military pays 80 percent of preschool or child care costs for one or two children, and 90 percent for the third child as a stipend in the service member’s monthly wages<sup>420</sup>
- retirement housing and the right to choose a place of retirement if space is available, with earliest pension age of 45 with a possible earnings of 5,500–7,000 rubles monthly (2008 rubles)<sup>421</sup>
- 50 percent of pay for retirement pension
- doubling of service time counted through service in austere or “hardship” locations
- three-year contract completion bonus.

Another issue is the interconnectedness of the professional development of both service members and their families. The results of one survey, administered between 2016 and 2017 to

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<sup>415</sup> President of Russia, “Expanded Meeting of the Board of the Ministry of Defense” [“Расширенное Заседание Коллегии Министерства обороны”], webpage, December 22, 2017.

<sup>416</sup> “Ministry of Defense Fulfilled Putin’s Order to Provide the Children of the Military with Childcare Placements” [“Минобороны выполнило поручение Путина об обеспечении детей военных местами в детсадах”], TASS, December 25, 2018.

<sup>417</sup> “Shoigu: Since the Beginning of the Year, 5.5 Thousand Families of Military Personnel Received Housing Subsidies” [“Шойгу: С начала года 5,5 тыс. семей военнослужащих получили жилищные субсидии”], TASS, November 2, 2018.

<sup>418</sup> MoD, “On the Results of Performance of the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation in 2018” [“Итоги деятельности Министерства обороны Российской Федерации в 2018 году”], webpage, undated-1.

<sup>419</sup> “Army General Sergei Shoigu: Russian Armed Forces Make a Great Leap in Development” [“Генерал Армии Сергей Шойгу: Вооруженные Силы России сделали огромный рывок в развитии”], *Ural’skie voennye vesti*, No. 20, May 28, 2021b.

<sup>420</sup> I. Kopinashvili, “‘Kindergarten’ Order from the Ministry of Defense” [“‘Детский’ приказ Министра обороны”], *Voennyi Vestnik Iuga Rossii*, No. 8, 2008.

<sup>421</sup> “For You, Contract Soldiers,” 2009.



408 contract service members and sergeants, emphasized the interconnectedness of professional development of military personnel and their families. The authors of this research, Yuriy Bychenko and Taisiya Balandina, regard the ability of all members of military families to have a fulfilling career as a crucial factor of the professional development of the service members themselves.<sup>422</sup> It will both bring additional income—which is very important for most military families—and allow military personnel’s families to realize their own potential. Therefore, according to Bychenko and Balandina, the Armed Forces have to go beyond bandage solutions, such as unemployment benefits or very formal job-searching support. The strategy to support military families should be multifaceted and include such elements as education and training, comprehensive support throughout one’s career, building the skillset flexible enough in situations of frequent relocations, and encouraging self-employment.<sup>423</sup>

Another survey of an undisclosed military unit, administered between 2016 and 2017, showed that 19 percent of respondents believed that the issues with their spouses’ employment were among the shortcomings of the military service, making it less attractive.<sup>424</sup> However, a 2020 survey of 103 military families in Primorskiy Krai (Eastern Military District) demonstrated tensions between the high demands of military career-building and the desire to create opportunities for all members of military families.<sup>425</sup> The authors explored the systems of values that their respondents had and found that one’s own professional development was an important value for 19 percent of the spouses of military service members. Furthermore, this percentage increased after 2012 (previously, 11 percent of spouses reported this as an important value). At the same time, according to the authors, the spouses’ responses indicate that families were still focused on their military service member’s career and were willing to sacrifice the interests of the rest of the family members if needed.<sup>426</sup>

In addition to the material aspect of family well-being, another essential aspect of this well-being is the ability to have a normal family life while serving. Prior to the 2022 invasion of Ukraine, Russian promotional materials for recruiting contract service members also stressed this advantage. Contrary to the lives of conscripts, contract personnel during peacetime conditions are entitled to a 40-hour workweek and can spend more time with their families.<sup>427</sup> Nevertheless, existing surveys show that these family-related concerns remained salient even prior to the 2022 invasion of Ukraine. For instance, a 2017 survey of 297 contract service members in the Western

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<sup>422</sup> Bychenko and Balandina, 2019.

<sup>423</sup> Bychenko and Balandina, 2019.

<sup>424</sup> Morozova and Fomin, 2017.

<sup>425</sup> Yuriy Bychenko and Aleksey V. Egorov, “Values in the Social Culture System of Russian Servicemen’s Families [Ценности в системе социальной культуры семьи российского военнослужащего]”, *Izvestiya Saratovskogo Universiteta. Novaya seriya. Seriya Sotsiologiya. Politologiya*, Vol. 21, No. 1, 2021.

<sup>426</sup> Bychenko and Egorov, 2021.

<sup>427</sup> MoD, “Contract Service. Information for the Candidate” [“Служба по контракту. Информация для кандидата”], webpage, undated-x.

Military District found that only 2.4 percent of the respondents selected having a convenient work schedule as a dimension of the military service's attractiveness. A smaller percentage (0.5 percent) believed that there was less overwork in military service compared with other occupations.<sup>428</sup>

Another survey, conducted in the same year but a different military district (*Primorskiy Krai*, Eastern Military District) showed that these issues might serve as reasons for termination of the contract by service members or for one's decision to not renew a contract. For example, 25 percent of the 972 respondents who discontinued their military service cited the distance from their homes as a reason for this decision (these respondents could select multiple responses). Furthermore, 23 percent of respondents were dissatisfied with having irregular work hours, and 13 percent reported a lack of time off.<sup>429</sup>

### Education Support and Professional NCO Development

One retention initiative targeted enlisted personnel who were interested in higher education after military service. For them, the MoD offered a variety of education benefits tied to remaining in service longer. For example, after the first contract or a period of three years, if a service member passed university entrance exams, they would be offered a noncompetitive slot to the university paid for by the Russian government for part-time classes in the evening. This would allow for the continuation of military service.<sup>430</sup> Alternatively, if a contract soldier enlisted in the Russian military, there were discussions about paying off student loans for time in service agreements.

Designing and implementing a professional NCO education program was another key tenet of the 2008-era New Look reforms. In 2008, Russia announced that it would create a long-term training program for professional NCOs based on warrant officer education. This line of effort, despite being designed well conceptually, proved to be very difficult for the Russian military to sustain on a large scale and did not last long in practice.

While the previous sergeant training program was only five months long, the new effort was to create a two-year professional NCO course. This effort was greeted with enthusiasm, and allegedly 4,000 personnel applied for 800 slots at the Ryazan Higher Airborne School for junior commanders in 2009.<sup>431</sup>

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<sup>428</sup> Maksim Kalinin, "Analysis of Social Problems and the Needs of Contract Military Personnel" ["Анализ социальных проблем и потребностей военнослужащих по контракту"], *Izvestiya vysshikh uchebnykh zavedeniy. Povolzhskiy region. Obshchestvennyye nauki*, Vol. 42, No. 2, 2017.

<sup>429</sup> Angelina Vashchuk and Elena Chernolutskaia, "Social Resources of the Primorsky Krai for Service Under the Contract in Armed Forces of Russia" ["Социальные ресурсы Приморского края для службы по контракту в Вооруженных Силах России"], *Istoricheskaya i sotsial'no-obrazovatel'naya mysl'*, Vol. 11, No. 2, 2019.

<sup>430</sup> Lipinskaya, 2008.

<sup>431</sup> Roger McDermott, "Russian Military Plans New NCO Training Center," *Eurasian Daily Monitor*, Vol. 6, No. 163, September 8, 2009.

However, old habits die hard in the senior ranks of Russian military officialdom: Shortly after this program began in 2011, leadership was instructed to shorten the program’s length to ten to 12 months because senior Russian military officials believed that was all that needed.<sup>432</sup> Senior Russian officers continued to believe that they did not really need professional NCOs modeled in any way after the Western model. In a rather shocking admission, then-Chief of the Russian Ground Forces, Colonel-General Alexander Postnikov, admitted that even though only 30 percent of sergeant billets were occupied in his service, he felt he had more than enough junior officers to make up the shortfall. This admission implies that he and others like him continued to view NCOs and junior lieutenants as somehow interchangeable.<sup>433</sup> After a group of retired officers wrote a report with recommendations to the General Staff to preserve the program, they were rebuked strongly. The General Staff reportedly accused this group of officers of trying to push the Russian military onto the NATO path and declared parts of the report a provocation.<sup>434</sup>

Sergeants in this trial program—who were supposed to receive two years of training—received only half that after the program had already begun. This chaotic start resulted in their receiving units being unimpressed with the results. After this lack of bureaucratic support, underfunding, reductions in goals (from 107,000 professional sergeants to 65,000), and delays for final implementation out to 2016, the lengthy professional NCO training program was quietly abandoned after the reinstatement of the warrant officer rank.<sup>435</sup> However, a version of this idea might exist for warrant officer training programs; by 2019 the Russian Air Force training center had initiated a warrant officer program that would yield a bachelors’ degree and technical training for those participating in it.<sup>436</sup> Since the initial failed attempt, in subsequent years, the military started a five-tier long-term training and education program for professional enlisted service members. This program has occurred at regional training centers, military occupational schools, and service schools, broken up over time. This plan appeared to be based on some aspects of the initial attempt at creating such a program in 2009.<sup>437</sup> Developing an NCO corps that can perform technical specialties and fill positions traditionally held by lower-level officers is an objective derived from recognizing the increasingly technical nature of warfare and acknowledging a bloated officer corps.<sup>438</sup> However, this has been a slow process. In line with the 2008 reforms, by 2010, the MoD had cut 180,000 officers to “reduce costs and free up space for

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<sup>432</sup> Roger McDermott, “Russia’s ‘Spineless’ Army: Paper Sergeants,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Vol. 8, No. 76, April 19, 2011.

<sup>433</sup> Shlykov, 2011.

<sup>434</sup> Shlykov, 2011.

<sup>435</sup> Shlykov, 2011.

<sup>436</sup> Bartles, 2019.

<sup>437</sup> Bartles, 2019.

<sup>438</sup> Makarov, 2010.

NCOs,” but ended up recommissioning 70,000 officers the following year to make up for shortfalls.<sup>439</sup> During this time period, there was also a lag in qualifying new NCOs—the now-defunct lengthy NCO academy (34 months) at the Ryazan Higher Airborne School only recruited 2,000, when senior MoD officials said the military would need 250,000 professional sergeants.<sup>440</sup>

### *Institutional Benefits*

We define *institutional benefits* as the intangible values and norms that transcend the self-interest of individual service members. Put simply, these values are defined by higher-order goals that might include duty, honor, or service to one’s country.<sup>441</sup> In our review of Russian military research, we found evidence that scholars were interested in three types of institutional benefits: good order and discipline, patriotism among service members, and improvement of public perception of the Russian military. We assume that these intangible benefits foster a sense of meaning for Russian personnel that, in turn, will motivate them to continue their military service.

#### Good Order and Discipline

We identified two themes related to good order and discipline: (1) hazing, bullying, and harassment and (2) military leadership. These themes relate to overall culture of serving within the military. While most of this research did not model using quantitative data on retention intentions of Russian service members, we posit that perceptions of good order and discipline affect perceptions of well-being by Russian personnel. These perceptions might affect personnel decisions to continue with military service.

As noted earlier, hazing, bullying, and harassment are widely studied problems within Russian military literature related to good order and discipline.<sup>442</sup> However, hazing also affects job satisfaction and other factors that serve as a basis for retention.

Structural changes within the military, reduced one-year conscript terms, and more-frequent and strict control procedures (including regular physical examinations for conscripts) have decreased the number of incidents but not eliminated harassment entirely.<sup>443</sup> There were several media reports on incidents in recent years. Major incidents, such as mass shootings or

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<sup>439</sup> Felgenhauer, 2011.

<sup>440</sup> Felgenhauer, 2011.

<sup>441</sup> Moskos, 1977; Moskos, 1986.

<sup>442</sup> A. N. Dyachenko, “Hazing in the Russian Army as a Factor of Evasion from the Military Service” [“Неуставные отношения в Российской армии как фактор уклонения от военной службы”], *Sotsial’nyye normy v usloviyakh sovremennykh riskov*, Chelyabinsk State University, 2017.

<sup>443</sup> Timur Bocharov, “Rules, Time and Violence in the Barracks: The Logic of the Institute in Transition” [“Правила, время и насилие в казарме: Логика тотального института в переходный период”], *Zhurnal issledovaniy sotsialnoi politiki*, Vol. 17, No. 3, 2019.

suicides,<sup>444</sup> usually make the headlines and stay on the agenda for a longer period, encouraging public conversation about possible remedies. The media also talks about less widely known cases, and these reports are relatively infrequent.

Recent amendments to the legislation on foreign agents might make it increasingly difficult to attract public attention about the incidents.<sup>445</sup> Publicity is the most effective tool that the victims, their families, and specialized nonprofit organizations have used to counter the hazing. There is even an assumption that *dedovshchina* was significantly reduced because smartphones enabled people to capture the harassment on video and audio, serving as proof for law enforcement.<sup>446</sup> However, in the spring of 2021, the military prohibited the use of smartphones by conscripts, which is another concern expressed by human rights organizations.<sup>447</sup> With new legislation coming into effect, there has been concern that any reporting will be significantly limited by prohibiting publications on many military issues, including physical and mental wellbeing.

At the same time, in an extensive interview in September 2019, Shoigu emphasized that hazing in the Russian military had been eliminated completely. He admitted that some “criminal activities” were being committed within the Armed Forces, but their quantity was low compared with the average crime rate in civilian communities.<sup>448</sup> Shoigu’s rhetoric reflects an interesting shift from the cases of *dedovshchina* as a serious issue to treating the incidents in the military as benign. Annual reports of the Minister of Defense to the expanded meeting of the Collegium of the MoD of Russia also bypass the issue of hazing. Hazing is mentioned only in the 2016 report,

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<sup>444</sup> For example, for some recent media reports from the past few months, see Timofey Borisov, “A Criminal Case Was Initiated on the Beating of a Service Member in the Khabarovsk Krai” [“Возбуждено уголовное дело об избиении военнослужащего в Хабаровском Крае”], *Rossiyskaya gazeta*, September 10, 2021; “Hazing Was ‘Dismissed’. The Authorities Want to Make Violence in the Russian Army Classified Instead of Fighting It” [“Дедовщине объявлен отбой. Власти хотят засекретить насилие в российской армии вместо борьбы с ним”], *Novaya gazeta*, October 12, 2021; “It Became Known That a Unit Where a Russian Conscript Was Found Dead Had Hazing” [“Стало известно о дедовщине в части найденного погибшим российского срочника”], *Lenta.ru*, August 24, 2021.

<sup>445</sup> In December 2020, the State Duma of the Russian Federation adopted changes to several laws, making the rules for those who register as foreign agents and their activities more strict. In particular, foreign agent status can now be assigned to individuals who collect information on the state of the military and military activities (State Duma of the Russian Federation, “On Amendments to Certain Legislative Acts of the Russian Federation in Terms of Establishing Additional Measures to Counter Threats to National Security” [“О внесении изменений в отдельные законодательные акты Российской Федерации в части установления дополнительных мер противодействия угрозам национальной безопасности”], 481-F3, 2020).

<sup>446</sup> Margarita Bocharova, “Crimes Against the Military Service: Disputed Issues and Their Solutions” [“Преступления против военной службы: Спорные вопросы и их решения”], *E-Scio*, 2020.

<sup>447</sup> “The General Staff Explained How the Ban on Smartphones for Conscripts Works” [“В Генштабе объяснили, как работает запрет на смартфоны для призывников”], *RBC*, March 31, 2021.

<sup>448</sup> “Sergei Shoigu Told How They Saved the Russian Army” [“Сергей Шойгу рассказал, как спасали российскую армию”], *Moskovskiy komsomolets*, September 22, 2019.

which claimed that the number of incidents of harassment decreased by 34 percent.<sup>449</sup> Mentions of hazing are absent from all other reports in the 2014 to 2020 time frame.

A reduction in the amount of hazing is believed not only to improve the attractiveness of the military service for those considering whether to continue but also to reduce desertion rates. The desertion rates in the Russian Armed Forces were especially high during the 1990s and early 2000s. While we did not find publicly available data on trends in desertion rates over the years, several reports in Russian military journals and media describe the scale of the problem. For instance, in 1998, an official newspaper of the MoD, the *Red Star*, quoted the Chief Military Prosecutor's Office, which had said that 17,000 service members deserted the Russian military between 1992 and 1998.<sup>450</sup> As noted in Chapter 3, almost 2,300 people deserted between January and July 2002.<sup>451</sup> These incidents were taking place despite the risk of severe punishment (unless it is proved that the person escaped because of hazing or certain circumstances, such as family issues) and abundant information campaigns against desertion.

Between 2010 and 2013, desertion rates appear to have decreased, but they increased again in 2014. However, the overall number of reported cases was smaller than in previous years (29 cases in 2013 and 50 cases in 2014). The apparent rates of desertion and evasion of duties sharply rose in 2014. An article in Russian media outlet *Kommersant* said that this was caused by hazing and a desire to avoid involvement in the conflict in Ukraine.<sup>452</sup> Russian media have regularly published data that suggest that there has been a decrease in the desertion rate. For instance, it was reported that the desertion rate decreased by 10.2 percent in 2019,<sup>453</sup> and decreased by 10.3 percent in 2020.<sup>454</sup> However, anecdotal evidence from the 2022 military intervention in Ukraine indicates that desertion during wartime conditions might be increasingly problematic for Russian military leadership.<sup>455</sup>

Some journalists emphasized that, unlike in previous decades, regular reports that would provide data on desertion, crime rates, and corruption in the military are no longer publicly

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<sup>449</sup> MoD, "On the Results of Performance of the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation in 2016" ["Итоги деятельности Министерства обороны Российской Федерации в 2016 году"], webpage, undated-j.

<sup>450</sup> Oleg Falichev, "How to Cure the Armed Forces from Desertion" ["Как излечить армию от дезертирства"], *Krasnaya zvezda*, No. 168, July 29, 1998.

<sup>451</sup> Viktor Sokirko, "Russian Armed Forces Have Two Problems: Hazing and Deserters. Soldiers Flee Not from the Military, but from the Tyranny" ["В российской армии две беды: 'дедовщина' и дезертиры. Солдаты бегут не от армии, а от произвола"], *Moskovskiy komsomolets*, July 28, 2002.

<sup>452</sup> "The Armed Forces Showed an Increase in Legal Awareness. The Number of Crimes in the Russian Military Continues to Decline" ["Вооруженные силы показали рост правосознания. Число преступлений в российской армии продолжает снижаться"], *Kommersant*, January 14, 2016.

<sup>453</sup> Yuriy Gavrilov, "The Number of Fugitives from the Armed Forces Has Decreased" ["Беглецов из армии стало меньше"], *Rossiyskaya gazeta*, February 27, 2020b.

<sup>454</sup> Anna Svetlova, "The Number of Deserters Has Decreased in Russia" ["В России сократилось число дезертиров"], *gazeta.ru*, February 25, 2021a.

<sup>455</sup> Natasha Bertrand, Katie Bo Lillis, and Jeremy Herb, "Mounting Russian Casualties in Ukraine Lead to More Questions About Its Military Readiness," *CNN*, March 18, 2022.

released by the MoD, making it difficult to analyze recent trends.<sup>456</sup> There is also a lack of public data on criminality. The published reports usually contain generalized data that do not distinguish among types of crimes. Unlike earlier publications that explicitly provided the numbers (e.g., 15,800 crimes committed in the first nine months of 1998, which was 1.6 percent more than for the same period in 15,559 crimes in 1997),<sup>457</sup> more-recent publicly available reports reference percentage changes over time. For example, in 2019, the rate of drug-related crimes decreased by over 11 percent, the rate of negligence-related crimes decreased by 9.8 percent, and the rate of extortion-related crimes decreased by 6.3 percent.<sup>458</sup> On the other hand, instances of corruption increased by 8.8 percent in 2020.<sup>459</sup>

Good order and discipline appeared in several research articles that surveyed military personnel. A 2017 survey of officers and contract service members in Moscow (256 respondents) and Rostov-on-Don (470 respondents)<sup>460</sup> demonstrated an interesting shift in valuing these particular factors depending on when it is considered. Although 63.8 percent of respondents in Moscow and 25.9 percent of respondents in Rostov-on-Don selected “organization, order, discipline in the military” as motivating factors for joining the military, this option was chosen far less frequently for the Moscow respondents and only slightly for Rostov-on-Don responders when they were asked whether it was important for them at the time of the survey.<sup>461</sup>

Second, one’s commander’s personality and ability to maintain good order and discipline also might affect perceptions of military service that could affect retention. A 2017 survey of 972 former servicemen (officers, warrant officers, sergeants, and privates) in Primorskii Krai (Eastern Military District)<sup>462</sup> showed that 8 percent of respondents decided not to renew their contract or terminated it prematurely because of poor treatment by their commander. This reason lags behind others, such as socio-psychological discomfort from overwork, remoteness of one’s duty station from home and family, and irregular working hours. Still, it is mentioned by some service members.<sup>463</sup>

Service members’ perceptions of commanders and those perceptions’ effects on retention were also topics of research in our sample. For example, one study conducted 64 expert

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<sup>456</sup> Vladimir Mukhin, “Every Tenth Crime in the Armed Forces Is Battery” [“Каждое десятое преступление в армии—рукоприкладство”], *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, February 18, 2020.

<sup>457</sup> “Crime Is Not Getting Better” [“Криминогенная ситуация не улучшается”], *Suvorovskii natisk*, No. 147, December 19, 1998.

<sup>458</sup> Yuriy Gavrilov, “The Number of Offenses in the Armed Forces Decreased in 2019” [“Число правонарушений в Вооруженных силах в 2019 году снизилось”], *Rossiyskaya gazeta*, February 18, 2020a.

<sup>459</sup> Anna Svetlova, “There Is Less Hazing and More Corruption in the Russian Armed Forces” [“В российской армии стало меньше дедовщины и больше коррупции”], *gazeta.ru*, March 10, 2021b.

