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# Issue 491

## Of Eagle Eye Intelligence

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## **RUSSIA: Foreign Recruitment for War Effort Likely Due to Growing Desperation**

**Summary:** Moscow has recruited and coerced third-country nationals to fight in Ukraine. This almost certainly reveals a growing desperation in the face of mounting casualties, inability to achieve military objectives, and potential domestic upheaval.

**Background:** From February 2022 to January 2026, the Russian military sustained approximately 1.2 million casualties, including 325,000 killed, according to the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS). Despite the high casualty rates, the Russian Army is advancing incredibly slowly in its campaigns in Chasiv Yar, Kupiansk, and Pokrovsk, averaging just 50 to 230 feet per day, according to CSIS. Since October 2025, Moscow has prepared for an involuntary partial mobilization via new laws authorizing expanded conscription and reservist activations. However, it has not initiated an involuntary reserve mobilization since September 2022, when a partial mobilization of 325,000 reservists led to widespread domestic backlash and between 700,000 and 900,000 Russians emigrating, according to the Institute for the Study of War. This high attrition and battlefield stagnation accompanies a weakening domestic economy with high inflation and a widespread labor shortage, according to CSIS and ISW. To avoid further damage to the domestic economy or the need for expanded conscription, Moscow has recruited approximately 20,000 willing and unwilling third-party nationals to fight in Ukraine.

**Economic Incentives:** Moscow likely calculated that it could meet its initial manpower needs by exploiting poverty in certain third countries to recruit foreign mercenaries. The Intelligence Directorate of the Ukrainian Ministry of Defense (GUR) estimates nearly 20,000 Cubans have joined the Russian Army since 2022, with approximately between 6,000 and 7,000 currently on the front lines, according to the *Journal of Political Inquiry*. Recruiters promised Cubans \$2,000 per month, more than 10 times the average Cuban salary, and expedited Russian citizenship. The GUR also released intercepted communications between Russian commanders and Colombian mercenaries, and Yemeni recruits captured by the Ukrainian army cited a \$2,400 per month salary as the reason they joined in statements to the Guardian. Recruitment often occurs via targeted social media advertisements in these countries and other low- and middle-income countries, such as China, Syria, and Libya. These soldiers, knowingly enticed to the Russian army, although often expecting a non-combat role, with the promise of astronomically high wages compared to their home countries, constitute the bulk of foreign fighters voluntarily in

Ukraine. Under a mutual defense pact, Pyongyang has sent approximately 14,000 soldiers to fight in Russia, according to *The Guardian*. On 15 February, North Korean Supreme Leader Kim Jong Un unveiled a new housing unit in Pyongyang for the families of soldiers killed in Ukraine, referring to them as “young martyrs”. This almost certainly reveals the depth of the Russia-North Korea partnership.

**Coercing Foreign Nationals:** Moscow likely did not see enough recruitment with its voluntary recruitment model, leading it to adopt more coercive measures to recruit third country nationals. Governments across Southeast Asia and Africa have reported that Moscow lured young men to Russia with the promise of civilian employment, to then conscript them, according to the *Guardian*. Recruiters forced conscripts to sign contracts in Russian, which nearly all of them could not understand, according to the *Moscow Times*. Moscow has also targeted migrant workers already within Russia, most often Central Asian migrants, on the threat of imprisonment or deportation, according to the Atlantic Council. This widespread conscription of foreign workers for the front lines almost certainly reflects that Moscow considers attrition on the front lines a more pressing crisis than the widespread labor shortage. This reveals a degree of short-sightedness in Moscow’s strategy, as it harms its international reputation, diplomatic ties, and already-damaged economy in pursuit of a relatively small number of new recruits, considering their current casualty rates.

