

Will Putin Start Compulsory Mass Mobilisation?

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Executive Summary

A year and a half into the invasion of Ukraine, Russia is facing an acute shortage of Armed Forces personnel as a result of heavy casualties and the ever-increasing supplies of Western arms and military equipment to Ukraine. Russian technological superiority has disappeared and only an advantage in the number of troops remains as a means of achieving victory or concluding a negotiated peace agreement on Moscow's terms. Under these conditions, the attempted partial mobilisation in September 2022 appeared logical but did not lead to superiority on the battlefield. The Russian leadership is attempting to address this problem by recruiting into the Armed Forces on a voluntary basis.

For two reasons, total compulsory mobilisation appears to be a likely proposition. First, the Russian authorities have implemented several legislative and organisational measures in 2023 to ensure a quick and smooth transition to the concept of mass mobilisation. Second, it is important to realise that for three centuries the Russian Army has known no other means of concentrating human and material resources than some form of mobilisation. Mass mobilisation will be the main recommendation of Russia's generals to President Vladimir Putin if he demands a decisive military victory. From this perspective, such a mobilisation is not only likely, but would represent a return to the model of a mass mobilisation of the Armed Forces in a military build-up.

At the same time, there are at least three serious obstacles to restoring a Tsarist/Soviet-style mobilisation: first, the absence of the necessary number of junior commanders; second, the lack of a training base for the strategic reserve; and, third, the inability of industry to mass-produce military equipment and weapons. Adherence to the mobilisation model was one of the reasons for the collapse of the Soviet economy and the degradation of the Russian armed forces in 1990–2008. Any attempt to resuscitate it in the current conditions would lead to a degradation of all state structures in the short term, and a final return to the totalitarian model of government and a Soviet-style planned economy in the long term.

Everyone under Arms

The Russian leadership considers increasing the size of the Armed Forces to be the main means of achieving victory over Ukraine. A sharp increase in the size of the Armed Forces has become one of the priorities of the Russian military build-up in 2023. In December 2022, Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu set a target of increasing the size of the Armed Forces by one-third to a total strength of 1.5 million service personnel.¹ General Burdinsky, head of the Main Organisational and Mobilisation Directorate (GOMU) of the General Staff, specified the goal for this year: "In 2023, it is necessary to carry out timely organisational and staffing support for the formation of a combined arms army and an air army, an army corps, the Azov Naval Region, five divisions and 26 brigades, and the creation of Moscow and Leningrad Military Districts."²

1 <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/70159>

2 <http://voenkom.ric.mil.ru/Stati/item/495317/>

Russian leaders argue that recruitment into the army for both contracted service and volunteer formations has been extremely successful. In this way, officials are trying to suggest that there is no need for a compulsory mass mobilisation. At the end of June 2023, Shoigu reported to Putin that: “114,000 people and 52,000 volunteers have been recruited under direct contract”, or a total of 166,000 personnel.³ Deputy Security Council chief Dmitry Medvedev, who according to General Burdinsky is responsible for all recruitment efforts, reported in early August that “more than 231,000 people” had been put under contract.⁴ Less than a month later, Medvedev reported that about 280,000 had signed up.⁵ In mid-September, Putin reported that 300,000 people had signed contracts with the Defence Ministry.⁶ At the end of October, Medvedev announced that 385,000 had enlisted. According to Medvedev, more than 1600 people are signing a contract for military service every day.⁷ This would equate to 73,000 people recruited in month and a half, however, which does not appear very likely. Shoigu announced that as a result it would be possible to form a combined arms army, an army corps and five tank regiments. However, there are as yet no signs of their appearance on the battlefield.