<sup>460</sup> Ludmila Klimenko and Oksana Posukhova, “Professional Guidelines of Russian Military Servicemen: on the Materials of Applied Research” [“Профессиональные установки российских военнослужащих: По материалам прикладного исследования”], *Biznes. Obrazovaniye. Pravo*, Vol. 4, No. 45, 2018a.

<sup>461</sup> Klimenko and Posukhova, 2018a.

<sup>462</sup> Vashchuk and Chernolutskaia, 2019.

<sup>463</sup> Vashchuk and Chernolutskaia, 2019.

interviews with officers from the Main Directorate for Work with Personnel of the Armed Forces, the Main Command of the Ground Forces, and faculty of the Military University, as well as a survey of 1,172 respondents representing all districts, services, and branches of the Armed Forces.<sup>464</sup> The authors found some positive correlation between commanders' personal, moral, and professional qualities and conscripts' satisfaction with military service.

## Patriotism

A sense of patriotism was at the center of the debate over the future development of Russia's Armed Forces since the 1990s.<sup>465</sup> Shoigu emphasized that effective Armed Forces require both patriotism as a core value and the improvement of conditions for those who serve.<sup>466</sup> Those supporting preservation of conscription believed that a complete transition to a contract service would harm the military. One of the arguments, made by Aleksandr Khramchikhin from the Russian Institute for Political and Military Analysis and the Carnegie Moscow Center, was that military service, unlike other professions, cannot be based on material factors of motivation.<sup>467</sup> Khramchikhin's argument is that people choosing to serve should instead be driven by values unique to the Armed Forces, such as a desire to defend one's homeland and pride in protecting the lives and well-being of fellow citizens. He goes on to say that patriotism is the underlying foundation that makes the military stronger: Those who serve purely for material benefits will treat the military as a typical occupation, one of many. They are unlikely to take risks to defend their country against adversaries, and they will not sacrifice their comfort for harsh conditions on the battlefield. Moreover, they could easily leave the military if they find a better material offer despite all the training and support provided for them.<sup>468</sup>

We found evidence of geographic variability in patriotic perceptions in Russian research on their military. For example, pride of belonging to the Russian Armed Forces and military traditions were factors that made military service attractive for 12.7 percent of respondents in a 2017 survey of 297 contract service members in the Western Military District. In their open-ended responses, some members also noted how important and honorable it was to serve their

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<sup>464</sup> Veremchuk and Krutilin, 2013.

<sup>465</sup> Aleksey Arbatov, "The Neverending Dilemma: Draft—Contract" ["Бесконечная дилемма: призыв—контракт"], *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, May 4, 2013. Looking at research on the U.S. military, patriotism is a key motivator for military service along with material benefits like compensation. For more information, see David R. Segal, "Measuring the Institutional/Occupational Change Thesis," *Armed Forces and Society*, Vol. 12, No. 3, Spring 1986.

<sup>466</sup> Andrey Arkadiev, "Shoigu Described How Patriotism and Service to the Homeland are Connected" ["Шойгу рассказал, как связаны патриотизм и служение отечеству"], *Zvezda TV*, August 11, 2021; and "Sergei Shoigu Told How They Saved the Russian Army," 2019.

<sup>467</sup> Khramchikhin, 2017.

<sup>468</sup> Oleg Gorupay, "Contract Extend Not Dismiss" ["Контракт продлить нельзя уволить"], *Krasnaya zvezda*, No. 84, 2006.



country and protect it from its enemies.<sup>469</sup> In a different study from 2017, officers and contract service members in Moscow (256 respondents) and Rostov-on-Don (470 respondents) were surveyed about their motivations to join the military.<sup>470</sup> Results show that 57.4 percent of respondents in Moscow and 65.7 percent of respondents on Rostov-on-Don chose protecting the homeland, duty, and patriotic feelings among the factors driving their motivations. These numbers dropped dramatically for the respondents in Moscow when they were asked about factors that were important to them at the moment. Only 6.4 percent of these respondents selected protecting the homeland, duty, and patriotic feelings among the factors driving their motivations. The difference in responses for Rostov-on-Don was much smaller but still present, with 54.6 percent choosing this option in this case.<sup>471</sup>

A 2014 to 2017 survey of 234 conscripts from Russian scientific companies offers a comparison of perceptions on various aspects of military careers between those who were considering signing a contract to stay in the military and those who were not.<sup>472</sup> Although the numbers are small—especially given the prolonged research period—the existence of such surveys is important because of the increased emphasis that Russian military leadership places on attracting more people with technical backgrounds. The importance of the retention of these individuals has been repeatedly emphasized by the military leadership. Presenting the state of the military in 2017, Shoigu emphasized that about a quarter of those serving in the scientific companies decide to continue their career in the military. Since these units were first established, 365 service members in these units became officers.<sup>473</sup> In 2019, this number increased to 912, but it included those who became officers or started working for the defense enterprises.<sup>474</sup>

The aforementioned research looks into the differences in perceptions of various aspects of a military career that could have affected a service member’s desire to stay in service. In a 2014–2017 survey of 234 conscripts who served in the scientific companies in the Zhukovsky-Gagarin Air Force Academy, researchers asked these personnel to rate their needs on a scale from one to five (where one represented needs were not implemented and five represented fully

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<sup>469</sup> Kalinin, 2017.

<sup>470</sup> Klimenko and Posukhova, 2018a.

<sup>471</sup> Klimenko and Posukhova, 2018a.

<sup>472</sup> Ekaterina N. Karlova and Andrey Y. Grigorov, “Scientific Companies as a Personnel Resource for Military Scientific Organizations” [“Научные роты как кадровый ресурс военных научных организаций”], *Public Service [Государственная Служба]*, Vol. 19, No. 3, 2017, pp. 25–30. For more details, see discussion of these units in Chapter 3.

<sup>473</sup> MoD, “On the Results of Performance of the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation in 2017” [“Итоги деятельности Министерства обороны Российской Федерации в 2017 году”], webpage, undated-k.

<sup>474</sup> MoD, “Expanded Meeting of the Board of the Ministry of Defense of Russia: On the Results of Performance of the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation in 2019” [“Расширенное заседание Коллегии Министерства Обороны Российской Федерации”], webpage, undated-u.

implemented).<sup>475</sup> The study separated these respondents by those unwilling to continue service versus those willing to continue serving. Those who self-reported an unwillingness to continue serving and those who reported a willingness to service both ranked “the ability to contribute to the development and progress of [my] own country” as high (3.56 and 4.29, respectively). This factor received the same rating as the needs surrounding one’s ability to get housing and only slightly less than the social benefits (4.40).

### Public Perceptions of the Russian Armed Forces

Public perception of the military is another institutional factor that could influence the retention of Russian personnel. The esteem and regard of military service among Russian civilian society has, in theory, the capacity to reaffirm a sense of service to the country and overall identity as a service member. We know from research on the U.S. military that these perceptions affect recruitment and retention.<sup>476</sup> As noted in Chapter 3, there is some evidence that public perceptions of the military have improved in recent years. In this chapter, we found evidence that the Russian government has been investing resources to improve perceptions of military service (e.g., military parades, events with service members, events that use artillery fireworks). We assume that the Russian government has made these investments in part to improve domestic public perceptions of the Russian military. In 2018, an estimated 84 percent of Russian citizens reported to either completely or somewhat trust their military, second to the 85 percent reporting trust in their president.<sup>477</sup> Similarly, in 2020, Russians ranked the armed service near the top for importance in terms of its role in Russia.<sup>478</sup> According to the Russian government, in 2019, it held 28 military parades in cities, 447 events with the participation of service members, and 68 events with artillery fireworks in various cities across the country to commemorate of the end of World War II.<sup>479</sup>

Public regard for military service has been perceived within Russia as a potential asset in the retention of personnel. Specifically, some Russian scholars note that “ongoing institutional reforms of the Army . . . have a generally positive effect on the professional consciousness of

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<sup>475</sup> Karlova and Grigorov, 2017.

<sup>476</sup> James Griffith, “Institutional Motives for Serving in the U.S. Army National Guard: Implications for Recruitment, Retention, and Readiness,” *Armed Forces and Society*, Vol. 34, No. 2, January 2008; Todd D. Woodruff, “Who Should the Military Recruit? The Effects of Institutional, Occupational, and Self-Enhancement Enlistment Motives on Soldier Identification and Behavior,” *Armed Forces and Society*, Vol. 43, No. 4, October 2017.

<sup>477</sup> Levada Center, “Institutional Trust,” webpage, October 22, 2018.

<sup>478</sup> Levada Center, “The Role of Institutions,” webpage, February 28, 2020a.

<sup>479</sup> MoD, “Celebrating the 75th Anniversary of the Great Victory” [“Празднование 75-летия Великой Победы”], webpage, 2019a.

service members.”<sup>480</sup> In this study, researchers interviewed 256 contract personnel from Rostov-on-Don and 180 contract personnel from Novocherkassk between March and April 2017.<sup>481</sup> The sample from Rostov-on-Don consisted of 60 percent officers, while 61 percent of the sample from Novocherkassk was privates or sergeants. According to this study, 69.4 percent of personnel from Rostov-on-Don self-reported an increase in perceptions of professional prestige between 2012 and 2017, while 61.7 percent of respondents from Novocherkassk reported increases in professional prestige. Expectations for the subsequent five years were lower, however. Only 40.2 percent of contract personnel from Rostov-on-Don expected the professional prestige of the military to increase in the following five years. Similarly, only 38.3 percent of personnel from Novocherkassk expected these increases in prestige. These authors note that service members in these southern cities have had a “positive assessment of the prestige of the profession” but also note that “the economic development crises of the country determines the deterioration of the servicemen’s economic well-being in the last 1–2 years.”<sup>482</sup>

There is some evidence that initial motivations to join the Russian military—and reasons why personnel on contract prefer to continue their service—vary by geography. For example, a 2017 survey of officers and contract personnel found that respondents believed that prestige of their profession rose in the previous five years. Specifically, 69.4 percent of respondents from Rostov and 80.3 percent from Moscow reported improvements in the level of prestige of the profession over the preceding five years.<sup>483</sup> However, 87.6 percent of personnel from the Moscow sample expected further increases in professional prestige, versus 40.2 percent holding that belief in Rostov.

In contrast, only 15.7 percent of personnel in Moscow reported that the military profession’s value in society was a motivator for joining. When asked about what motivates these Moscow personnel today, only 4.3 percent reported that it was the value of military service in Russian society. Put simply, personnel in Rostov reported a higher likelihood of making a career in the Armed Forces, and their positive perceptions of the military profession remained relatively simple as they completed their contract. The authors conclude that personnel in Moscow tend to hold “pragmatic orientations in their work. A neutral prestige assessment of the military profession and higher satisfaction with the quality of their lives.”<sup>484</sup> In comparison, Rostov

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<sup>480</sup> Lyudmila V. Klimenko, Oksana Y. Posukhova, and Inna Y. Khromushkina, “Professional Identity of Servicemen in Russia’s Southern Cities” [“Профессиональная идентичность военнослужащих южнороссийских городов”], *Zhurnal sotsiologii i sotsial’noy antropologii*, Vol. 20, No. 3, 2017.

<sup>481</sup> Klimenko, Posukhova, and Khromushkina, 2017.

<sup>482</sup> Klimenko, Posukhova, and Khromushkina, 2017.

<sup>483</sup> Klimenko and Posukhova, 2018b.

<sup>484</sup> Klimenko and Posukhova, 2018b.

personnel’s “expectations for the privilege position of professional soldiers” were not met because of inadequate real socioeconomic support.<sup>485</sup>

## Conclusions

We draw four conclusions from our review of the Russian military manpower literature. First, Russian military retention–related concerns and priorities appear to have shifted over time prior to December 2021, and uncertainty remains surrounding the specifics for some of these priorities. The Russian military has had limited resources to pursue efforts at both professionalizing *and* modernizing its force structure. Retention has been a key variable in pursuit of the former, especially for highly skilled personnel. Although institutional benefits might help develop a sense of purpose for Russian personnel, the perceived lack of occupational benefits (e.g., housing and compensation) appears to have been a persistent problem for some personnel within the Russian military.

Second, we conclude that the Russian military likely has been uninterested in retaining all of its conscripts, contract personnel, and officers under peacetime conditions. Given economic constraints, it is likely that the Russian Armed Forces would prioritize benefits for certain types of personnel that leadership would like to retain as these individuals’ careers progress. For example, we found evidence of specialized compensation incentives based on one’s occupation. If, previously, the main emphasis was made on retaining sergeants, young lieutenants, and newly recruited contract soldiers in general,<sup>486</sup> in recent years, the targeting has become more focused. In particular, pilots—including test pilots—and engineers have received enhanced monetary incentives.<sup>487</sup>

Third, we conclude that the Russian Armed Forces have sought to employ both institutional *and* occupational benefits to improve the well-being of personnel and, in turn, improve retention outcomes. We find evidence in recent Russian military research on a variety of occupational benefits (such as surveys on the quality of military housing, compensation, and experiences of military families). Furthermore, we find evidence that scholars have fielded surveys looking at the sense of patriotism within the Russian military, public opinion of military service, and the level of good order and discipline within the force. While many of the studies in our sample have methodological limitations, and we were unclear on the motivations for why these studies were done, our assumption is that such research highlights an interest within the Russian military. These themes stand out in the official media outlet of the MoD—the *Red Star* newspaper. The quantity of articles on housing and compensation remains comparatively high, but the number of publications on patriotism in the military visibly picked up in the most recent few years. We

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<sup>485</sup> Klimenko and Posukhova, 2018b.

<sup>486</sup> Mukhin, 2019.

<sup>487</sup> Bocharova and Nikol’skiy, 2020; Kulikov, 2021.

found similar themes in our review of reports to the annual expanded meeting of the Collegium between 2014 and 2020.

Fourth, we conclude that motivations for peacetime military service have likely varied by geographic region. For example, as also noted in Chapter 3, we found evidence that the self-reported motivations for why some Russian personnel joined—and why they were currently serving—varied for those located in Moscow versus other regions of the country. Those in Moscow held a more pragmatic view of their profession when compared with those in such places as Rostov, who might be more motivated by the institutional benefits of service. With that said, these perceived institutional benefits might not always cancel out the economic incentives—or lack thereof—for some Russian service members.

## Chapter 5. Assessing Russian Individual Personnel Proficiency

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### Introduction

The MoD has viewed military proficiency as “the most important component of combat potential of the Armed Forces and an integral part of their combat effectiveness and combat readiness.”<sup>488</sup> The effort to make Russia a modern fighting force, then, must involve improving the military proficiency of Russia’s military personnel to meet the goals of a modern military. One of these goals has been a contract-based Russian military that demonstrates high proficiency through technical competence, moral-psychological strength, and patriotic attitude toward the country. In this chapter, we will discuss how individual military proficiency specifically contributes to Russia’s goal of a more proficient military by raising the military’s proficiency standards.

This chapter considers efforts by the Russian military to enhance its proficiency standards prior to December 2021. We draw five conclusions from our literature review:

1. Russia has been moving toward a contract-based military as one way to respond to the effects of technological revolution in the military.
2. A more proficient Russian military will still be structurally and qualitatively different than the U.S. military.
3. Russia has employed a combination of education and training reforms, deployments, and combat experience to increase the level of proficiency in its contract and conscript personnel.
4. While overall proficiency might have improved since the immediate post-Soviet period, multiple factors suggest that there has been and will be significant variance in individual proficiency across the Armed Forces.
5. Russia might not fully trust its military personnel, even as more of them serve under contract, and it has been working hard to improve the loyalty of all its service members by promoting lessons of military history and patriotic values at all echelons.

### Defining Military Proficiency

The Russian MoD defines *military proficiency* as “high professional and specialty readiness of service members, military divisions and units (ships) to perform combat missions and responsibilities to carry out military duties.”<sup>489</sup> Military proficiency consists of individual and collective actions and “is acquired during combat training and the entire process of military

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<sup>488</sup> MoD, Military-Encyclopedic Dictionary, “Military Proficiency” [“Мастерство воинское”], webpage, undated-b.

<sup>489</sup> MoD, Military-Encyclopedic Dictionary, undated-b.

training and education.”<sup>490</sup> Russia also considers moral incentives as a means to support and encourage military proficiency growth.

Russia’s view of military proficiency at the individual level thus encompasses two dimensions, professional readiness and specialty readiness, where the latter is a component of the former.<sup>491</sup> For example, the MoD defines the *military-professional qualities* of an officer as a “system of specialty knowledge, skills, and abilities that characterize an officer as a military professional capable of accomplishing combat tasks in any environment.”<sup>492</sup> A Russian officer’s military-professional qualities include competence, discipline, leadership, organization, creativity, and psychological and physical qualities. Many factors related to professional readiness are prevalent within an individual before they enter military service and are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3. However, some of these factors are the specific targets of training and education as well.

The quality of competence further highlights the specialty readiness component of military proficiency. The MoD defines *military-professional competence* (also for the military-professional officer) as “military-professional knowledge necessary for confident accomplishment of military duties.”<sup>493</sup> Specific military duty requirements determine the scope and content of this knowledge, as well as skills and abilities. In this chapter, we will explore whether Russia’s contract-based military corps possesses relevant and sufficient skills to perform their jobs effectively under a variety of combat conditions and how they sustain these skills over time. Combat experience will also play a role in influencing these skills. Figure 5.1 summarizes these concepts related to Russian military proficiency.

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<sup>490</sup> MoD, Military-Encyclopedic Dictionary, undated-b. This chapter focuses on individual actions.

<sup>491</sup> Another possible framework comes from previous RAND research into personnel and unit *Will to Fight* that offered two different perspectives at the individual level: individual capabilities and individual motivations. While motivations of individuals to remain in Russia’s Armed Forces are discussed in Chapter 4 (Retaining Military Personnel), individual disposition to fight in any given battle—shaped by personal identity, ideology, economics, and other factors—is not a focus of this study. Instead, we primarily focus on what RAND’s research termed *individual capabilities* and we refer to as *individual proficiency*: a category further broken down into service members’ competence and quality. See Ben Connable, Michael J. McNerney, William Marcellino, Aaron Frank, Henry Hargrove, Marek N. Posard, S. Rebecca Zimmerman, Natasha Lander, Jasen J. Castillo, and James Sladden, *Will to Fight: Analyzing, Modeling, and Simulating the Will to Fight of Military Units*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-2341, 2018.

<sup>492</sup> MoD, Military-Encyclopedic Dictionary, “Military-Professional Qualities of an Officer” [“Военно-профессиональные качества офицера”], webpage, undated-c.

<sup>493</sup> MoD, Military-Encyclopedic Dictionary, undated-c.

Figure 5.1. Military Proficiency and Its Components



### Competence

Russia has viewed military training and education as the primary means of raising individual competence by improving the knowledge, skills, and abilities of military personnel. For example, during military training exercises, the MoD combined committee working groups to evaluate the levels of knowledge, skills, and abilities to assess the level of individual proficiency and unit readiness during final inspections of military units.<sup>494</sup> Individual proficiency contributes to military units' readiness and ability to conduct training and perform combat tasks. Observers of Russia's military training have noted that the professionalism of a military service member depends on the member's personal interest in constantly improving their military proficiency, including skill-level qualification.<sup>495</sup>

### Skill-Level Qualification

Skill-level qualification plays an important role in increasing individual military proficiency of the Armed Forces.<sup>496</sup> In the past, high skill-level qualification was an indicator of proficiency

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<sup>494</sup> V. Kolesnikov, "Unified Collective—Different Results. Why?" ["Коллектив единый—результаты разные. Почему?"] *Na boievom postu*, No. 79, October 20, 2007.

<sup>495</sup> A. Belousov, "Professional. Combat Training—Above All" ["Профессионал. Боевая учеба—превыше всего"], *Krasnaya zvezda*, No. 216, November 2005.

<sup>496</sup> MoD, Military-Encyclopedic Dictionary, undated-b.



and was tied to financial incentives and promotion.<sup>497</sup> For example, some military observers recall instances during the Cold War when division or battery commanders could not attain their position without the grade of “Master of Combat Qualification.”<sup>498</sup> However, some officers and their subordinates came to view obtaining higher skill-level qualification as cumbersome and unnecessary because the process required a lot of time and effort, was not a standard requirement across military specialties, and lacked organizational support or financial compensation.<sup>499</sup> As a result, service members spent little time with military equipment, leading some military observers to conclude that less training with equipment meant slower skill development.<sup>500</sup>

In 2015, the MoD released the directive “On the Approval of Test Procedures for Military Personnel Undergoing Military Service in the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation to Assign (Confirm) Their Skill-Level Qualifications,” which formalized criteria for assessing professional skills of military personnel.<sup>501</sup> According to the directive, skill-level qualification is an indicator of the professional level of the service member in the assigned military specialty and is awarded on the basis of test results. The directive also provides for senior officers in high positions to be awarded the skill-level qualification of “master” without taking any tests during the entire time in their military assignment. The rest of the Armed Forces, however, must test and follow the qualification requirements associated with their professional knowledge and skills needed for accomplishing their assigned duties and set by the test commissions unit that commanders appoint.

Tests consist of two parts: theory and practice. The theoretical part tests the level of professional knowledge needed for discharging the duties of the military office, and the practical part checks the level of professional skills associated with an assigned specialty. Theoretical questions address readiness for combat, professional duties, and command duties, while practical tasks apply knowledge and skills during exercises and demonstrations of other military requirements, such as weapons handling and marksmanship, use and control of combat and specialty equipment, maintenance, physical fitness, situational awareness exercises, moral-

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<sup>497</sup> A. Ivanov, “Again a 2 . . . Why Classification Stopped Being the Indicator of Military Proficiency” [“Снова двойка . . . Почему классность перестала быть показателем воинского мастерства”], *Na strazhe Rodiny*, No. 232, December 1997; A. Iakovlev, “Theme: Following the New Programs” [“Тема. По новым программам”], *Na strazhe Rodiny*, No. 171, December 2005.

