

4.3.1. Private military companies

4.3.1. Private military companies

Russia has numerous volunteer formations or private military companies (PMCs), many of which were created after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. In June 2023, the MoD ordered that all of them sign contracts with the MoD.⁹⁰² PMCs are actively engaged in recruiting volunteers for various formations and combat units and provide 'tens of thousands' of combatants in the war in Ukraine.⁹⁰³

As noted by Huseyn Aliyev, since 2024 all PMCs are registered with the MoD. They became 'quite firmly embedded within formal institutional framework', are tightly controlled by MoD, and their financing comes 'almost directly' from the MoD. While in general the contracts offered by PMCs are similar to those of the MoD, they offer higher one-off payments and monthly contract payments than those of the MoD and provide much more flexible service conditions.⁹⁰⁴

Some volunteer formations, such as 'Rusich' and the 'Russian Imperial League' use 'nationalist sentiments' in their recruitment efforts.⁹⁰⁵ Other groups which use pro-Russian patriotic rhetoric are the militias Union of Donbas Volunteers, PMC Tsar Wolves (*Tsarskie Volki*⁹⁰⁶), and units of the All-Russian Cossack Society.⁹⁰⁷ The latter is an umbrella organisation for various Cossack units: it is integrated into Russia's Combat Army Reserve (BARS) system and reportedly consists of 18 battalions comprising 25 000 members.⁹⁰⁸ One of the brigades of the All-Russian Cossack Society, Don Brigade, has reportedly operated under the PMC Redut, which is also reported to have paid its wages.⁹⁰⁹

As noted by Huseyn Aliyev, 'a whole range' of PMCs remain active in Ukraine, including Espanola and many other small formations. They continue to offer one-year contracts and reportedly respect the contract terms, allowing the recruited personnel to leave service after completion of the contract. More than 20 000 individuals have served under these contracts with various PMCs, and they were subsequently demobilised. Notably, 13 000 former PMCs reportedly received 'veteran status' in 2024.⁹¹⁰

- [902](#)

Larsen, K. P., The rise and fall of the Wagner group, DIIS, 9 January 2025, [url](#)

- [903](#)

Gorenburg D. et al, The Future Russian Way or War. Part 1: State Mobilisation, SCEEUS, Report No 11 2025, 26 September 2025, [url](#), p. 4

- [904](#)

Huseyn Aliyev, Online interview with EUAA, 7 October 2025

- [905](#)

Gorenburg D. et al, The Future Russian Way or War. Part 1: State Mobilisation, SCEEUS, Report No 11 2025, 26 September 2025, [url](#), p. 11

- [906](#)

OpenSanctions, Tsar Wolves, 30 May 2025, [url](#)

- [907](#)

Klein, M., Russia's Volunteer Formations: Instruments for Recruitment, Proof of Loyalty or Diffusion of Power? Russian Analytical Digest 323, 2025, [url](#), pp. 20-21, 23

- [908](#)

Arnold, R., Kremlin Formalizing Cossack Mobilization Reserve, Eurasia Daily Monitor, The Jamestown Foundation, 2 July 2025, [url](#)

- [909](#)

Seltzer, J., Sanctioned Sector Analysis: Russian Private Military Companies (PMCs), 14 March 2024, [url](#)

- [910](#)

Huseyn Aliyev, Online interview with EUAA, 7 October 2025