Doubts about the effectiveness of army recruitment are only strengthened when the results are analysed of the “partial mobilisation” announced in September 2022. It was officially claimed that 300,000 people had been mobilised but only 280 units equivalent to a regiment or smaller (“chasts” and “podrazdeleniys”) were formed from them.⁸ At the same time, there is practically no information in open sources about the formation of larger units, brigades and divisions. There are only reports of the formation of the 18th and 25th combined arms army headquarters, and the 67th Motorised Rifle Division formed as part of the 25th Army. In addition, the Marine Brigade and the Airborne Assault Brigade were raised to the size of a division.⁹ According to the Conflict Intelligence Team research organisation, about 90,000 mobilised reservists were needed to replenish units already deployed on the battlefield in late 2022 to early 2023, and 123 new regiments were formed from the remaining 190,000–200,000 recruits. There was no attempt to form divisions from these regiments to be used as a *strategic reserve* in offensive operations.¹⁰ These regiments were placed under the control of five commands deployed on the battlefield. They were used as an *operational reserve* in defence. It appears that this is also the way the replenishment of the fighting forces is currently organised. The defence minister has stated that the ministry of defence has formed nine reserve regiments for the troop groups in the military operation zone, noting that these regiments are being “constantly replenished”.¹¹ From this we must conclude that the soldiers sent there are being trained as part of smaller units and then sent to the units on the frontline. Of course, it cannot be ruled out that the Russian command has managed

3 <https://www.gazeta.ru/army/news/2023/06/22/20721326.shtml>

4 <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2023-08-20/putin-turns-to-ruble-and-ballot-to-shore-up-shaken-authority#xj4y7vzkg>

5 <https://tass.ru/armiya-i-opk/18644747>

6 <https://www.rbc.ru/politics/15/09/2023/650423879a79474a6d6efd37?ysclid=lmq7h1r61m56617977>

7 <https://www.rbc.ru/politics/25/10/2023/653925779a79476038209088?ysclid=lo8hiug8g9366463073>

8 In Russian military terminology *chast'* can be a regiment (1000 troops) or a separate battalion (800), *podrazdelenie* - battalion, company, platoon (800-120-30).

9 <https://www.soldat.ru/news/2050.html>

10 <https://notes.citeam.org/mobilization-in-russia-2>

11 <https://www.rbc.ru/politics/05/10/2023/651e6f789a7947aaec573a37?ysclid=lnss84jdkw305568663>

to form reserve divisions from recruits in total secrecy for use in future operations. If this is not the case, however, then thousands of recruits are being sent to join up with troops just to conduct defensive operations. New mobilisations may be required for planned offensives. There are also demands to “rotate” the mobilised, to replace those on the battlefield. Although Moscow insists that such rotation is impossible during combat operations, these demands are sometimes supported by local governors who had promised during first wave of mobilisation that the mobilised would return in six months.¹²

Even if the reports about the huge number of contracts signed in 2023 are taken on trust, the numbers are a mismatch with what the defence ministry requires. State Duma Deputy General Andrei Gurulev had announced a plan to recruit “about 420,000 contract servicemen...by the end of the year”.¹³

Meanwhile, residents of Russian cities are reporting mass mailings of summonses to military enlistment offices, including “mobilisation orders”. In other cases, men are invited to “clarify their military registration documents” and those who attend are offered a contract for service in the army. Experts believe that recruitment for contract service has not been particularly successful, so the authorities are preparing in advance for a second wave of compulsory mobilisation.¹⁴

Legislative Preparations

While denying any possibility of an announcement of a new compulsory mobilisation, the Russian authorities undertook almost all the necessary legislative work to prepare for one in the spring and summer of 2023. The laws adopted aimed to systematically close all possible loopholes so that no one could slip through. This began in April with the adoption of laws that scrapped the requirement for military registration and enlistment offices to hand overdraft notices in person and obtain the signature of the potential conscript. A notice is now considered served once it has been sent to the personal account of a conscript on the public services portal Gosuslugi. From that moment until he shows up at the enlistment office, the conscript has his rights seriously restricted. He is forbidden to leave the country, conduct real estate transactions, register a car, or obtain a driver's licence. The fines for violating the rules of military registration have been massively increased. In addition, huge fines of RUB 500,000 for each man must be paid by employers who do not ensure that their employees turn up when conscripted. At the same time, the Chair of the State Duma Defence Committee, Andrey Kartapolov, said that the new rules would apply to all persons liable for military duty, including those in reserve, and not just to those who are to be called up for compulsory military service.