<sup>498</sup> Ivanov, 1997.

<sup>499</sup> Ivanov, 1997; and A. Iakovlev, “Skill-Level Qualification—Indicator of Proficiency” [“Классность—показатель мастерства”], *Na strazhe Rodiny*, No. 53, 2006.

<sup>500</sup> A. Iakovlev, “Occasional Reflections. Learn to Value Skill-Level Qualification” [“Размышления по поводу. Классностью дорожить умеете”], *Na strazhe Rodiny*, No. 2, October 10, 2000.

<sup>501</sup> MoD, “On the Approval of Test Procedures for Military Personnel Undergoing Military Service in the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation to Assign (Confirm) Their Skill-Level Qualifications” [“Об определении порядка проведения испытаний военнослужащих, проходящих военную службу в Вооруженных силах Российской Федерации для присвоения (подтверждения) классной квалификации”], Directive No. 542, September 18, 2015b.

psychological support, and working as a team under different conditions. Some units that have already applied this directive have tested their personnel in tactics, weapon handling and firing drills, and driving a combat vehicle.<sup>502</sup> Generals were automatically assigned the highest skill-level qualification.

To encourage service members to attain higher skill-level qualifications and view this practice as a benefit to their careers, the MoD had reportedly planned to provide additional monthly financial compensation. Specialists with third class qualification would receive 5 percent more than their duty pay, while those with the master qualification would receive 30 percent more.<sup>503</sup>

### *Professional Readiness and Its Moral-Psychological Quality*

The Kremlin has viewed the moral-psychological state of its military forces as an important component of Russia's combat potential.<sup>504</sup> A. Kuleba wrote that the "high morals of service members are the basis for successful accomplishment of combat training missions," while "psycho-emotional resilience of service members is an important factor in achieving their combat capability."<sup>505</sup> Furthermore, the service member's moral readiness and psychological ability to achieve assigned goals comprise a complex set of moral-psychological and professional-combat components.<sup>506</sup>

Within Russian military thinking, the notion of strict morals and a strong sense of community and self-sacrifice being major components of psychological readiness in war is not new and dates as far back as the 18th century.<sup>507</sup> Psychological readiness during the Soviet period focused on maintaining fighting spirit through a combination of physical stimuli and moral measures, when the soldiers were subjected to extensive ideological schooling at all levels.<sup>508</sup> More recently, the scope of moral qualities desired in service members has included attitudes toward military service, such as loyalty to military duties, high professionalism, organization, creativity, bravery,

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<sup>502</sup> Yevgenii Deviat'iarov and Aleksandr Kruglov, "Qualifications of Military Personnel are Determined According to Exact Criteria" ["Квалификацию военных определяют по точным критериям"], *Izvestiia*, April 3, 2018.

<sup>503</sup> Deviat'iarov and Kruglov, 2018.

<sup>504</sup> N. N. Leventov, M. S. Denisov, and E. S. Dulneva, "A New Approach to the Assessment of Combat Training Results" ["Новый подход к оценке результатов боевой подготовки"], *Vestnik Akademii voyennykh nauk*, Vol. 4, No. 69, 2019, p. 92.

<sup>505</sup> A. Kuleba, "Topic for Contract Personnel N10. Main Approaches to Developing Moral Readiness and Psychological Abilities of Military Personnel for Assigned Mission Tasks" ["Тема для контрактников N10. Основные пути формирования моральной готовности и психологической способности военнослужащего к выполнению поставленных задач по предназначению"], *Orientir*, No. 3, March 2017, p. 52.

<sup>506</sup> Kuleba, 2017, p. 55.

<sup>507</sup> Gjerstad and Poulsen, 2021.

<sup>508</sup> Gjerstad and Poulsen, 2021.

courage, and heroism, as well as professional competence as a specific moral quality.<sup>509</sup> Analytical reports from the Russian military establishment acknowledge that this combination cannot exist without considering the broad worldview and general personality of the service member.

In 2018, Russia amended its federal law, “On Conscription and Military Service,” to include a requirement for all citizens who apply to serve under contract to undergo professional psychological evaluation.<sup>510</sup> Since that time, the evaluation has become an integral part of preparing citizens for military service and conscription. According to General Lieutenant Yevgeny Burdinskiy, director of the Main Organization and Mobilization Directorate of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, this change will contribute to “improving the quality of conscript personnel in the Armed Forces and ensur[ing] future growth of the system of professional psychological evaluation.”<sup>511</sup>

Thus, Russian military application of the moral-psychological perspective has focused on identifying more—professionally reliable service members. For example, in 2021, psychologists in the Baltic Fleet worked with military personnel who were going to participate in the 76th annual Patriotic War Victory Parade.<sup>512</sup> The Baltic Fleet psychologists fielded an initial psychological survey to over 1,300 service members, which allowed them to select more—professionally reliable service members according to the following characteristics: high ability to withstand stress and well-formed moral-psychological qualities. The psychologists also tested psychological readiness, ability to regulate emotions and continue to function, and ability to resist stress. Furthermore, psychologists regularly monitor sociological and psychological qualities among service members to study the realistic mood and motivation of parade participants. Regular monitoring allows psychologists to develop “indicators of negative phenomena in military units, to target psychological support for service members, and to improve current studies with military personnel.”<sup>513</sup>

## Impact of Reforms on Russia’s Military Proficiency

The post–Cold War era brought chaos and uncertainty to Russia’s military planning, which extended to military personnel at all levels. Past training requirements were either no longer

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<sup>509</sup> Kuleba, 2017, p. 54.

<sup>510</sup> Federal Law No. 53, “On Conscription and Military Service” [“О воинской обязанности и военной службе”], March 28, 1998, as amended August 3, 2018.

<sup>511</sup> Yuliya Kozak, “Into the Ranks Following the Call of the Motherland and the Heart” [“В строй по зову родины и сердца”], *Krasnaya zvezda*, No. 33, March 3, 2018.

<sup>512</sup> MoD, “Psychologists of the Balti Fleet Are Preparing Servicemembers for Participation in the Parade for the 76th Anniversary of Victory in the Great Patriotic War” [“Психологи Балтийского флота готовят военнослужащих к участию в параде в честь 76-летия Победы в Великой отечественной войне”], webpage, April 25, 2021b.

<sup>513</sup> MoD, 2021b.

appropriate or unattainable in light of limited available resources. Low staffing and financial support forced most units to focus on individual training and forego unit-level training.<sup>514</sup> In 1996, for example, units with reduced strength planned to conduct combat training eight days per month. While more than the four days per month were achieved prior to this period, it still fell short of the 16 days (or at least 12 days) per month requirement for Russian service members to maintain and improve their skills. Additionally, Russian junior officers constantly had military detail and only viewed the concept of “independent training” on a schedule, theoretically. As a result, leadership skills of many company and platoon commanders atrophied. At the beginning of the 21st century, the Russian Armed Forces were not faring any better. Russia’s lack of an effective system of training and discipline for pre-draft youth resulted in an enlisted corps with weak military corporate values.<sup>515</sup>

Then in 2005, new education and training programs began to address the professionalization of the military as part of Russia’s federal plan, entitled “Transition to Recruiting Contract Service Members to Fill a Number of Formations and Military Units” (*Perehod k Komplektovaniuu Voennosluzhashchimi, Prohodiaschimi Voennuiu Sluzhbu po Kontraktu, Riada Soedinenii I Voinskih Chastei*).<sup>516</sup> Because Putin emphasized raising the quality of training for contract personnel—and stated that every contract service member must be a professional—the new way of staffing the Russian military with contract personnel made it possible to increase the level of professional training and guaranteed an improved system of combat training for the Armed Forces as a whole.<sup>517</sup> New training programs included ten months of summer and winter training cycles, each lasting for five months.<sup>518</sup> These programs also reintroduced the concept of independent training with a renewed emphasis on standards. The first month of the winter training cycle included intensive individual training to help service members attain required knowledge and skills. An emphasis on training junior commanders also returned.

With new combat training programs came the institution of new requirements for contract personnel across the Armed Forces, who were expected to conduct combat missions in any environment.<sup>519</sup> Permanent readiness units staffed with contract personnel conducted combat

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<sup>514</sup> Oleg Mineiev, “Topical Interview. Combat Training: At the Juncture of Plans and Realities” [“Актуальное интервью. Боевая подготовка: на стыке планов и реалий”], *Na strazhe Rodiny*, No. 106, June 4, 1996.

<sup>515</sup> V. M. Azarov, “Education and Discipline. Assessment of Moral-Psychological State of Military Personnel” [“Обучение и воспитание. Оценка морально-психологического состояния военнослужащих”], *Voennaia mysl*, No. 3, May 2001, p. 41.

<sup>516</sup> Iakovlev, 2005; and “Main Provisions of the Federal Plan ‘Transition to Recruiting Contract Service Members to Fill a Number of Formations and Military Units’ for 2004–2007” [“Основные положения Федеральной целевой программы ‘Переход к комплектованию военнослужащими, проходящими военную службу по контракту, ряда соединений и воинских частей’ на 2004–2007 годы”], *Na boevom postu*, Nos. 69–70, October 9, 2005.

<sup>517</sup> Belousov, 2005; and Iakovlev, 2005.

<sup>518</sup> Iakovlev, 2005.

<sup>519</sup> Iakovlev, 2005.

training 16 to 18 days per month—a significant increase from the post–Cold War era and in line with what military leaders expected. Personnel in units with reduced strength conducted combat training on no more than eight days each month, in line with post–Cold War requirements. New programs also recommended six hours of class instruction per day and for field activities to last up to ten hours, including training at night for a third of these activities. In 2021, Shoigu claimed that contract service members and conscripts spend up to 80 percent of their time at training grounds.<sup>520</sup>

Additionally, the culture in the Armed Forces largely has been characterized by low levels of education and motivation.<sup>521</sup> In 2008, then–Minister of Defense Anatoly Serdyukov instituted military reforms that focused on education and the living conditions of military personnel.<sup>522</sup> Information provided to new service members underscored such benefits of education as being appointed to higher military positions for those service members with skill-level qualification, excellence in combat training, and no disciplinary problems.<sup>523</sup> In addition, under the new reforms, prior civilian education, professional and moral-psychological qualities, and health would play roles in military assignments for new service members.

### *Staffing Priorities*

When Shoigu became Minister of Defense in 2012, the Serdyukov reforms gave way to Shoigu’s *MoD Action Plan for 2013–2020*, which detailed Russia’s military planning priorities for building a contract-based force, among others.<sup>524</sup> Figure 5.2 portrays Russia’s plan to grow its contract personnel force between 2013 and 2020.

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<sup>520</sup> “Shoigu Sees No Point in Increasing the Number of Conscripts” [“Шойгу не видит смысла в увеличении числа призывников”], RIA Novosti, August 10, 2021.

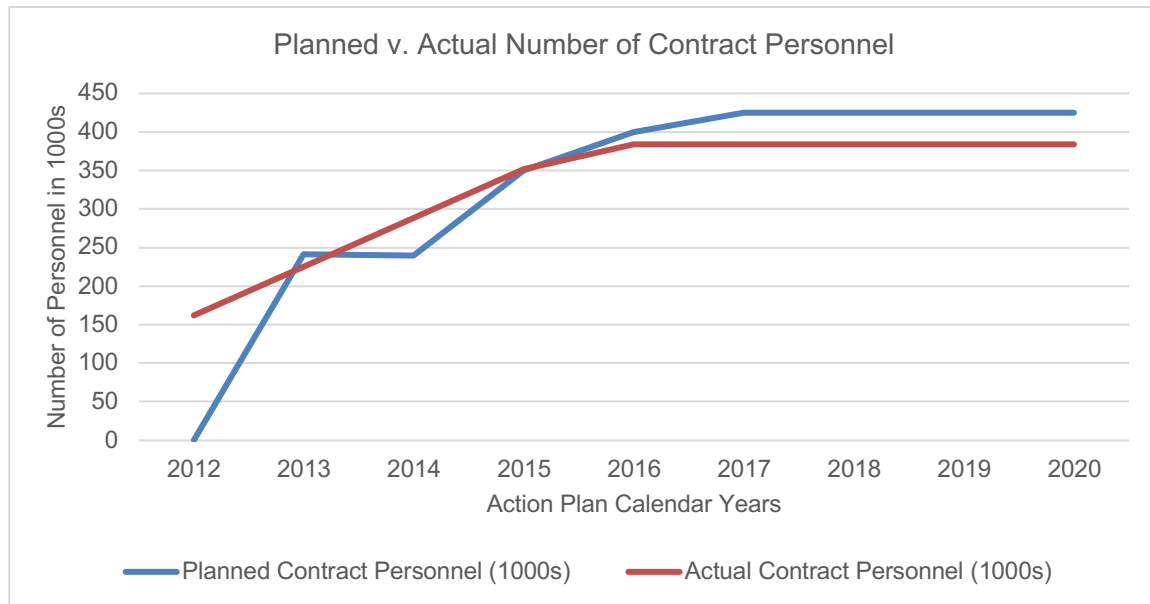
<sup>521</sup> Niels Bo Poulsen and Jørgen Staun, “Introduction,” in Poulsen and Staun, eds., 2021.

<sup>522</sup> Gjerstad and Poulsen, 2021.

<sup>523</sup> V. Shcherbachev, “Topic for Draftees N 24. Military Service for Soldiers, Sailors in the Armed Forces of the RF” [“Тема для призывников N 24. Прохождение военной службы солдатами, матросами в Вооруженных Силах РФ”], *Orientir*, No. 6, June 2008.

<sup>524</sup> Putin has approved the Action Plan for 2021–2025. The MoD has not yet made this plan publicly available (MoD, “Remarks by the Minister of Defense of the Russian Federation General of the Army S.K. Shoigu at the Russian Defense Ministry Board Session” [“Тезисы доклада Министра обороны Российской Федерации генерала армии С.К. Шойгу на расширенном заседании Коллегии Минобороны России”], webpage, 2020a).

**Figure 5.2. Action Plan 2013–2020: Goals to Build an Overall Contract Military Force**



SOURCE: RAND analysis of MoD Action Plan 2013–2020 and 2015 and 2017 Executive Summaries (MoD, “Remarks by the Minister of Defense of the Russian Federation General of the Army S. K. Shoigu at the Russian Defense Ministry Board Session” [“Тезисы доклада Министра обороны Российской Федерации генерала армии С.К. Шойгу на расширенном заседании Коллегии Минобороны России”], Moscow, December 11, 2015c; MoD, “Remarks by the Minister of Defense of the Russian Federation General of the Army S.K. Shoigu at the Russian Defense Ministry Board Session” [“Тезисы доклада Министра обороны Российской Федерации генерала армии С.К. Шойгу на расширенном заседании Коллегии Минобороны России”], Moscow, 2017a).

In 2012, Russia’s contract service members numbered 162,000; by 2017, that number had increased to 384,000, and by 2020, the number of contract personnel reportedly was twice that of conscript personnel.<sup>525</sup> Despite these increases, Russia has fallen short of its goals to expand its contract force almost every year since 2013, except for 2015. In 2015, the Armed Forces registered more contract enlisted personnel than conscript personnel for the first time.<sup>526</sup> In 2016, the MoD claimed that the non-commissioned officer (NCO) corps had become completely contract-based for the first time.<sup>527</sup>

Russia also set specific priorities to fill some types of military units with majority contract personnel. Figure 5.3 illustrates these plans and priorities across a mix of seven unit types and specialties. They include submarine crews, special brigade combat units, airborne battalions

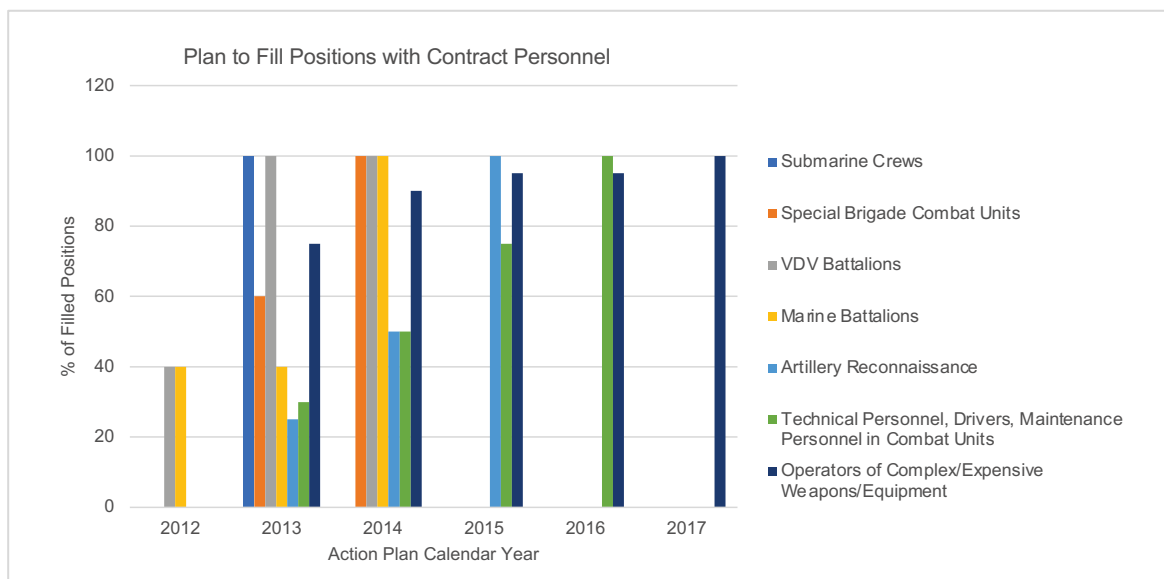
<sup>525</sup> President of the Russian Federation, 2017; MoD, “Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation: In Detail” [“Министерство Обороны Россииской Федератсии: Подробнее”], November 7, 2017b; and MoD, 2020a.

<sup>526</sup> MoD, 2015c.

<sup>527</sup> MoD, “Testimony of the Minister of Defense of the Russian Federation General of the Army Sergei Shoigu at the Russian Defense Ministry Board Session” [“Выступление Министра обороны Российской Федерации генерала армии С. К. Шойгу на расширенном заседании Коллегии Минобороны России”], webpage, December 22, 2016.

(VDV), marine battalions, artillery reconnaissance, technical personnel, drivers, maintenance personnel in combat units, and operators of complex and expensive weapons and equipment.

**Figure 5.3. Action Plan 2013–2020: Priorities for Completely Staffing Some Armed Forces Units with Contract-Based Personnel**



SOURCE: RAND analysis of MoD Action Plan 2013–2020 (MoD, undated-a).

The Action Plan called for contract personnel to fill these units at 100 percent between 2013 and 2020. Figure 5.2 also highlights what types of military units and specialties the Armed Forces prioritize for contract-based personnel: combat units and military specialties that require highly technical skills. Furthermore, the desire to reach 100 percent contract personnel for submarine crews by 2013 and special brigade combat units, VDV, and marine battalions by 2014 suggests that achieving the highest proficiency in these units takes priority. In 2017, Gerasimov confirmed that priority for staffing with contract personnel went to submarine crews, special operations units, and peacekeeping forces.<sup>528</sup>

While it is unclear whether Russia reached its contract-based personnel goals in all the military units listed in Figure 5.3, overall efforts across the Armed Forces progressed prior to 2022. Table 5.1 provides a summary of the state of these efforts, as of December 2021, in some of Russia’s major military services and branches.

<sup>528</sup> V. V. Gerasimov, “On the Progress of Executing the Directives of the President of the Russian Federation from May 7, 2012, Nos. 603, 604 and Development of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation” [“О ходе выполнения указов Президента Российской Федерации от 7 мая 2012 года №603, 604 и развития Вооруженных Сил Российской Федерации”], *Voennaya mysl*, No. 12, December 2017.

**Table 5.1. Summary of Efforts to Increase Contract Personnel Across the Armed Forces**

<b>Branch</b>	<b>State of Efforts</b>
Ground Forces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Most advanced ground troops and high-readiness units in Western and Southern Military Districts are contract personnel.</li> </ul>
VKS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All personnel in combat roles are contract personnel.</li> </ul>
Naval Forces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Push for contract-based crew corps to operate increasingly capable platforms.</li> <li>• All submarines are operated by contract personnel.</li> <li>• 90 percent of personnel on surface ships are contract personnel.</li> <li>• Marines are almost completely staffed with contract personnel.</li> </ul>
VDV	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Receive priority for contract personnel.</li> <li>• 70 percent of personnel in VDV are contract personnel.</li> <li>• Receive priority for conscripts.</li> </ul>
Special Forces (Spetsnaz)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ongoing efforts to replace Spetsnaz personnel completely with contract personnel.</li> <li>• Spetsnaz still has some conscripts.</li> <li>• Spetsnaz receives priority for conscripts.</li> </ul>

SOURCE: Bowen, 2020b; “Russian Federation—Air Force,” 2022; and “Russian Federation—Navy,” 2022.

Filling designated military units and bases with majority (95–100 percent) contract personnel has allowed the Russian military to maintain higher combat readiness, according to the MoD.<sup>529</sup> Additionally, as of 2017 the Armed Forces restructured to allow every Ground Forces regiment and brigade to include two battalions staffed completely with contract personnel and a third with conscripts, allowing for battalion-sized tactical groups ready for immediate deployment.<sup>530</sup>

### Scientific Companies

As discussed in Chapter 2, the MoD has been increasingly investing in raising the military-scientific potential of the Armed Forces. Military-scientific potential manifests through the (1) improvement of weapons and military equipment, (2) development of organizational structure of forces, (3) command and control of forces, (4) adaptation of new methods and means of conducting combat activities, and (5) the system of education and training of military personnel. The MoD established a system to respond to technological advancements in the defense sphere. The Action Plan for 2013–2020 called for the creation of several scientific companies “in accordance with the goals of the [Armed Forces of the Russian Federation]” to foster an environment that allows the most-talented conscript personnel prone to scientific work to realize their potential and apply their university-acquired knowledge to different areas of national security (e.g., nuclear security, command and control).<sup>531</sup> Representatives from MoD universities

<sup>529</sup> MoD, 2017a.

