

4. Military Service

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4.1. Overview of military service in Russia

The Russian armed forces have a hybrid structure, consisting of professional soldiers employed under term contracts and conscripts drafted for one-year compulsory military service.673 The main legislation for military service in Russia is the federal law On Military Duty and Military Service, which has been in effect since 1998.674 The law defines the legal framework for conscription, military service under contract, reserve, and mobilisation.675

As of early 2025, the Military Balance676 estimated that Russia's armed forces numbered approximately 1 134 000 active-duty troops,677 up from 900 000 in 2021.678 The ground forces form the largest part of the Russian army and comprise an estimated 550 000 personnel, which is nearly double of the pre-war number of 280 000. At the same time, between 2021 and 2025, a significant decrease of the Russian army's elite units was reported, with the naval infantry showing a decline from 35 000 troops to 10 000 and airborne forces from 45 000 to 35 000.679

According to the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS),680 as of late December 2024, Russia deployed up to 617 000 military personnel to or near Ukraine. This figure included 'recoverable wounded and those undergoing training.'681 An expert on Russian political and military affairs, Yuri Fedotov, noted, in September 2025, that almost all the active-duty soldiers (ground combat troops) were engaged in fighting in Ukraine. According to Fedotov, their size has remained 'relatively stable' since mid-2023 at around 600 000.682 The same month, Novaya Gazeta Europe reported that 850 000 men signed contracts with the Russian army in 2023 and 2024 combined, followed by 200 000 in the first half of 2025.683

On 6 October 2025, the General Staff of Ukrainian Armed Forces reported that Russia has lost over 1 115 200 troops since 24 February 2022.684 According to the data compiled by Mediazona and BBC Russian Service based on 'open source data from Russian cemeteries, military memorials, and obituaries',685 as of 24 October 2025, the list of Russian military personnel killed in Ukraine contained over 140 100 verified names.686

Sources noted a significant regional and ethnic disproportionality in the war casualties,687 with the highest death toll affecting soldiers originating from poor regions of Siberia, the Urals, the Far East, and 'the southern regions with a high percentage of Cossacks' such as Kuban, as well as Buryatia, Tatarstan, Dagestan, Bashkortostan, with Moscow oblast as a notable exception.688

As noted by researcher Guzel Yusupova, state-imposed recruitment quotas – both for voluntary recruitment and during the autumn 2022 mobilisation – have significantly contributed to the ethnic imbalance in war casualties. Smaller and more remote settlements, where larger number of ethnic minorities live, have been assigned disproportionately high quotas. According to the source, further factors include poverty and 'normalisation' of the perception of military recruitment as a path to financial improvement and 'glorification' of 'war heroes' in society.689

In February 2024, Transparency International Russia noted that corruption in the Russian army include 'petty corruption' (such as everyday thefts by lower-rank soldiers and corruption at military enlistment offices and border control), administrative corruption and irregularities in state procurement, and 'grand corruption' involving oligarchs and high-ranking officials.690 In 2024, several high-ranking military officials were dismissed from their positions or detained over alleged corruption charges.691 In the reshuffle of military leadership, former defence minister Sergei Shoigu, who had held the post since 2012, was removed from this role in May 2024, following military setbacks in Ukraine and 'his inability to root out' corruption in the army.692 In April 2025, a top general was sentenced to seven years in prison over taking bribes from a company producing communications equipment.693 The same month, a former major general, who reportedly criticised Russian 'military leadership in Ukraine' was sentenced to five years in prison on fraud charges.694

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