In July, another law increased by five years the time personnel can be kept in the reserve. Now, privates and sergeants remain in the first-category reserve – meaning that they are the first to be mobilised – up to the age of 40, while junior officers remain until they are 50 years old. Finally, legislators moved to expand the contingent subject to conscription. At first, the plan was to shift the age range for conscription from 18–27 to 21–30 years old. This would mean, they explained, that it would not be green youths going into the army but fully grown

12 <https://www.rbc.ru/politics/06/09/2023/64f8d31d9a7947090094c6f6?ysclid=ln30xrtvhn809073338>

13 <https://www.gazeta.ru/army/news/2023/09/03/21207188.shtml?ysclid=lm66rul2oe955329278>

14 <https://republic.ru/posts/109639>

men. However, the day before the final vote in the Duma, the draft age was simply expanded. The lower bar would remain at 18 while the upper age would be raised to 30. Meanwhile, assurances by the Russian authorities that conscript soldiers would not fight in Ukraine cannot be taken seriously. On the same day, in fact, the Duma adopted a law “permitting” conscript soldiers to sign a contract with the Ministry of Defence, that would make them “professional soldiers” and lift the prohibition on them fighting as soon as one month after their beginning of service. The Russian military long ago learned how to force conscripts to sign these contracts – through psychological pressure and sometimes physical violence. Finally, during the autumn session, the Duma plans to adopt a law on criminal punishment for evasion of service under mobilisation. It is expected that a citizen will face up to five years in prison for unauthorised departure from a unit or refusal to report to the military commission when summoned. Explaining the need to adopt these harsher laws, Kartapolov was extremely frank: “This law was written for a big war, for a general mobilisation. It already smacks of such a big war. And we are all looking at who to remove from there, who to protect. No one can be protected”.

It should be noted that the mobilisation carried out in the autumn of 2022 demonstrated that the Russian military command treats reservists in the same way as the Soviet command treated them in World War II. A significant number of reservists were sent to combat units with only the most minimal military training. These men almost certainly died in combat in the autumn and winter of 2022–2023.

Going Back in Time

The economic and military assistance provided to Ukraine by NATO and other Western sources has created a fundamental problem for Russia's military campaign. Excluding the possible use of nuclear weapons, a return to the concept of mass mobilisation appears to be the only possible way to maintain at least relative parity with a much-strengthened Ukraine. The current demographic situation makes it impossible to increase the size of the armed forces by half a million men through conscription, as required by the Minister of Defence. However, over 25 million men between the ages of 18 and 45 could be mobilised. The hasty adoption of harsher laws is the first step towards restoring the Soviet system of mass mobilisation. Mobilisation can now take many forms. It can be semi-voluntary, where people destined for mobilisation are forced to sign a contract with the Ministry of Defence. They can be also encouraged to join so-called volunteer formations. Some of these formations are created by regional authorities, while others (Redut, Patriot) are actually private military companies. Some analysts suggest that this could be achieved drastically by roughly doubling the draft to 250,000 men and forcing conscripts to sign short-term contracts with the defence ministry immediately after a brief training period. (Under war conditions, these contracts can be permanently extended with no right to terminate them.) However, this is not what happened during the recent autumn draft. Another possible option, since the Kremlin has not revoked the decree on partial mobilisation issued a year ago, is that mobilisation might take on a permanent “shadow” character where reservists are drafted into the army as arms and military equipment arrive. Finally, a general mobilisation cannot be ruled out, even though it may lead to a fall in support for Putin on the eve of presidential elections. Either scenario means that the Kremlin has once again radically changed its approach to the military build-up and returned to the concept of forming armed forces that has existed since 1873. If so, it is possible to argue that this is a hasty repair to the road that is guaranteed to lead to the abyss.

Describing mobilisation in broad terms, it began at the beginning of the 18th century with the appearance of a regular Russian army. Russian War Minister Dmitry Milyutin completed reforms in the 1870s that radically changed the system of staffing from one based on recruitment to a universal conscript army. Russia's high birth rate, which was typical for a peasant country, became a renewable resource for military power. Decades later, the ability to carry out a mass mobilisation and throw millions of poorly trained men into battle was key to the Soviet Union's victories on the Eastern Front.

By the middle of the 20th century, the Soviet Union wielded almost "ideal system" of mass mobilisation, which allowed the Soviet leadership to rely on a prodigious numerical superiority over NATO, its main global opponent. In peacetime, the Soviet Union was able to maintain a military force that was 5-million strong, annually replenished by a giant mobilisation reserve. This permitted the Soviet General Staff to call up 6–8 million in a so-called period of threat, if war seemed imminent. A significant proportion of the Soviet Armed Forces comprised skeleton divisions that were ready to accept mobilised reservists.