<sup>530</sup> Gerasimov, 2017, p. 15.

<sup>531</sup> MoD, “Action Plan for 2013–2020: Staffing the Armed Forces with Military Personnel [План действий на 2013–2020 годы: комплектование Вооруженных Сил личным составом]”, webpage, undated-a; and MoD, 2015c.



and scientific research organizations were slated to facilitate the individual selection process for the most-talented conscripts.<sup>532</sup>

In line with the Action Plan, in 2013, the Armed Forces created four scientific companies, then eight more by 2015, and reported a total of 17 in 2020.<sup>533</sup> Eight of the 17 existing scientific companies fall under the Military Innovation Technopolis ERA the MoD established in 2018.<sup>534</sup> The purpose of ERA is to facilitate innovative scientific research in the MoD.<sup>535</sup> In 2018, it comprised 18 laboratories with 600 pieces of unique equipment. Representatives from 32 leading manufacturers and scientific organizations, as well as operators from four newly built scientific companies, participated in ERA research efforts. The MoD has been working to identify “talented youth” to work in the ERA Technopolis, because the MoD recognizes that the wide use of advanced technologies, such as robotics and remotely piloted systems, as well as its demands for technologies that employ artificial intelligence, require “scientists of a new generation” in the Armed Forces.<sup>536</sup>

Overall, scientific companies work to apply scientific solutions to national security missions. For example, scientific companies associated with Russia’s Air Forces (*Voienno-vozdushniie sily*, part of the VKS) work on the scientific application of aircraft control systems and weapons, electro-optical and laser tracking and control systems, electronic warfare, and other scientific ideas.<sup>537</sup>

Scientific companies have served as a “reliable source” for raising the military-scientific potential of the Armed Forces.<sup>538</sup> According to Shoigu, in 2015, graduates from 42 universities were serving in 12 existing scientific companies.<sup>539</sup> In 2017, approximately one-quarter of service members decided to stay in the military after completing their draft service requirement in the scientific companies, and 365 conscript personnel had transitioned to the officer corps since 2013.<sup>540</sup> In 2018, this number grew to 459 officers; and in 2019, 912 conscripts became

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<sup>532</sup> Kozak, 2018.

<sup>533</sup> MoD, undated-a; and MoD, 2020a.

<sup>534</sup> MoD, “The Spring 2021 Conscription Cycle Began in Russia” [“В России стартовал весенний 2021 года призыв граждан на военную службу”], webpage, April 1, 2021a.

<sup>535</sup> MoD, “Remarks by the Minister of Defense of the Russian Federation General of the Army S. K. Shoigu at the Russian Defense Ministry Board Session” [“Тезисы доклада Министра обороны Российской Федерации генерала армии С. К. Шойгу на расширенном заседании Коллегии Минобороны России”], Moscow, 2018a.

<sup>536</sup> MoD, “Scientific Units of the Military Innovation Hub ‘ERA’ Will Be Filled with Talented Youth” [“Научные подразделения военного инновационного технополиса ‘ЭРА’ будут комплектоваться талантливой молодежью”], webpage, March 15, 2018b.

<sup>537</sup> MoD, “Ongoing Staffing of Ministry of Defense Scientific Companies” [“Продолжается комплектование научных рот Минобороны России”], webpage, December 12, 2013.

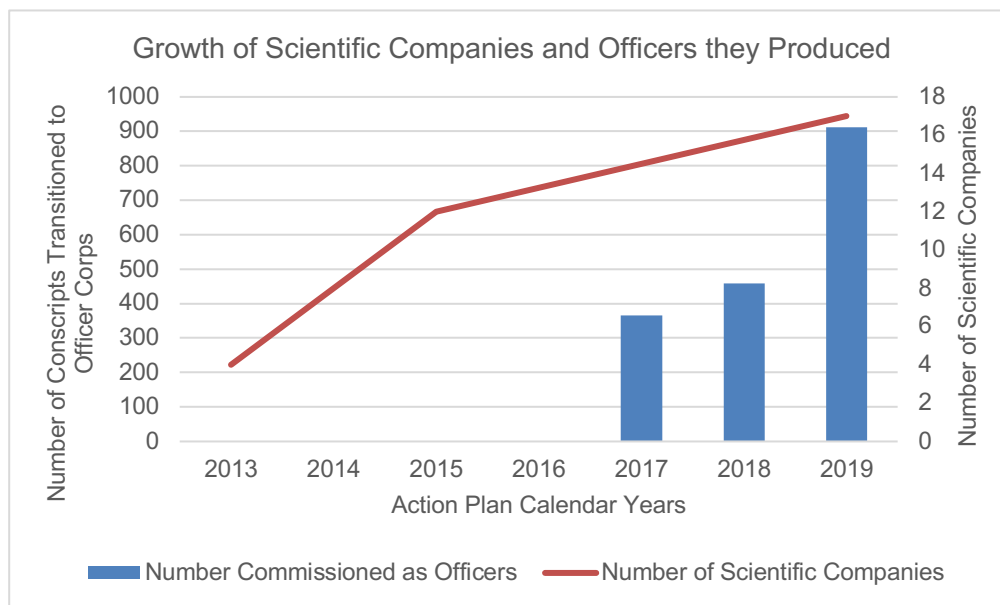
<sup>538</sup> MoD, 2017a.

<sup>539</sup> MoD, 2015c.

<sup>540</sup> MoD, 2017a.

officers or went to work with an industry contractor.<sup>541</sup> Figure 5.4 illustrates the growth of scientific companies and the number of conscript personnel that eventually became officers in the Armed Forces between 2013 and 2019.

**Figure 5.4. Growing Number of Scientific Companies Producing a Growing Number of Officers**



SOURCE: RAND analysis of MoD, undated-a; and 2018–2019 MoD Executive Summaries.

### *Current Training Priorities*

Russia’s military training priorities for 2013–2020 focused on improving combat training for all service members. Table 5.2 shows the planned individual indicators (metrics) for several training requirements across naval, air, and ground units for the planned period. Naval units used at-sea days as proficiency indicators. Air units included combat aviation, military transport, and army aviation—all part of the VKS—and naval aviation, and they use flying hours as proficiency indicators. Ground units included automotive engineers and combat vehicle crews and use distance driven in kilometers as a proficiency indicator. Finally, airborne units that are part of the VDV battalions used the number of parachute jumps completed as a proficiency indicator.

<sup>541</sup> MoD, 2018a; and MoD, “Remarks by the Minister of Defense of the Russian Federation General of the Army S. K. Shoigu at the Russian Defense Ministry Board Session” [“Тезисы доклада Министра обороны Российской Федерации генерала армии С. К. Шойгу на расширенном заседании Коллегии Минобороны России”], Moscow, December 24, 2019f.

**Table 5.2. Ministry of Defense Plan to Improve the Quality of Training for Its Troops for 2013–2020**

Action Plan Calendar Year	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
At sea (days) <sup>a</sup>	60	75	80	100	110	110	125	125
Combat aviation <sup>b</sup> (flying hours) <sup>a</sup>	100	100	100	105	110	115	120	125
Military transport <sup>b</sup> (flying hours)	110	110	120	130	140	150	150	150
Army aviation <sup>b</sup> (flying hours)	70	80	90	100	110	120	125	130
Naval aviation (flying hours)	70	70	80	90	110	105	110	120
Distance driven <sup>a</sup> (automotive engineers) (km)	350	500	500	800	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000
Distance driven (crews of tanks, BMP, BTR <sup>c</sup> ) (km)	250	350	350	400	500	500	500	500
Airborne reconnaissance (parachute jumps) <sup>a</sup>	9	11	13	15	17	19	20	21
Paratroopers, air assault, airborne units (parachute jumps)	6	7	7	8	9	10	11	12

SOURCE: RAND analysis of MoD, undated-a; MoD, “Action Plan 2013–2020: Improving the Quality of Troop Training” [“План деятельности на 2013–2020 гг.: повышение качества подготовки войск”], webpage, undated-b.

<sup>a</sup> At-sea days = per year per crew for surface and subsurface vessels. Flying hours = per year per crew. Distance driven = per year per tactical vehicle. Parachute jumps = per person.

<sup>b</sup> Combat aviation, military transport, and army aviation are part of VKS.

<sup>c</sup> BMP = *boievaia mashina pehoty* or infantry combat vehicle; BTR = *bronetransporter* or armored vehicle.

### Military Pilots

It is difficult to estimate whether Russia is achieving its individual proficiency goals for every branch listed in Table 5.1. Russia’s military pilots present an interesting example of an area in which deliberate investments have been made to improve proficiency through training within a specific field, although improved proficiency is difficult to assess. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Russian Air Force endured chronic shortages of aircraft, limited flying times, and fighter pilots who apparently earned less than bus drivers in Moscow.<sup>542</sup> In recent years, the VKS has become a top priority of military funding, which has paid for new platforms, improved armaments, and “expanding training and flying times for pilots and air crews.”<sup>543</sup> Cadets at the Air Force Military Academy now begin flying their assigned aircraft while at the academy.<sup>544</sup> Naval aviation pilots are said to clock around 130 flying hours per year on average—higher than the goals summarized in Table 5.2.<sup>545</sup> Still, the VKS suffers from a shortage of trainer aircraft and has had difficulties staffing all pilot positions.<sup>546</sup> As a result, some pilot training courses have been shortened and pilot terms of service have been extended.<sup>547</sup>

<sup>542</sup> “Russian Military Forces Dazzle After a Decade of Reform,” *The Economist*, November 2, 2020.

<sup>543</sup> Karsten Marrup and Kåre Dahl, “The Rise of Russian Air Power—A Qualitative Assessment of the Capability of the Russian Aerospace Forces,” in Poulsen and Staun, eds., 2021; and Andrew S. Bowen, *Russian Armed Forces: Capabilities*, version 3, Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, IF11589, June 30, 2020a.

<sup>544</sup> MoD, 2018e.

<sup>545</sup> “Russian Federation—Air Force,” 2022.

<sup>546</sup> “Russian Federation—Navy,” 2022.

<sup>547</sup> Golts, 2017a.

By late 2021, the VKS training fell short when compared with the Action Plan and Russia's near-peer adversaries. According to one estimate, recently graduated pilots averaged over 120 and 110 flying hours in 2018 and 2019, respectively—slightly below the Action Plan average requirements of 128 flying hours in 2018 and 132 flying hours in 2019 across combat, military transport, and army aviation units.<sup>548</sup> Overall, VKS pilot flying hours averaged just over 100 hours in 2018 and 90 hours in 2019. Notably, both the goals and the reality were below the NATO-stipulated minimum of 180 flying hours per year.<sup>549</sup> However, another estimate suggests that between 2014 and 2021, combat pilots averaged closer to 200 annual flying hours and transport pilots around 110 hours, nearer what Western pilots receive.<sup>550</sup> Efforts continued to focus on improving training and flying times for Russia's military pilots and air crews. Russia's pilots benefited from participating in operations in Syria, where, in 2017 alone, 80 percent of combat aviation crews and 90 percent of army aviation crews reportedly flew between 100 and 120 missions per crew.<sup>551</sup>

## Individual Military Training and Education

As with other militaries, Russia's primarily has sought to improve individual proficiency through training and education.<sup>552</sup> Russian officials have touted Russia's recent experience in military conflicts as having increased the military proficiency of Russia's personnel. The following sections will discuss the training and education of Russia's conscripts, contract enlisted personnel, and officers, followed by a discussion of the impact that Russia's participation in recent military conflicts (e.g., Ukraine, Syria) has had on military proficiency.

### *Typical Professional Development and Career Progression Pipeline*

Before examining specific training and education programs and recent combat experiences, it is helpful to outline typical pipelines of professional development and career progression within Russia's Armed Forces. Russian citizens, with or without military-related civilian training and education discussed in Chapter 3, enter service via three pipelines: (1) being conscripted; (2) under a contract as a professional enlisted soldier, sailor, or airman; or (3) as a junior officer following graduation from a military academy. Each pipeline includes distinct training requirements at various stages of the individual's career progression, and similar to other militaries, distinct opportunities to change pipelines also exist. For example, conscripts can sign

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<sup>548</sup> “Russian Federation—Air Force,” 2022.

<sup>549</sup> “Russian Federation—Air Force,” 2022.

<sup>550</sup> Marrup and Dahl, 2021; and Bowen, 2020a.

<sup>551</sup> MoD, 2017a.

<sup>552</sup> MoD, Military-Encyclopedic Dictionary, “Military Education (Military-Professional)” [“Военное образование (военно-профессиональное)”], webpage, undated-a.

a professional contract following their period of conscription and become a professional enlisted soldier, sailor, or airman. Furthermore, some enlisted service members under contract can become NCOs or warrant officers after completing required schooling. Finally, enlisted service members may attend a military academy to pursue an officer commission. As discussed in the preceding chapter and depicted in Figure 4.1, the general progression of individual positions varies significantly within Russia’s Armed Forces, as well as the requisite training and education between these positions.<sup>553</sup>

### *Conscript Training*

Russia practices a conscription system, but this system differs greatly from the U.S. draft system, which many Americans remember from the Vietnam era. Russia uses military commissariats—local military administrative offices responsible for not only the semiannual conscription process, but also documentation of local human and economic resources for the state’s use in the event of war. Within the conscription function, the commissariat determines the best use of the conscript.<sup>554</sup> While the proportion of Russian conscripts to contract enlisted personnel has decreased, and raising the proficiency of contract service members has become a priority, a significant number of active service members are still conscripts.<sup>555</sup>

Basic training for conscripts is done within individual units. Conscripts without a draft deferment must pass health, physical fitness, and moral standards, but then they are transferred from induction stations directly to their units. There they receive initial and on-the-job training (OJT) for their particular assignment. Even VDV airborne training is conducted by the conscript’s unit.<sup>556</sup>

However, Russia’s national compulsory training program calls for male citizens to receive basic defense knowledge and military service training, as well as military-patriotic education, in primary and secondary vocational education institutions.<sup>557</sup> Thus, conscripts that have undergone compulsory training as civilians are not akin to new recruits in many Western militaries that recruit from civilian populations with no official prior military-related experiences. Those with previous DOSAAF training, discussed in Chapter 3, might have even completed field-specific education at specialized schools, including driving schools, joint technical schools, technical and radio engineering schools, and navigation schools, as well as at federal and regional sports and

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<sup>553</sup> Vatulkin et al., 2004; MoD, “Promotion from an Enlisted to a Non-Commissioned Officer, Conscription Service,” webpage, undated-s; Grau and Bartles, 2016; Bartles, 2019.

<sup>554</sup> Bartles, 2019.

<sup>555</sup> Gjerstad and Poulsen, 2021; Thomas Nyholm Jorgensen, “From Rusty Neglect to Well-Oiled Machine: The Resurrection of the Russian Army in the Years 2008–2020,” in Poulsen and Staun, eds., 2021.

<sup>556</sup> MoD, “Obtaining a Military Occupational Specialty Prior to Conscription” [“Получение военно-учетной специальности до призыва на службу”], webpage, undated-m.

<sup>557</sup> MoD, “Compulsory Training of Citizens for Military Service” [“Обязательная подготовка граждан к военной службе”], webpage, undated-c.

technical clubs that have the infrastructure and professional staff required to train specialists in a military specialty.<sup>558</sup>

In 2015, about 40 percent of those entering the military reportedly had already obtained a military specialty (*voenno-uchetnaia spetsial'nost'* or VUS, similar to an U.S. MOS or Air Force Specialty Code) via the DOSAAF program as a civilian. At that time, the MoD sought to have all new conscripts report to service with a verified VUS.<sup>559</sup> However, the number of new recruits that reported to the draft with a VUS decreased to 14 percent in 2017 and increased slightly to 17 percent in 2018, indicating that the MoD is still far from reaching its goal.<sup>560</sup>

Russian officials have acknowledged that the 12-month conscription period is too short to achieve a high degree of proficiency, especially with increasingly advanced and complex military equipment required on the modern battlefield; this is one reason for Moscow's push to recruit and train contract personnel with longer enlistment periods.<sup>561</sup> As a result, "conscripts usually fill positions that require little training, such as drivers, cooks, laborers, or lower-level maintenance personnel," according to expert Charles Bartles.<sup>562</sup> The common assignment of conscripts to secondary support roles and the fact that they are not expected to perform in most combat missions suggest that Russia recognizes the limited capabilities of most conscripts.

Furthermore, units staffed primarily by conscripts and relying heavily on OJT continued to experience high turnover as annual conscription periods end and new conscripts join the unit. Thus, conscript-based units have continually remained at low levels of proficiency and readiness collectively as well.<sup>563</sup> Importantly though, Moscow's decision to retain peacetime conscription service, even in a reduced capacity, has not been driven by attempts to increase individual proficiency as seen in professional contract enlisted initiatives. Instead, it has been a response to financial limitations and a desire to infuse young men with national patriotism and create a large

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<sup>558</sup> MoD, undated-m.

<sup>559</sup> Grau and Bartles, 2016. MoD press releases from 2015 show that the portion of draftees entering the military with a VUS was actually 19 percent. See MoD, "In the Spring of this Year Over 150 Thousand New Recruits Were Called to Military Service" ["Весной текущего года на военную службу призвано более 150 тысяч новобранцев"], webpage, July 18, 2015a; and MoD, "Fall 2015 Draft of Citizens to Military Service Has Ended" ["Завершился осенний 2015 года призыв граждан на военную службу"], webpage, December 31, 2015d.

<sup>560</sup> MoD press releases between 2015 and 2018. For example, MoD, "Fall 2017 Draft of Citizens to Military Service in the Russian Defense Ministry Has Ended" ["Осенний призыв 2017 года граждан на военную службу в Минобороны России завершен"], webpage, December 29, 2017c; and MoD, "Fall Draft of Citizens to Military Service Begins on October 1, 2018" ["1 октября 2018 года начинается осенний призыв граждан на военную службу"], webpage, October 1, 2018d.

<sup>561</sup> Bowen, 2020a; Litovkin, 2019.

<sup>562</sup> In general, conscripts with only a year of service are given assignments with few training requirements, such as "drivers, cooks, laborers, or lower-level maintenance personnel," according to Russian military expert Charles Bartles. Charles K. Bartles, "Russian Armed Forces: Enlisted Professionals," Army University Press, March 11, 2019.

<sup>563</sup> Steen Wegener, "Introduction to the Issue of the Russian Armed Forces' Military Capability," in Poulsen and Staun, eds., 2021.

pool of basically capable individuals that could be mobilized to expand the size of the Armed Forces rapidly during a large, conventional conflict.<sup>564</sup>

### *Professional Training for Contract Enlisted Personnel*

In December 2019, Shoigu reported that Russia’s Armed Forces continued efforts to develop a professional military to respond to the increasing complexity of delivered weapon systems and military equipment. Simultaneously, the number of contract personnel ready to operate such systems increased.<sup>565</sup> Shoigu’s newly instituted structure—for every regiment and brigade to include two battalions with contract personnel and a third staffed with conscripts—meant that 168 battalion tactical groups were formed with contract service members alone as of August 2021, according to Shoigu.<sup>566</sup> New training initiatives, introduced in 2005 and then expanded after the 2008 New Look reforms, largely focused on contract enlisted personnel proficiency standards.

### *Basic Training and Junior Enlisted Personnel*

Similar to conscripts, individuals signing enlistment contracts must fulfill rudimentary requirements (e.g., age, health, fitness, lack of criminal record) to enter the Armed Forces at the first enlisted rank, private or sailor.<sup>567</sup> Such individuals must pass minimal fitness standards in three categories: strength (pushups, sit ups, and pull ups [men only]), speed (60m sprint, 100m sprint, 10x10m shuttle run), and endurance (1km run, 3km run, and a cross-country ski event [men only]). Unlike conscripts, qualified recruits go directly to the first of what is a five-tier training system, as outlined in Figure 4.1. As of December 2021, this first tier involved two phases, the first of which consisted of six weeks of basic training hosted at 29 formal training units and four higher military education institutions. For the second phase, junior enlisted personnel attended a VUS-specific training course that could last from months to years depending on the specialty. If the individual who enlisted already possessed VUS qualifications from a DOSAAF program, they could skip this phase of initial formal training.<sup>568</sup>

Following the first tier of individual training, contract service members typically go on to their first assigned units, where they enter a three-month probationary status. During this time, unit commanders have the opportunity to discharge soldiers and sailors unqualified for service

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<sup>564</sup> Jorgensen, 2021.

<sup>565</sup> MoD, 2019f.

<sup>566</sup> “The Russian battalion tactical group (BTG) is a modular tactical organization created from a garrisoned Russian Army brigade to deploy combat power to conflict zones” (Nicolas J. Fiore, “Defeating the Russian Battalion Tactical Group,” paper, Fort Benning, Ga., undated); “Shoigu Said That There Are 168 Battalion Tactical Groups in the Russian Army” [“Шойгу заявил, что в армии России насчитывается 168 батальонно-тактических групп”], TASS, August 10, 2021.

<sup>567</sup> Litovkin, 2019.

<sup>568</sup> Bartles, 2019.

from the Armed Forces.<sup>569</sup> As of this writing, unit training of individual and collective skills occurs within the Armed Forces' larger strategic and readiness exercise schedule, resulting in distinct summer and winter training cycles (discussed earlier).<sup>570</sup> Each training cycle also focuses on collective tasks that prepare tactical units for a higher-echelon, semi-annual exercise during which individual skills continue to improve, although it is unclear whether individual proficiency is evaluated during collective training and exercises.

Overall, Russia has invested in several initiatives to increase the number of contract junior enlisted personnel and improve the formal and unit training of these personnel. These initiatives very likely have improved the quality and competence of junior enlisted ranks that previously included mostly conscripts who were limited to OJT. However, it is difficult to ascertain exactly how much more proficient the average individual at the lowest ranks is, relative to past periods. The characteristics of Russia's approach also might limit professional development beyond a basic level at this echelon. For example, one program, which was aimed at increasing the ratio of contract enlisted to conscripts, offers draftees reporting to their induction office an option to sign a two-year enlistment contract instead of serving a one-year conscription period.<sup>571</sup> There are some indications that this program (which was discussed in Chapter 4) along with other retention issues may result in high numbers of contract junior enlisted leaving service after their shortened contracts expire (normal contracts are at least three years). Although a private under this program receives formal initial and VUS training, that individual will serve only about a year and a half (or less) in their unit (two years minus their tier-one training period), generally less time than most U.S. junior enlisted spend in their first assignments.

