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## Russian War Mobilisation One Year After Vladimir Putin's Decree

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**On 21 September 2023, a year had passed since the announcement of Vladimir Putin's decree on mobilization, which remains in effect to this day. This decree led to the deployment of over 400,000 Russian conscripts to Ukraine, while an even larger cohort chose to leave the country due to apprehensions of front-line deployment. In retrospect, it is imperative to acknowledge that the so-called "partial" mobilization failed to make a substantial impact on the situation of the Russian military, which failed to achieve notable military successes in Ukraine. Its sole discernible effect was a temporary cessation of the counteroffensive by Ukrainian forces, which had been making swift advances following their spectacular victories in the Kharkiv and Kherson regions in the summer and autumn of 2022.**

**Mobilisation Decree and Its Implementation.** On the day the new decree was promulgated, Vladimir Putin stressed that it introduced a "partial" mobilization, with its primary focus on individuals possessing military experience and specialists critical for the continuation of military operations in Ukraine. These specialists encompassed drivers, communication engineers, and logisticians, among others ("IEŚ Commentaries", No. 692). Given that certain aspects of the decree were classified and the authorities refrained from disclosing the specifics of the mobilization process, there is limited information available regarding the procedure, its actual targets, and the total number of conscripts drafted as a consequence. Although Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu reported that over 300,000 individuals were conscripted within the framework of the mobilization, with its completion in October, the veracity of these figures remains subject to scrutiny, as the mobilization decree continued to be formally enforced. In line with statements made by General Kyrylo Budanov, the head of Ukrainian military intelligence (HUR), Russia conscripted roughly 350,000 individuals in the autumn of 2022, supplemented by an additional 20-22 thousand recruits each month. An interview with Radio Svoboda on 25 August 2023, indicated that Russia was contemplating mobilizing a further 450,000 individuals, giving rise to discussions concerning a prospective new wave of mobilization in Russia. Comments also surfaced suggesting that the authorities might favour a continuation of "quiet" mobilization and might exert pressure on conscripts to encourage voluntary contract enlistment. Notably, Vladimir Putin stated in mid-September 2023 that around 300,000 individuals had signed such contracts since the beginning of the year. Within the State Duma, calls for increasing the number of contract personnel to 400,000 by the year's end gained prominence.

**Reforming the Conscription System.** Significant concerns among Russians stem from legal adjustments that broaden the scope of individuals subject to conscription and their assignment to the reserve. In line with the provisions enacted on 24 July 2023, the upper age limit for reservists across various military categories will gradually increase by one year during the period from 2024 to 2028. This modification results in an extended duration for which ordinary servicemen and sailors remain in the reserve: from 35 to 40 years for the first category of conscripts, from 45 to 50 years for the second category, and from 50 to 55 years for the third category. Categorization depends on the type of military service and the level of experience. The upper age limit for remaining in the reserve has also been raised for junior officers, advancing from 55 to 60 years, mid-ranking officers, increasing from 60 to 65 years, and senior officers, elevating from 65 to 70 years.

On 4 August 2023, Vladimir Putin ratified modifications to the law expanding the category of individuals subject to compulsory conscription. Beginning on 1 January 2024, the age bracket impacted will shift from men aged 18 to 30, replacing the previous age limit of 27. According to the Ministry of Defence, these alterations will

potentially enable the conscription of an additional 1.5 million individuals. Originally, these changes were planned for gradual implementation, with the upper age limit for conscription adjusted annually. However, in July and August, the authorities opted for immediate implementation without a transitional period.

It is paramount to emphasize that individuals who have received a category D classification in the military medical examination are exempt from conscription and mobilization. In cases involving categories W (partially fit for military service) and G (temporarily unfit for military service), a theoretical possibility exists for the mobilization of such individuals. Exemptions also apply to single fathers with a child under the age of 16, fathers of three children if all offspring are below 16 years of age, and fathers whose wives are at least 22 weeks pregnant with a fourth child. The mobilization decree does not encompass State Duma deputies or individuals who have opted for alternative civilian service instead of regular military service – in the event of mobilization, they will be redirected to such civilian service. Furthermore, it excludes individuals who have not completed their regular military service by the age of 30, members of volunteer formations performing duties akin to those assigned to the Russian army, students and doctoral candidates as well as IT professionals employed by companies holding the requisite state accreditation.