Not only people, but also military equipment – ships, tanks, aircraft and artillery systems – were deemed used in this way. Therefore, in a period of threat, all industrial facilities had to immediately begin producing weapons and military equipment. To be ready to switch their production lines, all factories were obliged even in peacetime to maintain so-called mobilisation capacities dedicated to military production. Rather than the manufacture of civilian and consumer goods, arms production was the main goal of Soviet industry. At the same time, huge quantities of armaments were produced in advance to be stored in stockpiles ready for use in case of war. However, this system could only exist under conditions of severe isolation and autarky. Eighty years of steady growth of military production in conditions of economic crisis contributed greatly to the collapse of the Soviet Union. The system was doomed to collapse as soon as the goal of the state became something other than preparing the country for war.

The most important factors of social life and the economy on which the system of mass mobilisation was based simply disappeared as the Soviet Union broke apart. Mass mobilisation required a steady growth in the population. The population needed to be sufficient not only for the formation of a multi-million-strong military force, but also to provide the Armed Forces with weapons, equipment and all the necessary resources. Russia will find it impossible to fill the ranks of a 1,5 million-strong military, which would require a draft of around 700,000 people each year. In addition to these manning problems, a large part of Soviet industry died in the 1990s and those enterprises that managed to survive were retooled to produce different products. The new owners of these restructured companies no longer need to rely on defence orders.

At the heart of Defence Minister Anatoly Serdyukov's military reforms of 2008–12 was a rejection of the concept of mass mobilisation. He decisively eliminated all skeleton units, as a result of which the number of divisions, brigades and regiments in Russia's Ground Forces fell from 1,890 to 172. He also abolished 115,000 officer positions.

The reformers were certain that future military conflicts would be short-term wars, which made a multi-million strong mobilisation reserve simply unnecessary. Following a closed meeting of the then-Chief of General Staff, Nikolai Makarov, with members of the State Duma, it became known that in wartime, the Armed Forces would increase from 1 million troops to just 1.7 million. This meant that even in war time, Russia would be mobilising not

millions but only 700,000 reservists. This means that the Russian authorities have already drafted as many men into the army as were planned to be drafted for the duration of an entire war. No one could have imagined that because of a totally mistaken decision by the political leadership, the Russian Army would be participating in a prolonged war with a style of hostilities reminiscent of World War II.

No One to Command, No Place to Train

There are at least three major obstacles to restoring a Soviet-style system of mobilisation. First, the lack of the required number of junior commanders. Second, the lack of a training base for the strategic reserve. Third, the inability of industry to mass-produce military equipment and weapons.

Any attempt at mobilisation will first raise the question of who will command the thousands of reservists. As he embarked on his reforms, Serdyukov marvelled at the “illogical” structure of the officer corps in Russia, with only two privates for every officer. In fact, this structure was entirely logical. An excessive number of officers were needed to lead companies and battalions of reservists in wartime. After the reform eliminated skeleton units, which consisted mainly of officers, the need for excessive numbers of commanders disappeared. Therefore, the reformers believed that an annual output of at least 8,500 new lieutenants would cover the military’s entire staffing needs. This changed after 2014. The obvious result of establishing new skeleton units was a sudden shortage of officers. The then Chief of the Main Directorate for Personnel in Russia’s defence ministry, Colonel General Viktor Goremykin, stated in 2016 that the Armed Forces found 11,000 officers for positions that would otherwise would have gone empty. In his words, the military used “non-standard” methods to fill these staffing gaps. Officers who left the Armed Forces were re-recruited. Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu clarified that due to shortages of personnel in 2015, 15,000 troops that had previously retired had returned to service.

Russia has also reduced the training period for officers in military schools and academies from five years to four. Special short-term courses for privates and sergeants were created that award the passing graduates an officer’s star. Such a system directly recalls the Soviet experience in World War II.

These measures helped to fill staffing gaps in peacetime, but the intense warfare changes the picture dramatically. There is no doubt that in 2022–23 a huge number of junior officers will be killed and wounded. In addition to making up for these losses, the Kremlin needs at least another 50,000 officers if it is to increase the army by one-third. Currently, Russian military universities graduate about 14,000 lieutenants a year. It is impossible to dramatically increase the production of junior officers in this way. Even if enrolment in military universities were drastically increased, it would take several years before Putin would get his new lieutenants.