Furthermore, during the previous conscription policy that included two years of service, conscripts spent nearly all their time with their assigned unit, although they did not receive formal initial training. Thus, some fully staffed contract units still might include individuals with little time in service and thus might experience relatively high turnover at the junior enlisted rank, partially limiting the potential to develop professional competence at this echelon. Individual competence is undoubtedly higher, but it is not clear just how much "better" the two-year contract enlisted service members—who have short basic and VUS training before joining their unit—are, when compared with the two-year conscripts that preceded them.

### Advanced Training

Those enlisted service members that renew their contracts after their first terms of service would likely attend a second-tier training course dedicated to their branch of service and VUS; this would prepare them for squad leader, tank commander, crew leader, and other similar positions. The intent of this and more-advanced enlisted training programs is not to "develop

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<sup>569</sup> Bartles, 2019.

<sup>570</sup> Jorgensen, 2021.

<sup>571</sup> Bartles, 2019.



well rounded leaders” but rather “develop technically proficient professionals.”<sup>572</sup> Russia’s junior NCOs do not expect to spend time out of their branch or specialty, so their career training pipeline focuses almost entirely on professional skills needed to learn, practice, or teach their specific profession. Thus, after serving in a unit for three to five years in a second-tier position, individuals will receive another three months of VUS-specific training and return to a unit as a deputy platoon leader, or, in some combat support platoons, as a platoon leader. After at least ten years of service, contract service members can attend three to five months of tier-four staff training to prepare to serve on regiment, brigade, and division staffs. After another five years in one of those positions, they may then receive another three to five months of tier-five training before serving at the Army Group level or on higher-echelon staffs.<sup>573</sup>

### Non-Commissioned Officer Academies

As mentioned previously, the MoD has a different concept of the roles and responsibilities of mid- and senior-ranked NCOs. In the Russian Armed Forces, officers—and in some cases warrant officers—take on many of the disciplinary, leadership, and training roles that Western military NCOs usually play.<sup>574</sup> However, the Russian military has shown an increased interest in the professional development of its NCOs—sometimes referred to as *officer assistants*—in recent years. And those meeting qualification requirements for knowledge, skills, abilities, and education can attend a professional educational institution at a dedicated military installation or university.<sup>575</sup>

NCO academies provide a nearly three-year-long program that includes training and education that is comparable to the kind that cadets receive at a four- or five-year military academies before commissioning as new lieutenants. On graduating from an NCO academy, the contract service member follows along a small-unit leadership career path.<sup>576</sup> Advanced training and higher education offer greater career incentives and likely produce more-competent NCOs than at any time in Russia’s past, but the priority remains to create qualified specialists and mentors in their specific career field.<sup>577</sup> While many NCOs probably become quite technically proficient in their field, some analysts still contend that training standards are not as high as in the United States, and NCOs lack relative experience outside of their niche specialty.<sup>578</sup> Some

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<sup>572</sup> Bartles, 2019.

<sup>573</sup> Bartles, 2019.

<sup>574</sup> Barndollar, 2020.

<sup>575</sup> MoD, “Training of Soldiers and Sergeants: Training of Contract Servicemembers” [“Подготовка сержантов и старшин: подготовка военнослужащих по контракту”], webpage, undated-aa.

<sup>576</sup> Grau and Bartles, 2016.

<sup>577</sup> Gerasimov, 2017.

<sup>578</sup> Richard D. Hooker, Jr., “How to Fight the Russians,” Arlington, Va.: Association of the United States Army, Land Warfare Paper No. 135, November 30, 2020.

evidence also suggests that Russia is still struggling to build a robust NCO system, possibly because of retention issues and its inability to graduate enough individuals from NCO academies.<sup>579</sup> One thing that is certain is that Russia is not interested in the U.S. or Western enlisted contract-based model because of the different military decisionmaking processes, histories, and social conventions in the Russian military.<sup>580</sup>

### *Professional Training for Warrant Officers*

In the past, Russia experienced challenges with maintaining enough warrant officers, in part because such officers had to graduate from a four- or five-year military academy like other officers. In addition, after graduation, warrant officers had few opportunities for career advancement and received roughly the same pay in all positions. As a result, the Armed Forces always had a shortage of warrant officers, especially in the positions associated with complex technical work.<sup>581</sup> After abolishing warrant officer ranks as part of the 2008 reforms, the MoD has brought these ranks back into service and improved their training and education.<sup>582</sup> Warrant officers now attend a three-year and ten-month course at the Aerospace Forces 183rd Training Center at Rostov-on-Don that grants a bachelor's degree and provides better incentives for individual performance and continued education.<sup>583</sup>

### *Professional Training for Officers*

Russian military officers serve different roles than many of their Western counterparts. In addition to their command and control role, they also act as the Armed Forces' "primary trainers, disciplinarians, and repositories for institutional knowledge."<sup>584</sup> Officers constitute the backbone of Russia's highly vertical command structure, and they exercise a great deal of authority over their subordinates.<sup>585</sup>

Similar to contract enlisted personnel whose military careers focus on a specific occupational specialty, Russian cadets also receive a VUS specialty while at an academy. Unlike many military academies elsewhere that promote a well-rounded university education, Russian military academies primarily focus on developing VUS proficiency and producing competent leaders for

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<sup>579</sup> Barndollar, 2020.

<sup>580</sup> Bartles, 2019.

<sup>581</sup> Bartles, 2019.

<sup>582</sup> Grau and Bartles, 2016.

<sup>583</sup> Bartles, 2019.

<sup>584</sup> Grau and Bartles, 2016.

<sup>585</sup> Kirill Shamiev, *Understanding Senior Leadership Dynamics Within the Russian Military*, Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, July 2021.

that specialty. Therefore, the MoD hosts several military academies associated with the following specialties:<sup>586</sup>

- communication
- nuclear, chemical, and biological defense
- logistics
- medicine
- combined arms
- artillery
- air defense
- military aviation
- military space
- space defense
- naval
- strategic missile forces.

Except for the General Staff Academy, graduating cadets commission at the rank of junior lieutenant and report directly to their assigned units immediately to begin leading troops and executing duties.<sup>587</sup> The MoD stated that in 2020, military academies produced some 13,000 junior lieutenants that entered the Armed Forces, which reportedly has a 96 percent staffing level for all officer positions.<sup>588</sup> However, even if these MoD-reported figures are accurate, Russia's officer corps has experienced a good deal of volatility since the 2008 reforms began, which may have implications for individual proficiency. As discussed more in Chapter 4, the Russian officer corps has gone through periods of severe overstaffing (no cadets were admitted to military academies between 2009 and 2011, and lieutenants were being assigned to NCO positions) and massive shortages (thousands of reservists and officers dismissed from service were recalled in 2015 and 2016, and most military academies were reduced from five to four years).<sup>589</sup>

Once in the Armed Forces, it is unusual for officers to transfer out of their branch or serve in out-of-branch assignments, again indicating the services' emphasis on VUS specialization.<sup>590</sup> Junior officers up to the rank of captain serve as commanders and deputy commanders of platoons, companies, and battalions. Before being promoted to the position of senior officer (major through colonel), officers attend a yearlong course, such as the Combined Arms Academy. After this course, officers in maneuver branches can command combined arms units at

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<sup>586</sup> MoD, Military Academy of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, "Links to Education Organizations" ["Карта сайтов образовательных организаций"], webpage, undated.

<sup>587</sup> Grau and Bartles, 2016.

<sup>588</sup> MoD, 2020b.

<sup>589</sup> Golts, 2017a.

<sup>590</sup> Grau and Bartles, 2016.

the regimental and brigade levels. Non-maneuver officers have similar career paths.<sup>591</sup> Promotion through these ranks reportedly is based on

11 formal and verifiable competencies, the ability to switch from peace to war contexts, personal appearance (disciplined and correct conduct), job capability (orderliness, systematic approach, initiative and sense of priorities), condition of the commanded unit, moral and psychological qualities (creative and capable of self-criticism, popular among peers, security awareness) and good health.<sup>592</sup>

In the absence of substantial NCO leadership, Russian military units are generally smaller than U.S. ones and have smaller staffs to facilitate officer command and control. As a result, Russian maneuver officers have opportunities to lead troops, and some command tours can last up to six years. Russian officers are also promoted more quickly than their Western counterparts and “it is not uncommon to see a 32-year-old battalion commander.” Within this tactical path, Russian officers generally do not serve in positions outside their branch, and they get ample time to hone the technical skills of their specialty. In this system, a brigade commander on the tactical path would have more years of command experience than their U.S. counterpart because of the ability to specialize in tactical leadership.<sup>593</sup>

Some senior officers can branch out of the tactical path toward an assignment on the General Staff.<sup>594</sup> General Staff Academy-trained officers—a small, elite group—are entitled “to think for themselves and create military innovation” while the rest of the Armed Forces are “mainly tasked with obeying orders and observing doctrines.”<sup>595</sup>

### *Professional Military Education*

The MoD formally defines *military education* as the process of training, increasing qualification of, and retraining military specialists, accompanied by an assessment of these specialists’ achieved education level.<sup>596</sup> At the end of an individual’s time in a military-academic institution, they typically receive a diploma or other form of documentation that serves as confirmation of a completed course of military education. The main purpose of professional military education is to ensure that Russia’s military forces have a qualified military cadre. This goal applies to all levels of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, which emphasizes acquisition of specific knowledge in a teacher-controlled environment at the lower levels as well as at the highest military academy, the Military Academy of the General Staff of the Armed

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<sup>591</sup> Grau and Bartles, 2016.

<sup>592</sup> Gjerstad and Poulsen, 2021.

<sup>593</sup> Grau and Bartles, 2016.

<sup>594</sup> Grau and Bartles, 2016.

<sup>595</sup> Gjerstad and Poulsen, 2021.

<sup>596</sup> MoD, Military-Encyclopedic Dictionary, undated-a.

Forces of the Russian Federation.<sup>597</sup> The General Staff Academy employs several selection criteria for admission:<sup>598</sup>

- level of military-professional readiness of officers and generals
- physical fitness
- health
- social-psychological and psychological characteristics
  - The psychological evaluation determines the candidates’ abilities to understand a complex training program and attain a master’s degree in national security.
- moral and strong-willed qualities
- logic
- spatial orientation
- memory
- ability to use different methods of analysis
- concentration and other professional qualities necessary for operational-strategic leadership.

In 2017, 60 percent of selectees had combat experience, and more than half had received high government awards.

Russia’s professional military education (PME) program includes primary, secondary, higher education, postgraduate, and additional military training. Requirements for graduation are comparable with those in civilian education in the same specialty.<sup>599</sup> Table 5.3 summarizes the specific attainment that each level of military education is supposed to provide to advance the training, qualification, and knowledge of Russia’s military personnel.

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<sup>597</sup> Gjerstad and Poulsen, 2021.

<sup>598</sup> MoD, Military Academy of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, “Military Academy of the General Staff of AF RF Is Selecting Professional Candidates for Admission” [“В Военной академии Генерального штаба ВС РФ проводятся мероприятия по профессиональному отбору кандидатов для поступления”], webpage, May 23, 2017.

<sup>599</sup> MoD, “Professional Education Program” [“Профессиональная образовательная программа”], webpage, undated-r.

**Table 5.3. Professional Military Education Program**

Level of Education	Description
Primary military education	To attain the knowledge and skills necessary to carry out job responsibilities of soldiers, sailors, NCOs, foremen, and warrant officers in specialties (professions) that require a commensurate level of qualification.
Secondary military education	Training for warrant officers and officers in middle management.
Higher military education	Training for junior officers for primary officer positions.
Postgraduate military education	Training for highly qualified science-educated and scientific personnel.
Additional military training	Continuous improvement of qualifications <sup>a</sup> and retraining of service members and mastering of new professional functions, weapon prototypes, and military equipment.

SOURCE: MoD, “Officer Retraining: Professional Retraining and Increase of Qualification for Officers of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation,” webpage, undated-n.

<sup>a</sup> Refers to skill-level qualification, a component of competence discussed earlier, which increases military proficiency.

In line with the MoD’s efforts to boost the military-scientific potential of the Armed Forces, the MoD created eight research and development institutes and ten major scientific units in military academies and colleges between 2012 and 2017.<sup>600</sup> The portion of military scientists—doctoral candidates and Ph.D.’s—in research and development institutes increased from 16 to 47 percent during this time. The portion of modern facilities for laboratory work and experimentation increased to 44 percent, improving the MoD’s ability to conduct research in advanced scientific areas.

As part of their additional military training (described in Table 5.3), the professional improvement of qualifications and retraining for has provides two paths: one is an opportunity for an officer to attain a new skill, and the other is to improve on their existing skills. The former entails over 500 hours of courses, at the end of which officers receive a diploma in professional retraining for a *new* type of function associated with their specific military specialty.<sup>601</sup> The latter requires at least 1,000 hours of labor-intensive qualification in accordance with their *existing* military specialty. This portion of military education occurs at least once every three years or prior to an officer’s promotion to a higher military post.

### *Military-Political Training and Education*

Russia’s military education system includes one additional element: military-political education. While independent of Russia’s PME program, military-political education is one of

<sup>600</sup> MoD, 2017b.

<sup>601</sup> MoD, undated-n.

the primary training topics for military personnel of the Armed Forces.<sup>602</sup> In the summer of 2018, the MoD established a directorate responsible for the military-patriotic instruction of the Armed Forces and to some extent civil society.<sup>603</sup> In 2019, Shoigu signed a directive to conduct military-political training (*voienno-politicheskiya podgotovka*, VPP) and assigned responsibility to oversee, support, and plan for such training to the Assistant Minister of Defense of the Russian Federation, Chief of the Military-Political Directorate (*glavnoie voienno-politicheskoe upravlenie*, GVU). This structure diverges from that of Western militaries, where if leadership perceives an erosion of ethical values and norms in the ranks, they hold unit-level commanders accountable. In Russia, the General Staff chose not to impart this duty to commanding officers and instead created a parallel cadre to foster these values.<sup>604</sup>

In accompanying guidance, Shoigu called VPP the “most integral form of military-political, state-patriotic, military, moral, legal, and aesthetic discipline.”<sup>605</sup> Thus, the GVU conducts military-political education and training to provide for “the moral-political and psychological state, order and military discipline, and development of ideology of the service member, and close-knit military teams capable of conducting missions in any environment and under any conditions.”<sup>606</sup> In his annual update to the Commander-in-Chief on the state of the Armed Forces at the end of 2020, Shoigu reported that commanders and military-political agencies “maintained a high level of moral-psychological and moral-political state of troops and their readiness to perform combat tasks under any conditions,” confirming successful implementation of the guidance he issued just a year earlier.<sup>607</sup>

### Military-Political Directorate

Unlike professional, combat, and other official forms of training discussed elsewhere in this chapter, military-political training is a requirement for all contract, conscript, and civilian personnel of all ranks and positions, and no one receives an automatic passing grade without prior testing. To assess the effectiveness of VPP—the results of which are important enough to report to the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation—the GVU administers the training through a strict curriculum. The curriculum encompasses several subject

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<sup>602</sup> MoD, “On Organizing Military-Political Training in the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation” [“Об организации военно-политической подготовки в Вооруженных силах Российской Федерации”], Order No. 95, February 22, 2019e.

<sup>603</sup> Gjerstad and Poulsen, 2021.

<sup>604</sup> Jason Gresh, “Professionalism and Politics in the Russian Military,” Wilson Center, Kennan Cable No. 67, April 2021.

<sup>605</sup> Minister of Defense of the Russian Federation, 2019e.

<sup>606</sup> MoD, “Main Military-Political Directorate of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation” [“Главное военно-политическое управление Вооруженных сил Российской Федерации”], webpage, undated-f; MoD, 2019e.

<sup>607</sup> MoD, 2020b.

areas: state and military building, military-political situation, the mission of the Armed Forces in repelling threats to national security, patriotic history, army and navy traditions, military education and psychology, moral norms and military ethics, laws of the Russian Federation, and international humanitarian legal norms.<sup>608</sup> Table 5.4 and Box 5.1 list specific military-political training requirements for all military personnel in the Armed Forces, including for the instructors who administer the training, and evaluation criteria of individual knowledge and aggregated assessment of VPP knowledge at the unit and commander levels, respectively.

**Table 5.4. Military-Political Training Requirements**

<b>Rank/Position</b>	<b>Amount of Training</b>
VPP instructors	Four hours per week for preparation; no less than two hours/month for instruction; two-day conference prior to start of instructional period
Leadership participation in VPP	
Commanders	No less than two classes during instruction period; monthly inspection of one of the units
Deputy commanders	No less than three classes; monthly inspection of one of the units
VPP counterparts	Monthly inspection of all subordinate units
Heads of departments and military services	No less than four classes with different categories of service members; monthly inspection of one of the subordinate units
VPP counterparts	Monthly inspection of all subordinate units
Senior officers (military department/district/fleet level)	16 hours per year—eight hours during professional training
Senior officers (military unit/ship/subunit level)	Four hours per month—two hours during professional training
Soldiers, seamen, NCOs, senior NCOs (contract/conscript) and warrant officers (in groups of no more than 25 people)	Three hours per week
Substitute staff in warrant officer schools; military institutions preparing specialists and junior commanders	Two times per week, two hours each
Armed Forces civilians	No less than two hours per month
During field exercises, deployment, and so on	No less than one hour per week

SOURCE: MoD, 2019e.

<sup>608</sup> MoD, 2019e, p. 3.



## Text Box 5.1. Evaluation Criteria for VPPT

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### Evaluation of Individual Training

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Tracked in combat (professional/official) training journals

Based on no less than three test questions; additional three questions to assess level of mastery of knowledge

Answers to questions based on a four-level scale:

- Excellent—correct use of concepts and terms
- Good—may include some inaccuracies and mistakes
- Satisfactory—soft knowledge of the topic; basic understanding presented with difficulty
- Unsatisfactory—requirements for satisfactory rating not reached

Individual grade scale:

- Excellent—at least two answers received excellent rating
- Good—over 90 percent of correct answers given; no less than two answers receive excellent or good rating; one satisfactory or 80–90 percent of answers are correct
- Satisfactory—no less than two answers receive positive evaluation or 70–80 percent of answers are correct
- Unsatisfactory—requirements for satisfactory rating not reached

A grade is reduced by one point if the service member has a pending disciplinary action against them at the time of the VPP test.

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### Evaluation of Unit Training

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Training groups

- Excellent—average grade of at least 4.7
- Good—average grade of at least 3.7
- Satisfactory—average grade of at least 2.7
- Unsatisfactory—average grade less than 2.7

Operational units

- Excellent—leadership and at least 50 percent of tested subordinate units received excellent, the rest good or satisfactory
- Good—leadership and at least 50 percent of tested subordinate units received excellent and good, the rest satisfactory
- Satisfactory—leadership and at least 70 percent of tested subordinate units received positive evaluation
- Unsatisfactory—requirements for satisfactory rating not reached

Authorities providing guidance on VPP

- Satisfactory—subordinate units have complete documentation in accordance with MoD directives, legislation, VPP authorities; at least 80 percent of VPP training plans have been executed

Unsatisfactory—requirements for satisfactory rating not reached.

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SOURCE: MoD, 2019e.

To complete military-political training, VPP instructors can administer it alongside professional, official, and combat training. For example, the beginning of the 2021 summer training cycle in the Baltic Fleet included a lesson in the military-political training program, titled *Russia in the Modern World. Main Goals of the Social-Economic, Political and Military-Technical Development of the Country. Tasks for Military Personnel During the Summer Training Period for the 2021 Calendar Year*.<sup>609</sup> This block of training focused on characterizing Russia’s military-political situation in the modern world through the challenges and threats to its national security, such as NATO’s presence and training in the region.

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<sup>609</sup> V. Maksimenko, “Combat Training Given High Intensity” [“Боевой учебе – высокую интенсивность”], *Strazh Baltiki*, No. 21, June 4, 2021.

Some military observers have noted that Russia’s military is becoming more political, harkening back to when Soviet political officers were installed in units to ensure political loyalty.<sup>610</sup> On May 15, 2019, during the 100th anniversary celebration of the establishment of the main political directorate of the Armed Forces, General-Colonel Andrei Kartoplov, Chief of the Main Military-Political Directorate of the General Staff, emphasized that humanity is entering a new phase of warfare, where people’s minds are the main target of destruction and defeat.<sup>611</sup> Kartoplov further stated that, for this reason, Russia’s military-political leadership decided to change its fundamental approach to developing military personnel of the Armed Forces. The new approach would be based on the “experiences of Russian and Soviet militaries, wars, and military conflicts, in which our warriors demonstrated the highest moral-political qualities of defenders of the Motherland.”<sup>612</sup> World War II—known in the former Soviet Union as the *Great Patriotic War*—continues to serve as the brightest example of such experience. Perhaps for this reason, the GVU is most closely associated with raising and maintaining the level of patriotism within and outside the Armed Forces. While patriotic history is just one of the subjects in the training curriculum, it is the one that garners the most attention. There is a preponderance of resources available on the GVU homepage on the MoD website that recount the Soviet Union’s contribution to the destruction of Nazi Germany during World War II.<sup>613</sup>

## The Role of Combat Experience in Assessing Military Proficiency

Moscow’s principal motivations and objectives during military campaigns in Ukraine and Syria have been geopolitical, nationalistic, and strategic. However, a secondary benefit of these campaigns has been the opportunity to provide parts of the Armed Forces with combat experience that the MoD broadly believes has improved the overall quality of Russian forces, raised morale, driven military innovations, and enhanced technical proficiency.<sup>614</sup> Gerasimov noted how valuable this recent combat experience has been for training and education and that the complex situations of modern battlefields help improve individuals’ “offensive impulse, initiative, courage, decisiveness, risk acceptance, persistence, endurance, and ability to overcome any difficulties.”<sup>615</sup> In 2018, Shoigu discussed how pervasive this experience had become across important positions of the Armed Forces, claiming that 96 percent of combined arms brigade and

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<sup>610</sup> Gresh, 2021.

