

Rubles and Recruits: The New Face of Russian Recruitment

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«If you die in Ukraine, your family will receive millions». In Russia, it has almost become an advertising slogan, a sinister and concrete promise that turns war into an investment. In the poorest countryside, in the villages of Buryatia and Bashkiria, where the average monthly salary does not exceed 400 euros, joining the army has become the only way to economic redemption. Even at the cost of life. In 2024, over a thousand people a day enlisted in the Russian army: lavish salaries and bonuses attract the poorest. But the system is faltering under the weight of costs.

In 2024, according to former President Dmitry Medvedev, more than **1,000 new soldiers a day** signed a contract with the Ministry of Defense: over **450,000 men in a year**. An unprecedented turnout, which seems sufficient to compensate — according to NATO sources — the daily losses at the front, estimated at **about 1,000 casualties a day**.

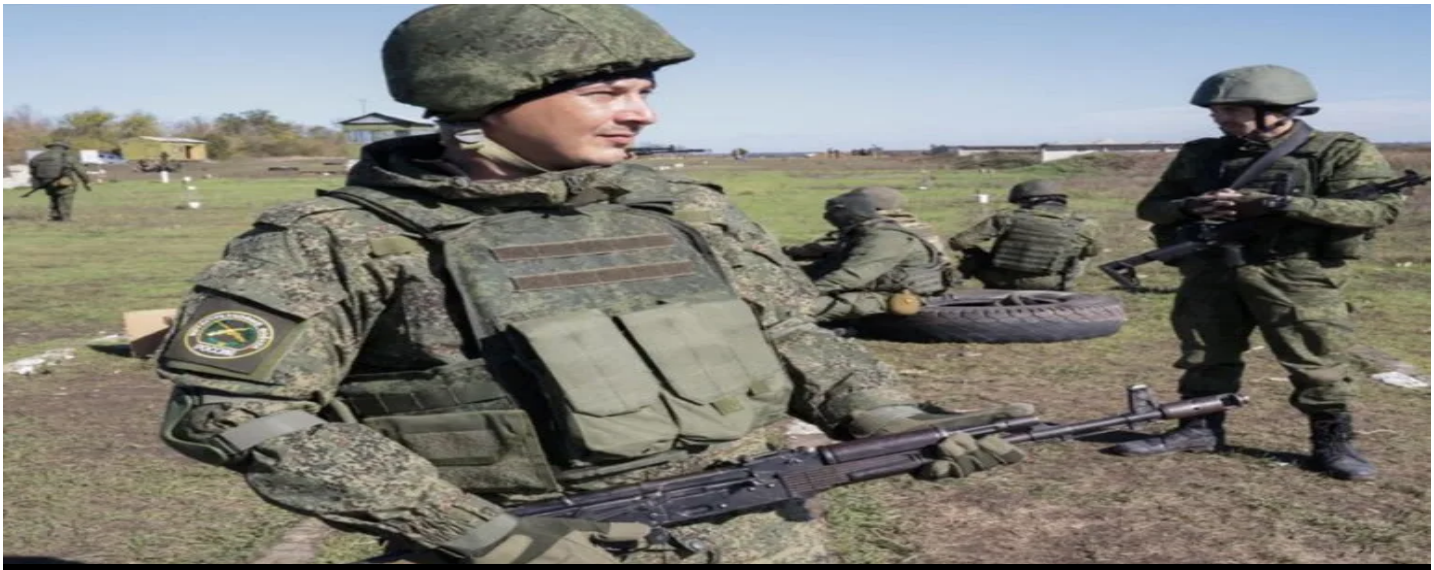


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The "War Price List"

The figures speak for themselves. Those who sign a volunteer contract (the so-called *kontraktniki*) receive a one-time payment of **2.3 million rubles** (about 24,600 euros), plus **monthly salaries of 210,000 rubles** (2,250 euros) and **additional bonuses for each frontline action**. It reaches 500 euros for each day of offensive, or for each kilometer conquered. The destruction of a Leopard or Abrams tank is worth **5,300 euros**, capturing a Western vehicle can yield **10,600 euros**. And if you die? The equivalent of **143,000 euros** is paid to the fallen soldier's family: almost **28 years of salary for a teacher in Buryatia**.

In Moscow, the capital so far spared from the direct effects of the conflict, the rush to enlist has resumed strongly: **over 6,300 new volunteers in the first months of 2025 alone**, driven by the fear that the truce might make the promised rewards vanish. The State has opened recruitment points in metro stations and multiplied incentives. In regions like Bashkiria, initial bonuses reach **3.4 million rubles** (almost 37,000 euros), more than triple the average annual income.



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An Unsustainable Model?

Behind this mechanism is a financial machine increasingly under pressure. According to an analysis by the German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP), in 2024 alone, recruitment absorbed **about 2 billion rubles a day** (22 million dollars), of which **1.5 billion** (18.3 million) were borne by regional budgets. Some local republics are allocating **almost 3% of their annual budget** to recruitment, risking financial collapse — as happened in the Samara region, where the one-time bonus had reached 42,000 euros.



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Meanwhile, the Russian sovereign fund, the National Wealth Fund, has drastically reduced: from initial liquid reserves of over **140 billion dollars** in 2022, only **40 billion** remain today, the

lowest since 2008. According to George Barros, an analyst at the Institute for the Study of War, «the system worked for two and a half years, but now it is starting to give way». This system is not destined to last. Despite the impressive numbers of 2024 – over 440,000 new kontraktniki – experts warn that the recruitment machine could stall within 12-16 months.

Yet, Moscow continues to prepare for a long war, not only against Kyiv but against the West. The Defense budget doubled in 2024, reaching 108 billion euros, 28% of public spending and over 7% of GDP, including secret items. With these funds, the Russian army aims to reach 1.5 million personnel and to form 16 new divisions and 14 brigades. The model is no longer that of the lean and professional forces desired after the 2008 reform, but a return to a mass army, capable of sustaining wars of attrition.



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Poverty, Not Patriotism

The equation is ruthless. In areas where the State has failed to provide services and opportunities, war has become the only effective social policy. It is not a matter of patriotism: it is mathematics. With the right price, even a child's life can become the key to changing a family's destiny. The Kremlin has chosen not to resort to a new general mobilization to avoid protests in the cities, but the price of this “economic mobilization” could prove very high.

2025 will be a crucial year. If the pace of enlistments should slow or resources run out, the fragile balance on which the Russian Army rests could shatter. Meanwhile, families in deep Russia continue to sign contracts, hoping that those promised millions do not truly become

money for the coffin.

News link: https://www.swp-berlin.org/10.18449/2024C24/