There is still some capacity to call up those who have received military training at civilian universities before 2008, when the vast majority of all civilian university graduates were promoted to the rank of reserve officer. At that time, about 65,000 reserve officers graduated annually. In the 1990s and early 2000s, when cadre officers left the armed forces en masse, up to 40 per cent of platoon commander positions were filled by these “enlisted officers”. Thus, theoretically, there are about one million reserve officers who could be mobilised. However,

their capacity for immediate use is highly questionable. Their military skills were very low level even at the time of graduation and are even more implausible 10–20 years after completing their education. It would take several months to remind 40-year-old lieutenants of even the basics of combat operations and the use of military equipment. A more promising direction would be to train up officers from the ranks of sergeants who have distinguished themselves in combat. However, even this resource appears limited.

The second limitation is the modest training opportunities available for the mobilised. In the Soviet period, almost every skeleton division had a training facility with training grounds for reservists. In the past 15 years, however, there has been a drastic reduction in the number of military units. The ministry of defence transferred most of its training centres and ranges to local authorities for civilian use. In most cases, these were replaced by new buildings and dacha plots. Thus, it will take many years to restore the system of mass training for mobilised personnel.

Tanks Out of Nowhere

However, these two obstacles can be circumvented by acting in the way the Russian government has acted in the past; that is, ignoring the risk of huge losses and sending unprepared troops into battle under ineffective commanders. However, the new units would still have to be armed. Moreover, this would have to be done in conditions where a huge amount of military equipment and armaments were used up in combat operations. As mentioned above, the Soviet Union resolved this problem in advance by producing and stockpiling in peacetime the armaments that would be needed in times of war. Russian industry must therefore now establish mass production of weapons. Thus far, just as with the issue of recruiting troops, Russian leaders are reporting complete success in providing troops with the necessary armaments.

Medvedev, who was appointed deputy Chair of the Military-Industrial Commission at the end of 2022, has asserted that: “We provide ourselves with all kinds of weapons. And today we already have more than the current needs of the Armed Forces”. Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Industry and Trade Denis Manturov has stated that: “Since the beginning of the year, in many types of weapons, much more special military equipment has already been produced than in the whole of last year. And if we are talking about ammunition, we are now reaching a level at which deliveries in just one month exceed the total order of the last year”. This would mean that ammunition production would have increased by 1200 percent. The defence ministry paints a similarly rosy picture. In 2023, the number of weapons purchased or modernised weapons had increased by 500 percent compared to the beginning of 2022. The number of tanks delivered – 3.6 times, infantry fighting vehicles –by 210 percent, and armoured personnel carriers by 400 percent.

Apart from constant references to 24-hour working at military plants, the leaders of the military-industrial complex do not provide any specific data to explain such significant achievements. Meanwhile, such a decisive increase in production must necessarily be accompanied by a commensurate increase in the output of raw materials, such as the production of metals, chemicals and related products, and much more. However, production data and statistics do not support this optimism. Moreover, according to several observers, even the growth achieved in mechanical engineering, electronics and some other areas can be explained by

the fact that the figures for 2023 are compared with those for years in which production fell sharply for one reason or another. Thus, the production of tanks is compared with 2021, when production fell to 34 tanks, while in previous years 100 tanks were produced.

At the beginning of 2023, Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin said that he expected military production to quadruple in 2023 compared to 2021–22, which should be supported by a corresponding increase in capacity and raw material production. However, there have been only a few reports of such growth in the press. It is therefore fair to conclude that any rapid increase in production is most likely due to the modernisation or repair of old military equipment that has been in storage since Soviet times. After more than a year and a half of intensive combat operations, however, these stocks would have been depleted. It is no coincidence that US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan has said that arms negotiations between Moscow and Pyongyang are “actively advancing”, with a view to providing Russia with weapons. He also mentioned that Moscow is now “looking to whatever sources they can find” to buy scarce ammunition.

Increasing the output of military equipment is undoubtedly being hampered by low levels of labour productivity. For example, productivity in Technodinamika, a concern that unites Russia’s ammunition manufacturing enterprises, is about 2.3 million rubles per year (less than \$32,000), which is nine or ten times lower than that of US ammunition manufacturers. In Russia’s political, economic and technological reality, productivity can only be increased through a serious increase in personnel.