<sup>611</sup> “Main Military-Political Directorate of the AF RF Celebrates Centennial” [“Главное военно-политическое управление ВС РФ отмечает столетие”], *Zvezda TV*, May 15, 2019.

<sup>612</sup> Val’hanskaia, 2019.

<sup>613</sup> See for example, “Uchebniie i Spravochniie Posobiia [Education and Reference Materials]” in MoD, undated-f.

<sup>614</sup> “Russian Military Forces Dazzle After a Decade of Reform,” 2020.; Martin Russell, *Russia’s Armed Forces, Defense Capabilities and Policy*, Members’ Research Service, European Parliament, March 2021; and Gresh, 2021.

<sup>615</sup> Gerasimov, 2017, p. 19.

regimental commanders had recent combat experience.<sup>616</sup> Russia's Ukraine and Syria campaigns have helped improve personnel proficiency in two ways: the personal experience gained by service members while deployed, and the application of lessons learned in the military institutions and culture that train and educate service members back in Russia.

### *Ukraine, 2014*

During the 2014 Russian military intervention in eastern Ukraine, regular rotations of troops from multiple military districts ensured that individual units did not get burned out, and numerous individuals had opportunities to serve in or directly support operations in Ukraine. The 2014 annexation of Crimea by a "small number of highly trained and disciplined troops" was portrayed as an indicator of improved Russian capabilities.<sup>617</sup> However, early reports from fighting in eastern Ukraine indicated a noticeable variance in terms of the quality and competence of Russian service members there.<sup>618</sup> In 2015, a Ukrainian officer reported that the majority of conventional troops who they faced made "huge mistakes" and "were untrained and unprofessional," in contrast with reported experiences with fighting against the Russian elite troops of the *Spetsnaz Glavnoe upravlenie* (GU; Main Directorate of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation) and Chechen fighters who were far more effective and feared.<sup>619</sup> Over time, multiple rotations of Russian troops in eastern Ukraine gained experience in armored warfare, artillery duels, use of unmanned aerial systems (UAS) in targeting cycles, coordinating cyber-attacks, and electronic warfare, among other tactics and techniques.<sup>620</sup>

### *Syria*

By the end of 2020, an estimated 63,000-plus Russian service members had served in Syria.<sup>621</sup> The short three-to-four-month tours of duty for Russian troops maximized opportunities for individuals across the Armed Forces to perform on live battlefields, although this limited the length of combat experience for each individual service member. Putin has described Russia's Syria campaign as a "training exercise," and one Russian general suggested that it was actually cheaper to conduct "training" under combat conditions in Syria than in some large-scale

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<sup>616</sup> MoD, 018a.

<sup>617</sup> Russell, 2021.

<sup>618</sup> Unlike in Crimea, the Kremlin officially denied that Russian forces were involved in the fighting in eastern Ukraine as of January 2022.

<sup>619</sup> The Main Intelligence Directorate (*Glavnoie razveyivatel'noie upravleniie* or GRU) is the predecessor to the current Main Directorate of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation (GU). Spetsnaz are the special forces of the GU. Jeremy Bender, "Here Are 2 Problems That Could Sink the Russian Military in a War," *Business Insider*, October 21, 2015.

<sup>620</sup> "Russian Military Forces Dazzle After a Decade of Reform," 2020.

<sup>621</sup> "Russian Military Forces Dazzle After a Decade of Reform," 2020.

exercises in Russia.<sup>622</sup> As in Ukraine, Russian troops in Syria tested their advanced skills with UAS, precision strike, air defense, and an array of electronic warfare techniques.<sup>623</sup> In Syria, however, Russian troops may have received greater personal development as they faced local insurgents while also operating deployed further abroad and in proximity to U.S. forces, suggesting that skills employed there might have more relevance to future battlefields.<sup>624</sup> Russian officers also had more opportunities to practice mission command in Syria while acting with more autonomy and creativity than Russia's past command and control structures and culture encouraged.<sup>625</sup>

Of the military services, the VKS particularly benefited from the combat experience gained during the military intervention in Syria, where the 2008 military reforms were tested under real-world combat conditions.<sup>626</sup> At the time, the Russian military leadership touted its proficiency: Gerasimov stated in 2017 that Russia's performance in Syria validated Russia's instituted training and education system that prepared its officers and enlisted and upheld "the superiority of the Russian military school and science."<sup>627</sup> Syria also proved to be a testing ground for newer capabilities and systems. Multiple types of tactical and long-range platforms (fighters, interceptors, and bombers) employed air-launched cruise missiles and other precision-strike capabilities throughout the country.<sup>628</sup>

### *Ukraine, 2022*

On February 23, 2022, 190,000 Russian military troops and separatist forces invaded Ukraine on its eastern, northern, and southern borders and began their advance toward Ukraine's major cities, including its capital, Kyiv.<sup>629</sup> At the end of March 2022, a month into Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the Russian military found itself "bogged down in the face of Ukraine's fierce resistance" and began to retreat, presumably to reconstitute its Ground Forces for the "focus toward the Donbas" during the next stage of its "special military operation."<sup>630</sup>

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<sup>622</sup> Keir Giles, "Russia's 'Lessons Learned' from Ukraine and Syria," in Stephen J. Blank, ed., *The Russian Military in Contemporary Perspective*, U.S. Army War College Press, Strategic Studies Institute, September 2019, p. 288.

<sup>623</sup> "Russian Military Forces Dazzle After a Decade of Reform," 2020.

<sup>624</sup> Gjerstad and Poulsen, 2021.

<sup>625</sup> "Russian Military Forces Dazzle After a Decade of Reform," 2020.

<sup>626</sup> Christopher Phillips, *The Battle for Syria: International Rivalry in the New Middle East*, Yale University Press, 2016, p. 217.

<sup>627</sup> Gerasimov, 2017, p. 20.

<sup>628</sup> Bowen, 2020a.

<sup>629</sup> Anton Troianovski and Neil MacFarquhar, "Putin Announces Start to 'Military Operation' Against Ukraine," *New York Times*, February 23, 2022.

<sup>630</sup> Jonathan Tepperman, "Why Russia Is Losing: Gen. David Petraeus on the War in Ukraine," Octavian Report, Substack post, March 23, 2022; Benjamin Johnson, Tyson Wetzell, and J. B. Barranco, "Russia Crisis Military Assessment: Russia Is Forced to Make a Major Shift in Strategy," blog post, Atlantic Council, March 30, 2022.

During this first month, Russia surprised Western observers of its ongoing military reforms with its poor performance. On the battlefield, Russian troops struggled to advance their wheeled and tracked vehicles through somewhat muddy Ukrainian terrain; remained clustered and out in the open when stopped; and seemed inadequate at employing armor, infantry, engineers, artillery, and mortars to achieve combined-arms effects, such as maintaining their vehicles and weapon systems and providing logistical support to their forward forces.<sup>631</sup> Russia's Air Force attempted but could not disable Ukraine's military airfields at the beginning of the war, and could not achieve air superiority.<sup>632</sup> Russia's Air Force stayed outside the range of Ukraine's air defenses to reduce aircraft losses.<sup>633</sup> Russian forces also underperformed jointly. Russia's Air Force "has been unimpressive" with providing close air support to its Ground Forces advancing inside Ukraine and has "generally been carrying out attacks that are disconnected from ground maneuvers."<sup>634</sup> Russia's Black Sea Fleet was able "to provide supporting fires and logistical support to its Ground Forces in the south," but it suffered a significant loss when its flagship battle cruiser, the *Moskva*, was sunk by Ukrainian forces.<sup>635</sup>

Evidence emerged during the early weeks of the conflict that many Russian troops were not informed in advance that they would be fighting a war against Ukraine, a result of excessive operational security and likely mistrust of rank and file.<sup>636</sup> Analysis of Russian military performance during the conflict has underscored the undisciplined way that Russia has been waging the war: bombardment of civilian areas, such as hospitals, theaters, and residential buildings; and reports of looting, rape, and torture in addition to the tactical missteps described above.<sup>637</sup> Russian lack of training and professionalism under combat conditions is also apparent in the Armed Forces' equipment losses as a result of destruction, damage or abandonment, or capture, which appear to be occurring at much higher rates than expected.<sup>638</sup> Finally, reports

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<sup>631</sup> Tepperman, 2022.

<sup>632</sup> Michael Morell, "Putin's Choices in Ukraine: Former Top Pentagon Official Mike Vickers," interview with Mike Vickers, former Acting Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, March 2, 2022; Vasco Cotovio, Frederik Pleitgen, and Byron Blunt, "Inside the Race to Prevent Russia Gaining Full Control of the Skies Above Ukraine," *CNN*, March 23, 2022.

<sup>633</sup> Johnson, Wetzel, and Barranco, 2022.

<sup>634</sup> Tepperman, 2022.

<sup>635</sup> Johnson, Wetzel, and Barranco, 2022.

<sup>636</sup> Luke Harding, "Demoralised Russian Soldiers Tell of Anger at Being 'Duped' into War," *The Guardian*, March 4, 2022.

<sup>637</sup> Face the Nation, "Fiona Hill on Alleged Russian Atrocities in Ukraine and Putin's Future," video, YouTube, April 3, 2022.

<sup>638</sup> As of March 30, 2022, one estimate suggests that Russian Ground Forces have lost dozens of pieces of air-defense equipment, including 37 mobile surface-to-air missile systems. Ukrainian Armed Forces also claim to have shot down over 100 Russian aircraft and 123 helicopters. See Johnson, Wetzel, and Barranco, 2022; Cotovio, Pleitgen, and Blunt, 2022.

have been surfacing of Russian troops deserting or refusing to fight in Ukraine, phenomena also unexpected and uncharacteristic of professional military formations.<sup>639</sup>

Russia's apparent inability to plan and execute a successful 2022 campaign in Ukraine led to several initial conclusions among Western observers. At a strategic level, Russian intelligence appears to have underestimated Ukraine's tremendous will to fight. Over the past two decades, Russian threat assessments have classified Ukraine under local and regional sources of military threats to Russia, and such assessments did so within the context of NATO and the United States exerting military-political and economic pressure on Ukraine to create outposts for future military aggression.<sup>640</sup> From Moscow's perspective, Ukraine's previous decision not to fight for Crimea in 2014 and some Russian assessments that Ukraine's own conscripted forces are unmotivated might be the reasons why Ukraine's will to fight and defend its territory without direct intervention from NATO had come as such a surprise.<sup>641</sup> In one interview, David Petraeus, former Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, noted that "Russia is facing very capable Ukrainian forces and citizenry that are fighting for their survival, have the homefield advantage, and are fiercely determined to defend their country."<sup>642</sup> Mike Vickers, former Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence, also stated that "Ukrainian forces are way overperforming . . . Ukrainian leadership and people's grit are inspiring."<sup>643</sup> As a result, Russian troops expected to be welcomed as liberators and were unprepared for what followed.<sup>644</sup>

Most significantly for this chapter, the underperformance of Russian military personnel in Ukraine suggests that Russian leaders may have become overconfident, either on the basis of assessments of previous military campaigns (e.g., Syria, Crimea, Georgia, Chechnya) or because Russian senior military officials were overly optimistic or else miscalculated the progress of efforts to improve Russian forces' military proficiency or their capacity to support such a large operation. Most of Russia's reform efforts have been taking shape in the past decade. While the road from plan to execution of reform efforts is not a quick or easy one for any military, Russia's

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<sup>639</sup> William M. Arkin, "Shocking Lessons U.S. Military Leaders Learned by Watching Putin's Invasion," *Newsweek*, March 1, 2022.

<sup>640</sup> D. V. Surin, "Classification, Arrangement and Expert Evaluation of Foreign and Domestic Threats in the Analysis Assuring National Security of the Russian Federation" ["Классификация, ранжирование и экспертная оценка внешних и внутренних угроз при анализе обеспечения национальной безопасности Российской Федерации"], *Vestnik Akademii Voennykh Nauk*, Vol. 3, 2004; and Sambu Tsyrendorzhiev, "Forecast of Russian Military Dangers and Threats" ["Прогноз военных опасностей и угроз России"], *Zashchita i bezopasnost'*, No. 4, 2015, pp. 10–14.

<sup>641</sup> Adam Charles Lenton, "Why Didn't Ukraine Fight for Crimea? Evidence from Declassified National Security and Defense Council Proceedings," *Problems of Post-Communism*, Vol. 69, No. 2, 2022; Valerii Gromak, "Strategy of Begging" ["Стратегия попрошайничества"], *VPK. Voенно-Promyshlennyi Kur'er*, No. 6, February 16, 2022.

<sup>642</sup> Терперман, 2022.

<sup>643</sup> Morell, 2022.

<sup>644</sup> Aleksandr Tikhonov and Valerii Komissarov, "Burning Nazism with Dagger Fire" ["Нацизм выжигаем кинжальным огнем"], *Strazh Baltiki*, No. 11, March 25, 2022; Roger Cohen, "The Making of Vladimir Putin: Tracing Putin's 22-Year Slide from Statesman to Tyrant," *New York Times*, last updated April 14, 2022.

success in implementing military reforms in training, educating, and reorganizing its forces might lag behind the expectations of its military and political leadership.

### *Applying Lessons Learned in Combat to Improving Military Proficiency*

In 2017, Gerasimov had called for official analyses of Russia’s recent combat operations at the operational and tactical levels, but combat experience had already affected training and education as well as performance standards for officers.<sup>645</sup> Future service members of the Armed Forces would heed the examples that Russian officers and enlisted service members set with their “professional handling of modern weapons, high level of tactical proficiency and stoic morals . . . which allowed them to accomplish complex and difficult combat tasks with a small force.”<sup>646</sup>

Some observers believe this analysis of Russia’s recent combat experience represents a cultural shift in Russia’s officer corps away from the historically strict, top-down decisionmaking system toward one of greater enterprise, drive, and creativity among tactical officers. While expectations for lower-echelon leaders to exercise more tactical flexibility might not extend to the still-developing NCO corps, some of the lessons Russia has learned from its recent combat experiences have likely improved the ability of junior officers to operate on modern battlefields with greater freedom of action than previous generations. Some Russian military academy instructors have even deployed to Syria for “vocational training” to ensure that they are instilling the most-recent lessons learned from the front lines to military academy students.<sup>647</sup> Even at the highest level of education provided by the General Staff Military Academy, training programs have been introduced or updated in such subjects as post-conflict settlement and reconciliation using experiences from operations in Aleppo, Homs, and Eastern Ghouta,<sup>648</sup> again highlighting how differently the United States and Russia use similar terms as Russian activities in these areas were far from what Western militaries would recognize as stability operations.

Although most observers agree that Russia’s combat experiences prior to 2022 represented a net positive on individual and unit proficiency, there is a limit to how beneficial these campaigns are, partially because of the characteristics of Russia’s overly centralized system. Russian officials certainly learned from experiences in Chechnya and Georgia to drive improvements, but Russia still lacks an objective media and has a culture that discourages the reporting of bad news from the front lines. As a result, those empowered to direct improvements in training and education might not be provided with the most-accurate accounts of what is actually occurring in

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<sup>645</sup> Giles, 2019, p. 288.

<sup>646</sup> Gerasimov, 2017, p. 20.

<sup>647</sup> Gjerstad and Poulsen, 2021.

<sup>648</sup> MoD, “Military Academy of the General Staff of Russian Armed Forces Teaches Methods of Post-Conflict Settlement,” webpage, June 7, 2018c.

combat, which impose an upper bound on their usefulness.<sup>649</sup> Additionally, lessons learned in Ukraine and Syria might not be perfectly suited for a large-scale conflict with NATO.

## Conclusions

This chapter identified five core findings. First, Russia has taken steps to move toward a contract-based military to respond to the effects of technological revolution in the military. Russian strategists have concluded that “modern warfare requires agility and highly trained personnel to operate complex equipment and perform sophisticated tasks. Only trained professionals are suitable for this task.”<sup>650</sup> Russia’s professional training and education systems have been set up with the intent to (1) improve technical competence in military specialties; (2) prepare contract personnel to operate complex and advanced weapon systems and military equipment; (3) facilitate continuous learning; (4) take advantage of conscripts prone to scientific work with degrees in national-security–related fields; and (5) support scientific research, development, and application of new technologies to national security missions.

Second, a more proficient Russian military would still be structurally and qualitatively different than the U.S. military. Although Russia has made progress toward increased contract staffing and improved training, one must avoid the mirror image fallacy in comparisons to American analogues. Even if Russia ultimately realizes its ambitions for a robust, professional NCO corps, Russian NCOs are still more like enlisted professionals, having a narrow, technical focus on their specific specialty.<sup>651</sup> Russian officers still will be expected to perform many of the roles and responsibilities that Western NCOs fill, and the use of short-term conscripts in many service support roles will continue. Russia is also making efforts to learn the lessons from recent combat deployments, especially in Syria, to improve real-world decisionmaking and encourage creativity and initiative among officers in a clear departure from traditional Russian military culture. However, it is unlikely that a maneuver warfare mindset and proclivity for mission-type orders will permeate through all ranks of Russia’s Armed Forces in the near future.

Third, Russia has shown a commitment to improving proficiency by employing a combination of education and training reforms, deployments, and recent combat experience to increase the level of proficiency in its contract and conscript personnel. Russia intends to raise the technical expertise of its service members through new military education and training requirements. However, it is only in combat that Russian military leaders can learn whether their efforts have the intended impact on the future of Russia’s military. Russia’s military leaders expressed great satisfaction with Russian military commanders’ technical and leadership performance in Syria. The number of contract personnel across the Armed Forces has grown as

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<sup>649</sup> Gjerstad and Poulsen, 2021.

<sup>650</sup> Radin et al., 2019, p. 60.

<sup>651</sup> Grau and Bartles, 2016; Bartles, 2019.



the number of conscripts decreased. These developments pointed toward a more proficient active-duty force “by encouraging discipline and competency.”<sup>652</sup> However, early evidence from Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in 2022 suggests that Russian efforts have been only partially successful.

Fourth, while overall proficiency may have improved, multiple factors—including Russia’s 2022 military performance in Ukraine—suggest that there is, and will be, significant variance in individual proficiency across the Armed Forces. Over the past 15 years, poor personnel management has resulted in both a large overabundance and deficits of personnel at different times. In the former case, a shortage of assigned officer positions for lieutenants limited their opportunities to develop, and in the latter case, the MoD had to reduce training requirements (e.g., programs at military academies went from five to four years in length) to get the officers to their operational units quicker. While staffing might be more stable today, the effects of earlier incoherence might still be present. The MoD has also had to balance limited funding and has, for example, prioritized equipping and training the VKS in recent years, thus increasing the VKS’s proficiency while sacrificing other specialties.<sup>653</sup> Additionally, the drive to present the Kremlin with a higher contract-to-conscript ratio has led to programs that include very short initial enlistment periods. It is possible that these junior enlisted ranks experience high turnover rates, thus limiting the actual proficiency of junior “professional” personnel at any given time. Units that are fully staffed with contract personnel and can support more training days per month might also include more-proficient personnel than those units that are only partially staffed or include one-year conscripts. Finally, the MoD was in the process as of December 2021 of completing the formation of four new divisions (three in the west and southwest, and one in the Kuril Islands). If Russia’s decision to form more divisions resulted in a return to skeleton units with officers leading few, if any, troops, those officers might end up less proficient than their counterparts in similar but fully staffed units.<sup>654</sup>

Fifth, our analysis suggests that Russia might not fully trust its military personnel, even as more of them increasingly serve under contract, and that the leadership is working hard to improve the loyalty of all its service members by promoting lessons of military history and patriotic values at all echelons. Based on the prescriptive nature of the VPP guidance, it is evident how seriously Russia takes military-political training. The evaluation criteria also indicate that the moral-political state of the unit is only as good as the moral-political state of everyone in that unit and, when aggregated further, of the Armed Forces. Military-political readiness includes moral-political and psychological readiness, order and discipline, a unifying ideology, teamwork, and the ability to execute combat missions in any environment under any conditions. In the ideal, the Russian military professional is to obey orders, be mentally and

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<sup>652</sup> Gresh, 2021.

<sup>653</sup> Marrup and Dahl, 2021; Bowen, 2020a.

<sup>654</sup> Golts, 2017a.

physically tough, and be loyal to his unit, his government, and his country. Actual military-political readiness, tested during the reality of combat operations in Ukraine 2022, appears to have been particularly strained amidst waning confidence in military leadership, minimal information about missions and objectives, and disillusionment in response to an unexpectedly robust Ukrainian resistance.<sup>655</sup>

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<sup>655</sup> Natasha Bertrand, Katie Bo Lillis, and Jeremy Herb, “Mounting Russian Casualties in Ukraine Lead to More Questions About Its Military Readiness,” *CNN*, March 18, 2022.

## Chapter 6. Conclusions

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Between the mid-2000s and early 2020s, Russia took proactive steps to address long-standing challenges in its military in response to lessons learned from previous military engagements, assessments about the changing nature of warfare, and witnessing the effects of technological revolution in the military. These efforts included investments in tangible benefits, including housing, compensation, and family well-being, as well as efforts to improve intangible factors, such as patriotism and perceptions of the military, that make up benefits associated with military service.

Combined with a concerted effort to enhance personnel proficiency through investments in training and restructuring, these efforts yielded progress in mitigating many of the problems that have traditionally plagued the Russian military. However, despite this improvement, research—some based on survey and administrative data—suggests there is still room for improvement, and Russia’s 2022 invasion of Ukraine revealed substantial remaining gaps in the professionalism of Russian military personnel.

### Report Findings

Drawing from Russian-language sources and analysis, we identified several major findings for this report.