**Sanctions.** Expanding the group of conscripted individuals and extending the age limit for remaining in the reserve are not the sole measures pursued by the Russian Federation to streamline mobilization. It has also been imperative to reinforce the mechanism for delivering draft notices to military commissariats and institute sanctions against individuals evading mobilization. To this end, the State Duma passed regulations on 11 April 2023, with the aim of establishing an electronic registry of conscripts by 2025. Moreover, the law equates electronic draft notices with their paper counterparts: a draft notice is deemed delivered the moment it is posted on the individual's personal account on the "Gosuslugi" portal. In contrast, paper notices and those sent via registered mail are considered delivered upon their receipt. If a draft notice is not delivered either in writing or electronically, it is considered delivered seven days after being logged into the draft notice registry.

Individuals who have received a draft notice are subject to a travel ban. Failure to appear at the military commissariat within 20 days of the draft notice issuance results in the imposition of "temporary measures" against them. These measures encompass prohibitions on obtaining loans and credits, registering business activities, acquiring real estate and vehicles, and operating vehicles. Local authorities reserve the option to augment this roster of sanctions by imposing restrictions on the receipt of social benefits and assistance, among other measures. It is crucial to note that these sanctions are rescinded upon an individual's report to the military commissariat.

As of 1 October 2023, the fine for failing to report to the military commissariat will increase tenfold, from 3,000 rubles to 30,000 rubles (approximately USD 1,350). Employers who fail to ensure that their employees report to the military commissariat may also face fines of up to 500,000 rubles (over USD 22,000). Additionally, there are plans to increase the penalty for evading mobilization from 2 to 5 years of imprisonment. Previously, punishment for this offence was challenging due to the lack of effective draft notice delivery. Therefore, the most common penalty for not reporting was an administrative fine of 3,000 rubles. With the legal equivalence of paper and electronic draft notices, this issue has been eliminated.

## Conclusions

The persistent Russian aggression against Ukraine, spanning over a year and a half, has failed to realize any of Vladimir Putin's strategic objectives, while concurrently engendering mounting economic and political costs. The effective defence of Ukraine, facilitated through Western support, has precipitated significant losses for Russia in terms of both military equipment and personnel.

In the initial months of the conflict, Russia incurred substantial attrition among its most experienced and highly-trained military units. The endeavour to replace them, as undertaken through the announcement of the mobilization decree, did not yield a discernible qualitative shift on the Ukrainian front. Despite deploying hundreds of thousands of conscripts to Ukraine, Russia remained unable to wrest strategic initiative and could only temporarily impede the Ukrainian counteroffensive. The contest for Bakhmut laid bare the vulnerabilities of the Russian armed forces, necessitating reliance on mercenaries from the Wagner Group in the most strenuous front-line sectors. The Ukrainian counteroffensive, initiated in the spring of 2023, once again facilitated Ukraine's acquisition of the strategic upper hand.

To forestall the progress of the Ukrainian military, Russia must persist in recruiting fresh personnel and replenishing depleted military equipment and artillery ammunition. In pursuit of this goal, Russia has engaged in negotiations with countries such as North Korea and Belarus, simultaneously embarking on reforms to the conscription and reserve system to broaden the spectrum of individuals subject to this obligation. In an effort to enhance the efficacy of these measures, the sanctions framework targeting individuals evading mobilization has been expanded. It remains a complex task to categorically ascertain whether these actions represent preparations for a subsequent phase of mobilization or if the authorities favour the continuance of a "quiet" mobilization approach. Nonetheless, there exists no ambiguity that these measures attest to Russia's lack of readiness to concede and its preparations for a protracted war of attrition against Ukraine.