**Diplomatic Backlash:** While these efforts have triggered diplomatic tensions, Moscow likely judges that these tensions will not become particularly contentious or long-lasting and considers the war effort a higher priority than its international reputation. In 2024, Kathmandu banned its citizens from travelling to Russia or Ukraine for employment, according to AP News. New Delhi, Cape Town, Nairobi, Abuja, Tashkent, and others have issued warnings to their citizens against accepting job offers in Russia, especially higher risk advertisements such as those promising civilian jobs in the war zone or attached to the Russian Army. The countries’ foreign ministries have also consistently raised concerns with the Russian Foreign Ministry, demanding that Moscow ceases recruitment of their nationals. Moscow likely does not believe that these governments have enough diplomatic or political power, either at home or in the international community, to significantly alter its war effort or international standing, leading to its continued recruitment of their citizens.

**Outlook and Implications:** Moscow is almost certainly using these foreign fighters to sustain its war of attrition without placing a higher strain on its domestic populace, thus attempting to avoid domestic turmoil. Moscow's war strategy, based on overwhelming Ukrainian defenses through sheer scale, requires immense amounts of resources and high casualty rates that its almost certainly cannot replace with only its own resources, including draft-eligible Russians. However, Moscow must balance its war objectives with avoiding domestic unrest, particularly in cities, which could further harm its economy and political stability; domestic unrest and economic downturn would almost certainly result if Moscow expanded its conscription efforts within Russia.. Moscow likely assesses that recruiting foreign nationals and avoiding expanded conscription is the best way to balance these competing objectives despite the diplomatic and reputational consequences. Moscow's assessment of the situation will likely not change despite recent backlash from governments across the Middle East and Asia, and it will almost certainly continue to recruit from those countries.

Despite the risks, many governments will likely not be able to deter their citizens from seeking work in Russia. Moscow is targeting impoverished people, primarily within low-income countries, making it almost certain that at least some will consider the risks of conscription, death, or capture worth the promise of high salaries, even though Moscow seldom delivers those salaries as promised.

[Christina Muchow]

## MYANMAR: Junta Reactions to Legal Proceedings Unlikely to Halt Investigation

**Summary:** The Myanmar junta expelled the East Timorese charge d'affaires in response to new legal proceedings initiated by Dili. Despite this reaction, Dili will likely not halt the current investigations into the war crimes and alleged genocide by the junta.

**Development:** On 13 February, the Myanmar junta ordered Timor-Leste Yangon Embassy head Elisio do Rosario de Sousa to leave the country no later than 20 February in response to the initiation of legal proceedings against Myanmar junta war crimes, according to *Human Rights Watch*. Leaders of the Chin Human Rights Organization (CHRO) initiated legal action in late January after traveling to Dili, the capital of Timor-Leste, to meet with President José Ramos-Horta and authorities, according to *AsiaNews*. At this meeting, both parties filed a formal complaint with the Timor-Leste Ministry of Justice under the principle of universal jurisdiction, according to *CNA*. During this time, Myanmar is also defending itself against allegations of genocide against the Muslim Rohingya minority before the International Court of Justice (ICJ), according to *The Independent*.

**Analysis:** The expulsion of de Sousa from Myanmar will likely have no effect on the outcome and continuation of the legal proceedings in Timor-Leste but instead represents retaliation against Dili. The principle of universal jurisdiction allows the East Timorese Ministry of Justice to investigate the junta, so courts will likely not disregard these claims simply because the alleged war crimes occurred abroad. The Ministry of Justice will likely not drop the proceedings to improve diplomatic relations. The outcome of ongoing ICJ proceedings will likely influence Dili's case because a finding of genocide would increase the likelihood of successfully prosecuting the junta.

[Abigail Stephens]

## **SOUTH KOREA: Pyongyang Warning Likely Escalates Tension on the Peninsula**

**Summary:** Pyongyang warned Seoul of severe consequences if drones continue to invade its airspace. Seoul's efforts to de-escalate tension will likely not resolve issues and likely create higher risk of retaliation.