**Between 2008 and 2022, professionalization of the Russian military was a policy and budgetary priority for Russian defense leadership as a counterpart to modernization investments in weapons and equipment.** Overall, the Russian military sought to take a forward-leaning and iterative approach to personnel changes to address significant challenges within the force. This approach was apparent in policy changes across the areas of recruiting, retention, and proficiency. These changes required significant budgetary investment: In constant 2014 dollars, Russia’s personnel spending increased from \$4 billion in 2000 to \$30 billion in 2013.<sup>656</sup> On average, personnel costs represented about 46 percent of Russian defense spending from 2000 to 2016, according to Russian budget data provided to the United Nations.<sup>657</sup> By comparison, 37 percent of the United States’ defense expenditure in 2020 was spent on military and civilian expenditure and pensions.<sup>658</sup> Russia’s proposed defense budget for 2022–2025

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<sup>656</sup> Barndollar, 2020.

<sup>657</sup> Crane et al., 2019.

<sup>658</sup> Personnel expenditure includes pensions paid to retirees (North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Public Diplomacy Division, “Defence Expenditure of NATO Countries (2014–2021),” press release, June 11, 2021).

allocated 73 billion rubles (~\$988 million 2021 USD) to bolster the number of contract service members.<sup>659</sup>

Despite interest by some contemporary Russian military leaders in eliminating conscript service entirely, the Russian military coalesced around a mixed model of conscripts and contract service members for the foreseeable future. Increasing the proportion of contract service members required a balance between investments in the quality and quantity of both conscript and contract service members. By restructuring the force, reducing billets, altering command relationships, and reducing the number of understrength units, the Russian government was able to flow more funds per capita to remaining personnel and units. With these funds, the Russian military prioritized the professionalization of certain types of structures. For example, all VKS forces in combat roles served under contract as of December 2021, as did most advanced ground troops and elite units in the Western and Southern Military Districts. Pre-war recruitment efforts for contract personnel focused on Russian speakers between ages of 18 and 40, considered healthy, physically and psychologically fit for military service, and having no criminal records.<sup>660</sup> Although uncertainty remains about the specifics of Russian retention objectives, these also appear to have evolved over time to support a modernized military structure.

In pursuing personnel reforms, the Russian military appears to have drawn some lessons from previous experiences of the United States and other professional militaries. In addition to Russia's general thrust to develop a professional force—a process that the United States began in the late 1960s—Russia adopted a training cycle similar to that of the United States, increased nighttime training, and adapted its qualifications on the basis of its perceptions of Western combat.

**In an effort to improve recruitment and retention, the Russian military invested in its ability to deliver tangible benefits associated with conscription and contract service. Survey data suggest that some dissatisfaction persisted during the pre-war period.** Our review of Russian civilian and military surveys and analysis suggests that, as of December 2021, Russian motivations to join and remain in military service focused primarily on material benefits. In some Western works on military personnel recruitment and retention, these types of benefits have been described as *occupational* benefits, within a broader institutional-occupational model, also cited by some Russian analysts. Three primary areas of emphasis for the improvement of material benefits were housing, compensation, and family well-being.

Housing remained a top-tier personnel policy priority for the Russian military, according to senior leader speeches that were analyzed in this report. The Russian military sought to improve housing for contract service members by providing a new system that provides service members with a housing mortgage that accrues over years of service. This mortgage system, which provides tangible rewards and stability for contract service members, incentivizes recruitment

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<sup>659</sup> “Russia Plans to Increase the Number of Contract Personnel,” 2021.

<sup>660</sup> Moscow Mayor's Office, undated.

and retention because the mortgage is fully paid after two decades of service. Considered to be a significant competitive advantage against other potential career choices, housing has featured prominently in Russian military recruitment materials, followed by salaries and patriotic themes. However, although these efforts somewhat improved traditionally negative perceptions of Russian military housing, they did not entirely, and regional surveys between 2016 and 2017 suggested that only 8 to 30 percent of contract personnel reported living comfortably in military housing. Housing continued to be a personnel policy priority for the Russian military: In December 2020, the MoD consolidated the allocation of residential premises for military personnel into a single entity.<sup>661</sup> The previous year, officials highlighted that 7,000 service members received permanent housing, with 1,900 living in apartments, 5,100 receiving housing subsidies, and 33,000 families of personnel receiving housing.<sup>662</sup>

Compensation has also represented an area valued by Russian service members and thus also by the crafters of military personnel policy. For example, a 2014 poll of servicemen conducted by the Sociological Center for the Russian Armed Forces reported that 55 percent of contract personnel identified pay and benefits as their primary reasons for enlisting, with 30 percent citing patriotic motivations.<sup>663</sup> Higher salaries and personnel support account for the largest share of Russian defense spending and were intended by the MoD to attract higher-quality contract personnel, with a desire to match what qualified specialists could get in civilian sectors of the economy.<sup>664</sup> The entry-level salary as of 2020—an average of 32,000 rubles per month—was near and sometimes exceeded the average entry-level pay within the civilian sector, with systematic increases in salaries that correspond to years in service, as well as monthly bonus pay.<sup>665</sup> Compensation particularly appears to be used to recruit and retain those most sought after by the Russian Armed Forces. In 2019, for example, sergeants and contract soldiers received a 20 percent pay raise and additional benefits, while compensation for officers increased only by 3 to 4 percent.<sup>666</sup> In 2020, compensation increases were even more targeted and appeared to be aimed at retaining those in scarce occupations, primarily pilots and engineers.<sup>667</sup> Although satisfaction with compensation rates appeared to be mixed, with younger service members expressing more satisfaction with their compensation than older service members, the majority of respondents in the surveys that we reviewed appeared to be broadly satisfied with their compensation.<sup>668</sup>

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<sup>661</sup> MoD, undated-e.

<sup>662</sup> MoD, 2019b.

<sup>663</sup> Radin et al., 2019, p. 62, citing Douglas, 2014.

<sup>664</sup> Barndollar, 2020.

<sup>665</sup> MoD, 2019d.

<sup>666</sup> Mukhin, 2019.

<sup>667</sup> Bocharova and Nikol'skiy, 2020.

<sup>668</sup> Kalinin, 2019a.

Finally, prior to 2022, the Russian military increasingly began to use dimensions of family well-being as a tool to recruit and retain desired personnel. According to one source, about 30 percent of contract service members typically become married during their first or second year of service, with the number rising to over 90 percent by the end of the fifth year.<sup>669</sup> Promotional materials for the recruitment of contract personnel, for example, have emphasized efforts to accommodate a normal family life while serving, and peacetime policies included a move to standard work-weeks. Spouse careers also represent an emerging area of focus, both for service personnel and for policymakers. Despite the effort to accommodate families, however, this factor alone does not currently appear to be a primary motivator to join or remain in the Russian military.

**The Russian military undertook efforts to improve intangible factors, such as increasing prestige and reducing the stigma associated with military service, although these factors may play less significant roles in recruitment and retention than material factors, particularly with contract personnel.** In 2019, Shoigu emphasized that effective Armed Forces require both tangible factors, such as the improvement of conditions for service members, and intangible components, such as patriotism as a core value.<sup>670</sup> Within the context of the IO model in Western literature, these can be considered *institutional* benefits. Although the balance between tangible and intangible motivations varied in surveys of Russian service members that we reviewed for our study, a pragmatic view of the profession tended to dominate, followed by motivations of institutional benefits of service.

In a significant area of intangible benefits, the broader public opinion of the military appeared to have risen substantially prior to 2022, and particularly following Russia's military campaigns in Ukraine (2014) and Syria. According to polls reviewed for our study, the military was Russians' most trusted and approved institution as of 2021.<sup>671</sup> This improvement did not go unnoticed by contract personnel, a majority of whom interviewed during surveys reviewed for our study (60 to 70 percent) reported increases in professional prestige between 2012 and 2017. However, this support does not universally translate into enthusiasm for military service. Although the percentage of Russians who believe that every "true man" should serve in the Armed Forces reached 61 percent in 2021, this view was significantly more popular among respondents aged 55 years and older (72 percent), and has far less support (36 percent) among Russians aged 18 to 24.<sup>672</sup>

Patriotism, particularly military patriotism, represented a major area of priority in recent years for the Russian government, which developed a holistic, comprehensive approach to patriotic-military education to address low patriotic motivation to service. Targeted primarily at

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<sup>669</sup> Makarov, 2013, p. 73.

<sup>670</sup> Arkadiev, 2021; "Sergei Shoigu Told How They Saved the Russian Army," 2019.

<sup>671</sup> Levada Center, 2021b.

<sup>672</sup> Levada Center, 2021a.

youth, these efforts, according to one news report, cost the Russian government at least 73 billion rubles between 2015 and 2020.<sup>673</sup> Military-patriotic education appeared to seek to raise the prestige and desirability of military service, and the ubiquitous and compulsory nature of the programming means that nearly all Russian male youths have exposure to substantial military-patriotic messaging, although the effects of this programming are unclear. The Russian military promotes lessons of military history and patriotic values across echelons as one dimension of military-political readiness (moral-political and psychological readiness), throughout an individual's period of service.

Endemic problems with corruption and hazing (*dedovshchina*) have traditionally diminished perceptions about the desirability of military service for the Russian public. Order and discipline were thus additional areas of policy focus for the Russian military leadership, and represented one major motivation for the reduction of the conscription term to a single year. Court cases and anecdotal evidence suggest that some level of hazing persisted prior to 2022. However, Shoigu claimed in 2019 that hazing in the Russian military had been eliminated completely, and while he acknowledged that some criminal activities were still being committed within the Armed Forces, he stated that the rate of crime was low compared with the average crime rate in civilian communities.<sup>674</sup> Although his comments were intended to influence, they appear to be generally reflected in improved perceptions of military order within both the public and military personnel: 2017 surveys reviewed for our study suggest that the values of “organization, order, discipline in the military” are motivating factors for joining the military, although responses varied substantially by region.<sup>675</sup>

One major policy step taken to address hazing among conscripts was the reduction of conscription terms from two years to one. Previously, fully conscript units—having no or little NCO leadership and an officer that would not remain with the unit while not training—left the mostly or entirely junior group of conscripts to split into a set of new conscripts in their first year of mandatory service and senior conscripts in their second year. It was not uncommon for senior conscripts to prey on the junior ones, and when conscripts entered their second year they would continue the cycle of hazing and stealing. By limiting conscript terms of service to one year and perhaps developing a larger NCO corps, Moscow hoped to remove or reduce some of the past conditions that enabled hazing of junior personnel. Though data on hazing generally are not publicized, accounts of *dedovshchina* persist in service members' private blogs on social media, as well as in high-profile criminal cases.<sup>676</sup>

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<sup>673</sup> Bonch-Smolovskaya et al., 2021.

<sup>674</sup> “Sergei Shoigu Told How They Saved the Russian Army,” 2019.

<sup>675</sup> Klimentenko and Posukhova, 2018a.

<sup>676</sup> The accounts of hazing were confirmed (see “Shamsutdinov's Fellow Service Member Was Sentenced to a Suspended Sentence and a Fine for Hazing,” 2020). The shooter was recently sentenced to 24.5 years in a penal colony (see “Conscript Shamsutdinov Sentenced To 24.5 Years For Shooting 8 Colleagues,” 2021). A recent

**Russia’s professional training and education systems sought to enhance professional military proficiency to reflect new security and technological realities.** Reforms prior to 2022 sought to improve technical competence in military specialties, prepare contract personnel to operate complex and advanced weapon systems and military equipment and perform complex tasks, facilitate continuous learning through qualification and retraining of service members throughout their careers, and leverage interest and ability among conscripts for national security applications.

New education and training programs instituted in 2005 began to address “professionalization of the military” as part of Russia’s federal plan, “Transition to Recruiting Contract Service Members to Fill a Number of Formations and Military Units.”<sup>677</sup> Combined with a new focus on hiring and retaining contact personnel, investments in professional training yielded some improvements in the system of combat training for ground and naval forces.<sup>678</sup> For example, new training programs included ten months of summer and winter training cycles each lasting for five months.<sup>679</sup> A new emphasis on performance standards, and expanded requirements for contract personnel across the Armed Forces sought to prepare service members for combat missions in any environment.<sup>680</sup>

Additionally, the Russian military introduced scientific units meant to support scientific research, development, and application of new technologies to national security missions. These units, staffed with conscripts, sought to both retain talent in the military and to fill critical skills gaps. In 2017, Minister of Defense Shoigu reported about a 25 percent retention rate among those serving in the research units, and these units were first established, 912 of these service members became officers or started working for the defense enterprises.<sup>681</sup>

**Policy initiatives increased the proportion of contract service members in Russia’s military.** According to Deputy Minister of Defense Nikolay Pankov, the number of contract service members doubled between 2012 and 2020. By 2020, the majority of the Russian military force was comprised of contract service members, with contract personnel making up nearly 70 percent of the force.<sup>682</sup>

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journalistic investigation of hazing convictions recorded in the state system *Justice*, for example, uncovered more than 1,500 verdicts between 2016 and 2020 (Georgevich and Prokushev, 2020).

<sup>677</sup> Iakovlev, 2005; and “Main Provisions of the Federal Plan ‘Transition to Recruiting Contract Service Members to Fill a Number of Formations and Military Units’ for 2004–2007” [“Основные положения Федеральной целевой программы ‘Переход к комплектованию военнослужащими, проходящими военную службу по контракту, ряда соединений и воинских частей’ на 2004–2007 годы,” *Na boevom postu*, Nos. 69–70, October 9, 2005.

<sup>678</sup> Belousov, 2005; Iakovlev, 2005.

<sup>679</sup> Iakovlev 2005.

<sup>680</sup> Iakovlev, 2005.

<sup>681</sup> MoD, undated-u.

<sup>682</sup> As noted previously, 405,000 contract service members (and 225,000 conscripts) served in the Russian Armed Forces (“The Proportion of Conscripts Has Reduced to 30 Percent,” 2021; Mislivskaya, 2020).



The MoD had to balance limited funding and, for example, prioritized equipping and training the VKS in recent years.<sup>683</sup> Additionally, in 2017, Gerasimov confirmed staffing for submarine crews, special operations units, and peacekeeping forces had been prioritized for contract personnel.<sup>684</sup> As noted in Chapter 5, most advanced ground troops and highest-readiness units in the Western and Southern Military Districts were professionalized by December 2021, as were all personnel in combat roles in the VKS. In the naval forces, 90 percent of personnel on surface ships served under contract, and there was an ongoing push for professional crew corps to operate increasingly capable platforms. The Marines were almost completely professionally staffed, and all submarines operated by contract personnel.

Although conscripts still played important roles in filling some less technical and service support roles, contract personnel fully staffed all junior commanding positions (sergeant and senior sergeant), combat units of special forces, Marines, battalion tactical groups, and operators of complex equipment.<sup>685</sup> Within regiments and brigades, contract soldiers staffed two battalions for each one staffed by conscripts, bolstering the readiness of tactical groups for immediate use in the formations and military units.<sup>686</sup>

**Overall, the Russian military took steps to address most of the perennial problems and challenges that had previously hampered its effectiveness, but not all issues were resolved.** Chapter 2 of this report identifies ten perennial problems within the Russian military. We found that policy reform and investment in the areas of recruitment, retention, and proficiency addressed most of these areas. Table 6.1 offers a summary of these problems from 1991 to 2009, as well as recent trends. In particular, our review suggests that, as of December 2021, the following trends were noteworthy for Russia’s military recruitment, retention, and proficiency:

- The handling of manning and readiness challenges improved in the years prior to 2022. Russia’s transition to a professional military, paired with an increase in technical military education and training requirements, improved the capability and readiness of Russian forces. Russia’s military leaders expressed satisfaction with Russian military commanders’ technical and leadership performance in Syria, with Gerasimov claiming in 2017 that Russia’s performance in Syria upheld “the superiority of the Russian military school and science.”<sup>687</sup> However, some Russian military scholars continued to warn that parts of the force might lack material and professional motivations to serve.<sup>688</sup>
- Training initiatives introduced in 2005 and expanded after the 2008 New Look reforms, particularly among contract enlisted personnel, focused on improving training and proficiency standards. According to senior Russian military leadership, this effort

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<sup>683</sup> Marrup and Dahl, 2021; Bowen, 2020a.

<sup>684</sup> Gerasimov, 2017.

<sup>685</sup> “Russia Plans to Increase the Number of Contract Personnel,” 2021.

<sup>686</sup> Tikhonov, 2021.

<sup>687</sup> Gerasimov, 2017, p. 20.

<sup>688</sup> Kalinin, 2019a; Vashchuk and Chernolutskaia, 2019.

continued, in part to respond to the increasing complexity of delivered weapon systems and military equipment.<sup>689</sup>

- Military prestige and popular support improved significantly prior to 2022. As of 2021, the military represented the institution in Russia that had the greatest degree of trust and approval of the general public.<sup>690</sup> Furthermore, support for military service appeared to have increased.<sup>691</sup>
- Hazing and other negative service conditions were also areas of focus for senior military leader attention, as noted previously, and had reportedly improved. However, with the expansion of contract services, some hazing appeared to have spread there as well: In one 2020 poll, 55 percent of military respondents said they experienced some sort of hazing in the past six years.<sup>692</sup>
- Peacetime draft evasion had been reduced dramatically, from 6,200 in 2013 to 1,600 in 2018.
- While a larger proportion of conscripted youth were deemed fit for service, nearly 20 percent of young people reportedly remained ineligible because of poor health, and 40 percent of conscripts demonstrated insufficient physical fitness, skills, and talents for military service, with psychological fitness remaining a major barrier to service among Russian youth.<sup>693</sup>
- Military disillusionment was identified as an area of concern for the Russian military, particularly with a greater proportion serve under contract. The military had thus prioritized efforts to promote lessons of military history and patriotic values at all echelons, and incorporated the moral-political status of a unit in core evaluation criteria.
- Wage issues persisted, as noted previously, but appear to have been an area of investment for the Russian military, resulting in more-competitive compensation and greater levels of satisfaction reported among service members.
- Although public data on criminality and corruption in the Russian military are limited, MoD publications suggest that these continued to be issues prior to 2022, with drug-related crimes and extortion decreasing in recent years but corruption increasing.<sup>694</sup> Good order and discipline remained themes in publications about military services, and were identified as significant factors for the recruitment of officers and contract service members.<sup>695</sup>
- Desertion during peacetime had reportedly decreased in the years prior to Russia's 2022 campaign in Ukraine: sources suggest that it went down by 10.2 percent in 2019<sup>696</sup> and

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<sup>689</sup> MoD, 2019f.

<sup>690</sup> Levada Center, 2021b.

<sup>691</sup> For example one recent study of parents of adolescent boys in Russia, 68 percent responded that they would like for their son to serve in the military (VTsIOM, 2016).

<sup>692</sup> Arenina, 2020.

<sup>693</sup> Bondarev, 2021.

<sup>694</sup> Gavrilov, 2020a; and Svetlova, 2021b.

<sup>695</sup> Klimenko and Posukhova, 2018a.

<sup>696</sup> Gavrilov, 2020b.

10.3 percent in 2020.<sup>697</sup> However, there has been notably less public data available from the MoD on these issues in recent years.<sup>698</sup>

Despite investments in many of these areas, Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine exposed significant areas of weakness for Russian military personnel. Missteps at the tactical and strategic levels and reports of desertion and low morale suggested that Russian personnel in Ukraine were not prepared to accomplish the military objectives that Russia's political leadership had set out prior to the invasion.<sup>699</sup> Furthermore, reports of increased efforts to evade the April 2022 conscription drive suggested that the conflict might have longer-term implications for the ability of the Russian military to successfully implement its reform ambitions of the preceding decade.<sup>700</sup> Initial analysis of the opening phase of Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine suggested that the impact of the war might well be negative for recruitment and retention goals, while exposing enduring weaknesses, discussed in this report, in Russian personnel proficiency.

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<sup>697</sup> Svetlova, 2021a.

<sup>698</sup> Mukhin, 2020.

<sup>699</sup> Bertrand, Lillis, and Herb, 2022.

<sup>700</sup> Ilyushina, 2022.

**Table 6.1. Summary of Systemic Issues from 1991 to 2009 and Recent Trends**

<b>Problem</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Proficiency Issue</b>	<b>Recruitment Issue</b>	<b>Retention Issue</b>	<b>Trends Prior to 2022</b>
Undermanning and low readiness	Russia's inherited military was chronically undermanned, and force structure was poorly devised for challenges Russian military would face.	X	X	X	Improved manning and readiness
Training quality and lack of funds	Poor and irregular training and broader economic issues created a lack of funds for more.	X			Investments and reform yielded improved regularized training and performance standards.
Military prestige and popular support	Endemic problems led to a decrease in level of prestige and subsequent decline in popular support for military service.		X	X	Stronger popular support for the military and enhanced prestige because of perceptions of success in recent conflicts.
Hazing and other service conditions	Extremely poor service conditions, particularly hazing of conscripts and junior officers, decrease the incentive to join or stay in the military.	X	X	X	Reduction of hazing; MoD reported zero, but court cases and survey data suggest that cases persist.
Draft evasion	Because of service conditions, families are desperate to keep their male family members from serving.		X		Lower rates of draft evasion.
Health problems and personnel deferments	The poor health condition of the eligible male Russian population made recruitment more difficult and costly.		X		Remained problematic, both in physical and psychological health of Russian youth.
Military disillusionment	Deep-seated morale crisis within military caused both recruitment and retention problems.	X	X	X	Renewed emphasis on moral-psychological dimensions of readiness.
Wage issues	Financial problems led to arrears and poor pay compared with other sectors.		X	X	Improved compensation, particularly for highly valued roles.
Criminality and corruption	Crime within units, graft and syphoning of funds, bribes	X	X	X	Some improvement, yet remained problematic; good order and discipline

<b>Problem</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Proficiency Issue</b>	<b>Recruitment Issue</b>	<b>Retention Issue</b>	<b>Trends Prior to 2022</b>
Desertion	Poor service conditions led some service members to desert.			X	identified as a recruitment factor. Lower rates of peacetime desertion

## Appendix A. Russian Language Journals, Assessment of Senior Leader Speeches, and Details on the Compensation System for Military Personnel

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Box A.1 identifies Russian-language journals that military manpower and personnel, which our research team drew on during the course of this study. These sources used either quantitative or qualitative data to study the overall well-being of existing service members, which we assumed is related to retention decisions by personnel. The articles listed in Box A.1 represent a starting point for our literature review that we then augmented with additional relevant sources as necessary.