However, this is highly unlikely. According to the Ministry of Industry and Trade, in 2023 the Russian military-industrial complex was short of more than 16,000 highly qualified workers involved in the production of the most in-demand weapons and equipment. The Central Bank has also drawn attention to the record personnel shortage in Russian companies. According to its April monitoring of enterprises, as of the end of the first quarter of 2023, the number of employees in Russian companies was the lowest since records began in 1998. The most acute personnel shortage was noted in manufacturing industries – precisely those that produce armaments and military equipment. A new mobilisation would only intensify the shortage of personnel.

It should be borne in mind that the production of complex military equipment requires the production of a huge number of components. In the Soviet Union, these were manufactured at civilian enterprises. For example, production of the Su-27 fighter jet required about 1000 components, which were manufactured by tens of, mostly civilian, enterprises. After the break-up of the Soviet Union, defence industry enterprises either had to build new plants to produce components, which multiplied the cost of production, or produce all the components at final assembly plants, which seriously increased production times and costs. There were no reports of the creation of new military plants on the eve of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine. We can therefore assume that, thus far, the second option has been followed. However, given limited capacity and limited cooperation, the capacity of the Russian military-industrial complex will be reduced at best to replacing the equipment and weapons destroyed during military operations.

Return to a Soviet-Style Economy?

Mass production of weapons will inevitably require a return to the Soviet model, in which virtually all enterprises in the country were engaged in military production. However, such a return would mean a radical change in the economic model: a return to a planned economy. In this case, production would lose its economic meaning and the nationalisation of most of industry would be inevitable.

From this point of view, it is indicative that high-ranking officials have already started talking about the need to revive Gosplan, one of the key instruments of the planned economy. For example, Deputy Prime Minister Manturov, speaking in parliament, explicitly called for market-based industrial policy to be abandoned “to ensure industrial sovereignty”. According to Manturov, “under today’s extraordinary conditions, Gosplan 2.0 can be limited to the tasks of the state defence order, and more broadly to ensuring the needs of special operations in the short-term cycle or state security in the long term”. In fact, this is tinkering. The introduction of fixed prices for military products would inevitably make it necessary to introduce them for all goods. Alexei Rakhmanov, a former director of the United Shipbuilding Company, said in an interview that existing practice has nothing to do with a market economy: “The customer (MOD – A.G.) says: ‘You signed a fixed price, go ahead, and fulfil it. Where is the market gauge? And when there are no common rules of the game and when we, realising that the customer is always right, go to fulfil the order first and then calculate what it costs us, unfortunately, we do not always find ourselves in a winning position’. At the same time, Rakhmanov hinted quite clearly that decisions in such cases are made under threat of criminal prosecution. It is no coincidence that since the beginning of the war more than 30 criminal cases have been brought to the courts for the disruption of defence orders, and more than 400 people have been accused of disrupting defence orders.

Representatives of law enforcement agencies are quite frank. According to the Alexander Bastrykin, Chair of the Investigative Committee of Russia at the St Petersburg International Legal Forum, “We are talking, in fact, about economic security in war conditions.... And then the next step: let’s go down the path of nationalisation of the main sectors of our economy”. In fact, nationalisation is already taking place. For example, the court upheld the claim of the General Prosecutor’s Office, which demanded the seizure of the Volzhskij orgsintez plant – one of the largest chemical companies in Europe – from its owner on the grounds of the “illegality” of the privatisation carried out in 1993–95. The court ignored the arguments that the authorities had not only authorised the privatisation process but known of the outcome of the procedure for many years, and had made no claims. The Prosecutor General’s Office also filed a lawsuit to confiscate the Metafraks Kemikals plant, the former Gubakha chemical plant, claiming that it is a strategic enterprise important for the country’s defence and security, and that its owner was now residing in the unfriendly United States. On the initiative of the prosecutor’s office, several dozen documents from almost 70 years ago were attached to the case. The Prosecutor General’s Office is also seeking to reclaim the plants Haidel’bergCement Rus (Moscow Region), Slantsevyj tsementniy zavod “Tsesla” (Leningrad Region), Syr’evaya kompaniya (part of Bashkirskaia sodovaya kompaniya), and Gurovo-Beton (Tula Region) from “illegal possession” and in favour of the state.