**Development:** On 13 February, Kim Yo Jong, sister of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, cautioned Seoul of severe repercussions if another drone invades into Pyongyang airspace. Earlier this year, Pyongyang claimed to have shot down a South Korean drone that crossed into its airspace and demanded an apology. President of South Korea Lee Jae Myung denied any official involvement in the invasion. Kim asserted that Pyongyang does not care whether an individual or a civilian organization executed the drone invasion, according to The Defense Post. To de-escalate tension, a joint military-police task force launched an investigation to identify those responsible. The investigation uncovered ties to members of the country's military and intelligence. While conducting search warrants at 18 locations, the authorities booked three active-duty services members, three civilians, and one National Intelligence Service employee, according to Türkiye Today.

**Analysis:** Kim's warning likely serves as a deterrent, discouraging Seoul from executing more drone invasions. However, Seoul has taken steps to likely show accountability by launching an investigation. These efforts will likely not satisfy Pyongyang, given that Pyongyang indicated it does not matter who executed the invasion. Therefore, Pyongyang will likely continue issuing threats, even if Seoul displays efforts at de-escalation. These events highlight ongoing tensions on the Korean Peninsula and the likely repercussions remaining regardless of Seoul's efforts.

[McKenzie Koliba]

## COLOMBIA: Eradication of Coca Plants Will Likely Lead to Widespread Civil Unrest

**Summary:** Farmers and guerrilla groups will likely resist Bogotá's efforts to reduce drug trafficking through the eradication of coca plants conducted without farmer consent, with no viable substitution or compensation offers from Bogotá for families affected.

**Development:** On 13 February, Bogotá announced the resumption of spraying glyphosate on coca plants, a chemical which researchers have linked to cancer in humans according to *The Straits Times*. Bogotá originally suspended this operation in 2015 due to concerns about negative health impacts. The Minister of Justice Andrés Idárraga confirmed in December 2025 the deployment of drones to conflict zones where armed groups reportedly coerce farmers into planting coca, according to ColombiaOne. Coca is not only used for cocaine production, but also as a medicine for altitude sickness among other remedies according to *The Guardian*. Bogotá has pledged controlled spraying to prevent the chemical from affecting communities, according to *The Straits Times*. Bogotá plans for drones to fly at a maximum height of 5 feet above crops to reduce glyphosate drift according to ColombiaOne. Farmers have expressed concern that Bogotá's actions will abolish their primary source of income.

**Analysis:** Farmers will most likely defy Bogotá's plans to eradicate coca production. Farmers' pressure to resist the spraying likely stems not only from economic concerns, but also from armed groups that seek to sustain the production of coca for trafficking purposes. Bogotá will likely face backlash from a humanitarian standpoint because researchers have associated glyphosate as a known link to cancer in humans. While eradication efforts of coca plants may lower drug trafficking rates, Bogotá's plan will almost certainly increase local tension and contribute to higher rates of violence within the nation.

[Lola McEwen]

## About GSIS

Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University's (ERAU) Bachelor of Science in Global Security & Intelligence Studies (GSIS) degree program at our Prescott Campus blends both academic and professional studies to equip students with the knowledge and skills necessary to become future leaders in intelligence, security, and law enforcement. The program provides students with a sound foundation in the liberal arts, including international relations, foreign languages and cultures, international law, foreign policy, political and military history, and other essential topics.

## About EE

Eagle Eye Intelligence (EE) is an intelligence and research organization led by the students of the GSIS program at ERAU in Prescott, Arizona.

Dr. Philip E. Jones founded EE and Embry-Riddle's GSIS program in 2002, following a career with the Central Intelligence Agency and consulting work in international development and global security. Currently, Professor Dale R. Avery, a former career intelligence analyst, serves as EE's faculty advisor.

EE strives to provide actionable intelligence and analysis to its customers during the academic year. We are driven by a number of goals – continuous development, nonpartisanship, interdisciplinary studies, global awareness, and professionalism.

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Christina Muchow, a Senior in the GSIS program, currently serves as EE's Editor in Chief. For questions or comments, contact the team at [editorsee@gmail.com](mailto:editorsee@gmail.com) or Professor Avery at 928.777.4708. If you use material from this publication, you should attribute: Eagle Eye Intelligence Edition 491, a publication created by students at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in Prescott, Arizona.



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