### **Text Box A.1. Examples of Russian-Language Journals Addressing Military Manpower and Personnel Topics**

*Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniya* [Sociological Studies]

*Zhurnal Issledovaniy Sotsialnoi Politiki* [Journal of Social Policy Studies]

*E-Scio*

*Uchenyye zapiski Krymskogo federal'nogo universiteta imeni V. I. Vernadskogo. Sotsiologiya. Pedagogika. Psikhologiya* [Research Briefs of the V.I. Vernadsky Crimean Federal University. Sociology. Pedagogy. Psychology]

*Vestnik Nizhegorodskogo universiteta im. N. I. Lobachevskogo. Seriya: Sotsial'nyye nauki* [Journal of the Nizhny Novgorod University. N.I. Lobachevsky. Series: Social Sciences]

*Izvestiya of Saratov University. (Series: Sociology. Politology)*

*Journal of Military Commissariats of Russia Academy*

*Vestnik Akademii Voinennykh Nauk* [Bulletin of the Academy of Military Sciences]

*Psychology in Economics and Management*

*Scientific and Practical Electronic Journal, Alley of Science*

*Gosudarstvennaya sluzhba* [Public Service]

*Problems of Modern Education*

*Russia: Trends and Development Prospects*

*Zhurnal institutsional'nykh issledovaniy* [Journal of Institutional Studies]

*Biznes. Obrazovaniye. Pravo* [Business. Education. Law]

*Zhurnal sotsiologii i sotsialnoy antropologii* [Journal of Sociology and Social Anthropology]

*Journal of Military University*  
*Science and Modernity 2021, 71st International Scientific Conference of Eurasian Scientific Association*  
*Innovative Economy: Prospects for Development and Improvement*  
*Voennaia Mysl [Military Thought]*  
*The World of Russia. Sociology. Ethnology*  
*Historical and Social-Educational Idea*  
*Russian Military Overview*  
*Army in Numbers (Annual Overview)*  
*Institut Ekonomiki Perehodnogo Perioda [Gaidar Institute for Economic Policy]*  
*Orientir [Reference Point]*

Table A.1 displays the details of some of the institutional and occupational benefits mentioned in speeches by Sergey Shoigu between 2014 and 2020; we reviewed these speeches for this report.

**Table A.1. Analysis of the Speeches of the Minister of Defense of the Russian Federation Sergey Shoigu at the Extended Sessions of the Collegium of the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation**

Year	Benefits Mentioned in Speeches					
	Occupational			Institutional		
	Housing	Compensation	Family Well-Being	Good Order and Discipline	Patriotism	Public Opinion of the Military
2020 <sup>a</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>11,000 received permanent housing through saving and mortgage system</li> <li>35,000 received corporate housing.</li> <li>59,000 were reimbursed for renting accommodation</li> <li>Reimbursement limit for the contract (privates and sergeants) increased.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Salary indexed by 3 percent</li> <li>Over 45,000 service members in the high-demand occupations received a monthly increase of on average 23,000 rubles (at that time, about \$320)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2,000 children of military service members received preschool care coverage.</li> </ul>			
2019 <sup>b</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>7,000 service members received permanent housing, of which 1,900 received apartments, 5,100 received housing subsidies</li> <li>About 600 service members received corporate housing weekly, totaling over 33,000 families per year</li> <li>300,000 service members participate in the saving and mortgage system.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Inflation indexation of salaries and pensions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5,000 children of military service members received preschool care coverage.</li> <li>900 spouses of military service members received employment.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Creation of a program supporting the moral and psychological wellbeing of the service member.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Political work bodies within the military gained increasing significance.</li> </ul>	



Year	Benefits Mentioned in Speeches					
	Occupational			Institutional		
	Housing	Compensation	Family Well-Being	Good Order and Discipline	Patriotism	Public Opinion of the Military
2018 <sup>c</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>8,000 service members received housing, including 2,800 who received apartments, and 5,500 who received housing subsidies.</li> <li>44,000 service members joined the saving and mortgage system</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>97 percent decrease in the size of waiting lists for preschool care.</li> <li>99 percent decrease in unemployment among family members.</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No details, but patriotic education of the service members is flagged as a priority.</li> </ul>	
2017 <sup>d</sup>	Five-year results: 149,000 received corporate housing, 120,900 received permanent housing, 79,400 received housing within the saving and mortgage system, 24,100 received housing subsidies, 64 percent of them are privates and sergeants who signed new contracts.					<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>93 percent of population trusts the military.</li> <li>Since 2012, the level of disapproval of the military has decreased from 31 to 7 percent.</li> <li>64 percent of Russian citizens believe that military service is a good school of life for young people.</li> </ul>
2016 <sup>e</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>28,500 people received corporate housing.</li> <li>21,000 service members joined the saving and mortgage program.</li> </ul>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The rate of hazing incidents decreased by 34 percent.</li> </ul>		
2015 <sup>f</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Coverage by corporate housing</li> </ul>					

Year	Benefits Mentioned in Speeches					
	Occupational			Institutional		
	Housing	Compensation	Family Well-Being	Good Order and Discipline	Patriotism	Public Opinion of the Military
	<p>increased by 23 percent.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 27,000 service members received corporate housing.</li> <li>• 156,000 service members participated in the saving and mortgage program.</li> <li>• 50,000 purchased housing already.</li> </ul>					
2014 <sup>g</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 17,000 service members across all districts received corporate housing.</li> <li>• The first housing subsidies were distributed in the Western Military District.</li> <li>• 15,000 mortgages were distributed within the saving and mortgage system.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bonuses to stimulate the level of professional training. For qualifications, 3 to 5 percent of the official salary are paid, and payments for command positions are up to 20 percent.</li> <li>• Salaries of military personnel exceed the average level of wages.</li> </ul>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1.7 percent increase in the number of internally oriented activities for patriotic education.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 8,500 public-facing and media activities.</li> </ul>

SOURCE: Publicly available information displayed on the website of the MoD as of November 4, 2021.

<sup>a</sup> MoD, "Russian Defense Ministry Board Session, 2020," webpage, 2020b.

<sup>b</sup> MoD, undated-u.

<sup>c</sup> MoD, website-l.

<sup>d</sup> MoD, undated-k.

<sup>e</sup> MoD, webpage, undated-j.

<sup>f</sup> MoD, "On the Results of Performance of the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation in 2015" ["Итоги деятельности Министерства обороны Российской Федерации в 2015 году"], webpage, undated-i.

<sup>g</sup> MoD, "Report at an Expanded Meeting of the Board of the Ministry of Defense of Russia on the 2014 Performance Results" ["Отчет на расширенном заседании Коллегии Министерства обороны России об итогах деятельности за 2014 год"], webpage, undated-o.

Table A.2 provides an overview of the compensation system for Russian service members using publicly available documentation by the MoD.

**Table A.2. Details on Compensation System for Military Personnel in the Russian Armed Forces**

Type of bonus	Amount
Length of service (monthly)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2–5 years—10 percent</li> <li>• 5–10 years—15 percent</li> <li>• 10–15 years—20 percent</li> <li>• 15–20 years—25 percent</li> <li>• 20–25 years—30 percent</li> <li>• Over 25 years—40 percent</li> </ul>
Qualification category (monthly, for contract service members)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3rd class/category—5 percent</li> <li>• 2nd class/category—10 percent</li> <li>• 1st class/category—20 percent</li> <li>• Master class/category—30 percent.</li> </ul>
For work with classified information (monthly, for contract service members)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For work with information of special importance—25 percent</li> <li>• For work with top secret information—20 percent</li> <li>• For work with secret information—10 percent</li> </ul>
For special conditions of service (monthly, for contract service members)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 100 percent of the military position salary for personnel of the MoD.</li> <li>• 70 percent of the military position salary for the crews of submarines (cruisers); the crews of autonomous deep-sea (underwater) vehicles deployed on surface ships (vessels); technical crews of deep-water stations; the crews of submarines under construction; submarine (cruisers, deep-water stations) testers; instructors of educational institutions and subdivisions training nuclear submarine specialists; and flight personnel performing flights according to combat (special) training plans as part of the crews of aircraft and helicopters (air command posts, flying laboratories, ultralight aircraft), provided that they fulfill the flight hours norm established by the Minister of Defense of the Russian Federation for the past year.</li> <li>• 50 percent of the military position salary for the crews of surface ships (ships, boats), including those under construction; of the command of ship formations (up to a squadron of surface ships (boats) permanently stationed on ships, as well as in submarine command (up to and including the command of submarine forces); involved in underwater diving (being in diving pressure chambers under high pressure), provided that they fulfill the norms of working hours under water (descents) established by the Minister of Defense of the Russian Federation; serving in special purpose formations (military units, subunits); those who are doing military service in intelligence formations (military units, subunits) included in the list of intelligence control bodies; reconnaissance formations (military units, subdivisions), according to the list approved by the Minister of Defense of the Russian Federation; those performing parachute jumps, subject to the fulfillment of the parachute jumping norm established by the Minister of Defense of the Russian Federation for the past year.</li> <li>• Up to 50 percent of the military position salary for the service members doing military service in certain military positions of medical service specialists in special conditions, according to</li> </ul>

Type of bonus	Amount
For performing tasks directly related to risks to life and health in peacetime (monthly)	<p>the list approved by the Minister of Defense of the Russian Federation; in military units (institutions, organizations, subdivisions) performing tasks to support space programs, according to the list approved by the Minister of Defense of the Russian Federation; at special facilities (in military units, organizations, institutions and in certain positions), according to the lists approved by the Minister of Defense of the Russian Federation; carrying out special work (performance of special tasks), according to the lists approved by the Minister of Defense of the Russian Federation; performing military service in other special conditions of military service, according to the lists approved by the Minister of Defense of the Russian Federation; carrying combat duty with a total duration of five or more days per month—30 percent, from three to five days per month—15 percent, less than three days per month—5 percent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 20 percent of military position salary for the service members in aviation military units (aviation rescue centers) performing military service in military positions, replaced by military personnel (ground aviation specialists who ensure the safety of aircraft and helicopter flights) according to the list of military positions approved by the Minister of Defense of the Russian Federation; in the crews of standard combat (special) equipment on tracked and wheeled chassis, as well as in the instructors of training military units and subunits included in the crews of equipment on tracked and wheeled chassis and engaged in driving training on these combat (special) vehicles, in military positions, those working on recharging nuclear reactors of ships, and those handling nuclear fuel and radioactive waste, according to the list approved by the Minister of Defense of the Russian Federation.</li> <li>• Up to 20 percent of the military position salary for the service members doing military service in certain military positions that require foreign language skills, according to the list approved by the Minister of Defense of the Russian Federation; if one Western language is used—10 percent, if one Eastern or two or more foreign languages are used—20 percent; in military positions of leaders, commanders (chiefs) of military units and organizations of the Armed Forces and their structural units, as well as in leadership of units, according to the list approved by the Minister of Defense of the Russian Federation.</li> <li>• 10 percent of the military position salary for service members doing military service in Moscow and Moscow region and in Saint Petersburg and Saint Petersburg region.</li> <li>• Up to 100 percent of the military position salary for performing diving tasks depending on the depth, time spent underwater, and type of task.</li> <li>• Up to 60 percent of the military position salary for the period of direct participation in exercises, ship missions, the development of tasks of combat and combat training in the field, and tasks outside the permanent deployment of a military unit according to the list defined by the Minister of Defense of the Russian Federation (2 percent of the military position salary for each day of participation in these events).</li> <li>• Up to 50 percent of the military position salary for parachuting (landing with equipment), depending on the number of jumps, conditions, and performance; for working with explosives, such as detection, identification, seizure, disposal, destruction of explosive devices and explosive objects, the use of explosive materials and explosives, explosive devices and explosive</li> </ul>

Type of bonus	Amount
	<p>objects for the days on which they performed this work, for performing flights from ship deck or using a ground training system based on the flights and performance, and for being in flight crews to extinguish natural and human-made fires.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Up to 40 percent of the military position salary for working directly with persons providing assistance on a confidential basis.</li> <li>Up to 30 percent of military position salary for military service in medical institutions (units) with harmful and/or dangerous working conditions in the positions of medical personnel, according to the lists approved by the Minister of Defense of the Russian Federation, and for military service related to the performance of research on cadaveric material, research using X-ray, high-frequency and ionizing radiation, toxic, poisonous, narcotic, potent, or aggressive substances.</li> <li>Up to 20 percent of military position salary for serving in the regions of ecological crisis at the Baikonur complex and the city of Baikonur (Republic of Kazakhstan), carrying out diagnostics and treatment of HIV-infected, working with materials containing the human immunodeficiency virus, completing military service in anti-plague institutions or departments, laboratories of especially dangerous infections and sanitary-epidemiological units, for direct involvement in work on recharging nuclear reactors of ships and handling nuclear fuel and radioactive waste for each day of performance of this work.</li> </ul>
<p>Percentage allowance for the length of service in structural units for the protection of state secrets (for contract service members)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>If the length of service is between 1 and 5 years—10 percent</li> <li>If the length of service is between 5 and 10 years—15 percent</li> <li>If the length of service is over 10 years—20 percent</li> </ul>
<p>Monthly bonus for work experience in encryption authorities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>If the length of service is less than 3 years (2nd class)—5 percent</li> <li>If the length of service is less than 3 years (1st class)—15 percent</li> <li>If the length of service is between 3 and 6 years (2nd class)—10 percent</li> <li>If the length of service is between 3 and 6 years (1st class)—20 percent</li> <li>If the length of service is over 6 years (2nd class)—20 percent</li> <li>If the length of service is over 6 years (1st class)—30 percent</li> </ul>
<p>Monthly bonus for military personnel with higher legal education and military positions in the legal profession (for contract service members)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>For positions in the central office of the MoD—50 percent</li> <li>For positions in military command and control bodies, services and branches of the Armed Forces, military districts (fleets) command, regional command, combined arms—30 percent</li> <li>For positions in the directorates of formations, military units, and organizations of the Armed Forces—15 percent</li> </ul>
<p>Monthly bonus for high achievements in service (for contract service members)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>For working in institutions of higher and additional professional education on teaching and research positions and having a degree of the candidate of sciences—20 percent, doctors of science—40 percent</li> <li>For holding military positions in research institutions that require advanced degree—for the candidates of sciences—15 percent, doctor of science—30 percent</li> <li>For holding a teaching position in higher education institution and having an academic title and degree—for associate professors 40 percent, for heads of departments 50 percent, for professors 60 percent,</li> </ul>

Type of bonus	Amount
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For those involved in the performance of tasks in mountainous and high-mountainous terrain, trained under the program of mountain training instructors and occupying military positions in the mountain training and physical training and sports occupations—70 percent.</li> <li>• When awarded by the medals of the MoD (within one year from the date of the issuance of the medal): “For performance in combat”—30 percent, “For demining,” “For military valor, 1st degree”—20 percent; “For military valor, 2nd degree”—10 percent</li> <li>• For the qualification level of physical fitness, receiving or maintaining sports categories in military-applied sports and the sports titles (honorary sports titles) in any sports: for the 2nd qualifying level of physical fitness—15 percent, for the 1st qualifying level of physical fitness—30 percent, for the highest qualifying level of physical fitness—70 percent, for completing or maintaining the first category in one of the military-applied sports—80 percent, for completing the category of a candidate for master of sports in one of the military-applied sports—90 percent</li> <li>• For having the sports titles “Master of Sports of Russia (USSR), international class,” “Master of Sports of Russia (USSR)”—100 percent; honorary sports title “Honorary Master of Sports of Russia (USSR)”—100 percent</li> </ul>
Other monthly allowances	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For serving on a permanent basis on the territory of the Republic of Dagestan, the Republic of Ingushetia, the Kabardino-Balkarian Republic, the Karachay-Cherkess Republic, the Republic of North Ossetia-Alania and the Chechen Republic; from the day of enlistment and until termination, for those arriving as a part of a military unit, from the day of arrival at the point of deployment, the service members receive a monthly supplement to their monetary allowance.</li> <li>• For serving within special forces and (or) the forces of the combined grouping—in the amount of two monthly salaries in accordance with the military position held.</li> <li>• Not included in the special forces and (or) the forces of the Joint Group—in the amount of one month’s salary based on the military position .</li> </ul>

SOURCE: Reproduced in translation from MoD, undated-bb.

## Appendix B. Rank Structure of the Russian Armed Forces

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Table B.1 lists the rank structure of the enlisted Russian Armed Forces ranks and the U.S. military approximate pay grade equivalent.

**Table B.1. Enlisted Rank Structure in the Russian Armed Forces and U.S. Military Pay Grade Equivalent**

<b>Russian Rank Ground Forces, Air Force</b>	<b>Russian Rank Navy</b>	<b>U.S. Pay Grade Approximate</b>
Chief warrant officer ( <i>starshiy praporschick</i> )	Senior warrant officer ( <i>starshiy michman</i> )	E-9
Warrant officer ( <i>praporschick</i> )	Warrant officer ( <i>michman</i> )	E-9
Sergeant first class ( <i>starshina</i> )	Petty officer of the ship ( <i>glavniy karableniy starschina</i> )	E-8
Senior sergeant ( <i>starshiy serzhant</i> )	Senior petty officer ( <i>glavniy starshina</i> )	E-7
Sergeant ( <i>serzhant</i> )	Petty officer 1st class ( <i>starshina 1 statie</i> )	E-6
Junior sergeant/petty ( <i>mladshiy serzhant</i> )	Petty officer 2nd class ( <i>starshina 2 statie</i> )	E-5
Private first class ( <i>effreitor</i> )	Senior sailor ( <i>starshina matrios</i> )	E-4
Private ( <i>ryadovoy</i> )	Sailor ( <i>matrios</i> )	E-1–E-3

SOURCE: Galeotti, 2017.

**Table B.2. Officer Rank Structure in the Russian Armed Forces and U.S. Military Pay Grade Equivalent**

<b>Russian Rank Ground Forces, Air Force</b>	<b>Russian Rank Navy</b>	<b>U.S. Pay Grade Approximate</b>
Marshall of the Russian Federation ( <i>Marshal Rossiyskoy Federatsii</i> )	Marshall of the Russian Federation ( <i>Marshal Rossiyskoy Federatsii</i> )	N/A
General of the Army ( <i>General Army</i> )	Admiral of the Navy ( <i>Admiral Flota</i> )	O-10
Colonel General ( <i>General-Polkovnik</i> )	Admiral ( <i>Admiral</i> )	O-9
Lieutenant General ( <i>General-Leytenant</i> )	Vice Admiral ( <i>Vitse-Admiral</i> )	O-8
Major General ( <i>General-Mayor</i> )	Rear Admiral ( <i>Contre-Admiral</i> )	O-7
Colonel ( <i>Polkovnik</i> )	Captain 1st class ( <i>Kapitan 1-ovo ranga</i> )	O-6
Lieutenant Colonel ( <i>Podpolkovnik</i> )	Captain 2nd class ( <i>Kapitan 2-ovo ranga</i> )	O-5
Major ( <i>Mayor</i> )	Captain 3rd class ( <i>Kapitan 3-ovo ranga</i> )	O-4
Captain ( <i>Kapitan</i> )	Captain-Lieutenant ( <i>Kapitan-Leytenant</i> )	O-3
Lieutenant ( <i>Leytenant</i> )	Lieutenant ( <i>Leytenant</i> )	O-2
Junior Lieutenant ( <i>Mladshiy Leytenant</i> )	Junior Lieutenant ( <i>Mladshiy Leytenant</i> )	O-1

SOURCE: Galeotti, 2017.  
NOTE: N/A = not applicable.



## Abbreviations

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AVF	All-Volunteer Force
COVID-19	coronavirus disease 2019
DOSAAF	Volunteer Society for Cooperation with the Army, Aviation, and Navy (Russia)
FSB	Russian Federal Security Service
GDP	gross domestic product
GRU	<i>glavnoie razveyivatel'noie upravlenie</i> [Main Intelligence Directorate]
GU	<i>glavnoie upravlenie</i> [Main Directorate of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation]
GVU	<i>glavnoe voenno-politicheskoe upravlenie</i> [Main Military-Political Directorate]
IISS	International Institute for Strategic Studies
MoD	Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation
MOS	military occupational specialty
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NCO	non-commissioned officer
NGO	nongovernmental organization
OJT	on-the-job training
OSK	Operational Strategic Commands (Russia)
PME	professional military education
TOE	table of organization and equipment
UAS	unmanned aerial system
VDV	<i>Vozdushnodesantnye voyska</i> [Russian Airborne Forces]
VKS	Russian Aerospace Forces
VPP	<i>voenno-politicheskaya podgotovka</i> [military-political training]
VUS	<i>voenno-uchtnaya spetsial'nost'</i> [military specialty]
VVS	<i>Voienno-vozdushnye sily</i> [Russian Air Force]
VR	virtual reality

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uring the initial post-Soviet years, the personnel system of the Russian Armed Forces experienced pervasive challenges because of budget limitations and domestic and international collapse of prestige.

Challenges included undermanning and low readiness, poor training quality and lack of funds, lack of military prestige and popular support, hazing, draft evasion, health problems and personnel deferments, military disillusionment, wage issues, criminality and corruption, and desertion.

The authors of this report draw on Russian-language sources to examine trends in Russian military personnel policies and initiatives from the 1990s through December 2021, prior to Russia's February 2022 invasion of Ukraine. Russian personnel policies from 1991 through 2021 sought to mitigate many of the existing problems with the Armed Forces during the implementation of Russia's military reform efforts, especially since 2009. While progress was made in many areas, key challenges remain.

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