In April 2022, the Prosecutor General’s Office obtained a court order for the confiscation of shares in Kuchuksul’fat (Altai Territory), Russia’s only producer of sodium sulphate. In May to June 2023, a court in the Kaliningrad region recovered the shares of the Kaliningrad

Commercial Sea Port for the state in a suit by the Prosecutor General's Office. In June, the Solikamsk Magnesium Plant, the country's largest producer of magnesium, niobium and tantalum, was returned to the state. In August 2023, the Prosecutor General's Office filed a lawsuit to confiscate the energy company SIBECO from Andrei Melnichenko, one of Russia's richest men. At the same time, the Prosecutor General's Office sent a lawsuit to the Arbitration Court of Primorsky Krai demanding seizure by the state of the shares and stakes in the Dalnegorsk Mining and Processing Plant, Russia's only producer of boric acid, on the pretext that a foreign investor had taken control of it.

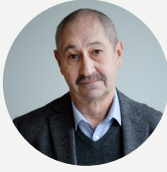
The Russian Ministry of Trade and Industry has applied to the arbitration court to terminate the contract of sale and purchase of the property of the strategic Novosibirsk plant "Sibsel'mash", which allegedly failed "to fulfil contracts on a state defence order" or to provide "state needs in the field of maintenance of defence capability and the security of the Russian Federation". The Prosecutor General's Office has also filed a lawsuit to reclaim state property in the Rostov Optical and Mechanical Plant, which is engaged in the production of optical-mechanical and optical-electronic day and night vision devices for fire control systems for armoured military equipment, including Armata tanks.

Experts have identified 18 cases of large-scale nationalisation in 2023. The return of industrial enterprises to the state has caused such concern among the business community that Putin was forced to comment on the matter at the Eastern Economic Forum: "The fact that the Prosecutor's Office is actively working on certain areas, companies – law enforcement agencies have the right to assess what is happening in the economy in specific cases. But it is not related to any decisions on de-privatisation....No one will be persecuted, but everyone must comply with the laws of the Russian Federation....No one is going to prosecute someone just because a person is engaged in business. However, it is unlikely that his words have reassured anyone. On the contrary, the statement that "law enforcement agencies have the right to assess what is happening in the economy" indicates an intention to continue to confiscate property on the basis of "defence interests". Immediately after Putin's speech, Prosecutor General Krasnov reported to him that the courts had decided over 24,000 lawsuits concerning the "illegal" loss of state property. It is well known, however, that the inability of the state to effectively manage industry is what ultimately led to the collapse of the Soviet economy. There is no reason to believe that it will be any different this time.

An inability to rapidly return to the Soviet model of mobilisation is most likely the reason why the Kremlin is trying to prepare for it on the one hand, but afraid to announce a general mobilisation, on the other. At the same time, the course of the war against Ukraine objectively requires Russia to achieve overwhelming numerical superiority on the battlefield. Mass mobilisation promises such superiority. If mass mobilisation becomes the main trend in the build-up of the armed forces, it will inevitably lead to a return to the fundamentals of the planned economy and the totalitarian practices of the Soviet Union.

Conclusions

- In the current military situation, when there is a relative parity of power of the opposing sides, only a sharp increase in the size of the armed forces can give Russia a chance to gain decisive superiority on the battlefield and, as a consequence, achieve conflict resolution on favourable terms for the Kremlin.
- The Russian authorities have set a goal of increasing the size of the armed forces by one-third to 1.5 million troops. To this end, an intensive campaign of voluntary recruitment is under way. However, contrary to official statements, the number of those troops who have signed a contract with the ministry of defence (385,000) is less than the stated goal of 440,000. An increase in the number recruited through conscription seems unlikely for demographic reasons.
- Despite the fact that Russian officials deny any intention to carry out a mass compulsory mobilisation, the possibility remains. Russia has both a tradition and experience of such mobilisations. In 2023, the authorities amended legislation to remove all obstacles to a possible mobilisation. If such a decision is taken, it is most likely to be after the presidential election on 17 March 2024.
- However, there are three current obstacles to effective mobilisation: a lack of the necessary number of junior commanders, the absence of training centres to prepare mobilised personnel and the inability of industry to mass-produce weapons and military equipment. In the short term, the decision to carry out a large-scale mobilisation is likely to lead to chaos in military construction and industrial organisation. If mobilisation training becomes a long-term trend, however, the consequence will be a return to the Soviet economic model, including a revival of the planned economy and nationalisation of industry.



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