

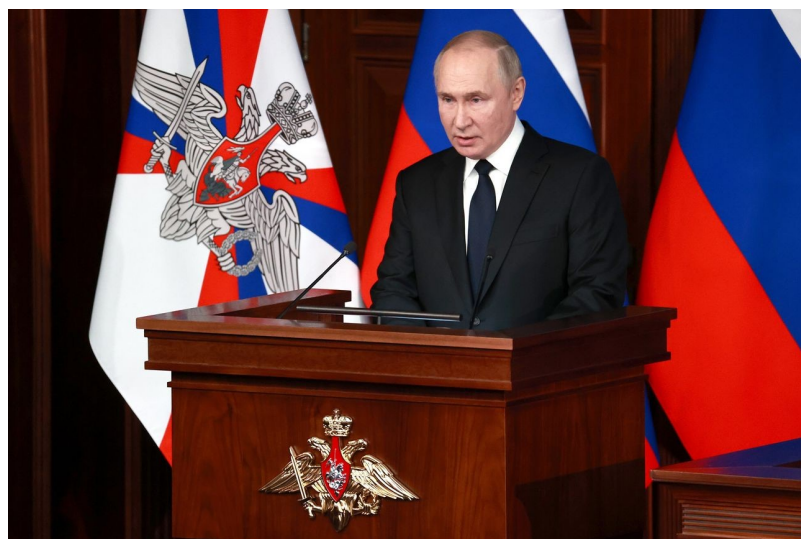
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WORLD EUROPE RUSSIA

# Putin to Boost Russian Military, Signaling Protracted War in Ukraine

President approves big increase to troop levels and orders improved weaponry and upgraded communications



President Vladimir Putin said he would give unlimited funding to the armed forces for equipment and hardware.

PHOTO: SERGEI FADEICHEV/ZUMA PRESS

By *Ann M. Simmons* [Follow](#)

Dec. 21, 2022 1:47 pm ET

MOSCOW—President Vladimir Putin approved an increase in Russia’s military manpower while ordering the enhancement of its potential and capability, suggesting that the Kremlin is digging in for a protracted war effort.

Mr. Putin pledged to give unlimited funding to the armed forces for equipment and hardware to fulfill Moscow’s military campaign in Ukraine and ordered his commanders to supply more improved weaponry to troops, upgrade communications and modernize military draft offices.

Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu proposed an increase in the number of service personnel from the current level of around 1 million to 1.5 million, including 695,000 contract soldiers.

It was unclear whether the increase would require another draft, following Mr. Putin’s September mobilization of 300,000 men. But Mr. Shoigu said Wednesday

Putin's September mobilization of 300,000 men. But Mr. Shoigu said Wednesday that in the future contract soldiers would replace citizens who were drafted into the troops as part of mobilization. He also recommended that the age of conscripts be raised to 30 years old, up from 27, and that conscripts be allowed to immediately sign a contract upon enlistment. Currently they have to wait three months before signing on as a contract soldier.



Senior Russian military officers listened to Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow on Wednesday.

PHOTO: MIKHAIL KLIMENTYEV/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Mr. Shoigu also said that Russia is planning to create new air formations, including eight bomber aviation regiments and a fighter aviation regiment. Three new motorized rifle divisions, including in the occupied Ukrainian regions of Kherson and Zaporizhzhia that Russia recently claimed, will also be created, Mr. Shoigu said. Additionally, an army corps will be formed in Karelia, in northwest Russia bordering Finland, while seven motorized rifle brigades will be enlarged to become divisions, he said.

The plans to enhance Russia's military came the same day that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky arrived in Washington to meet with President Biden at the White House and address a joint session of Congress, seeking support to counter Russia's invasion.

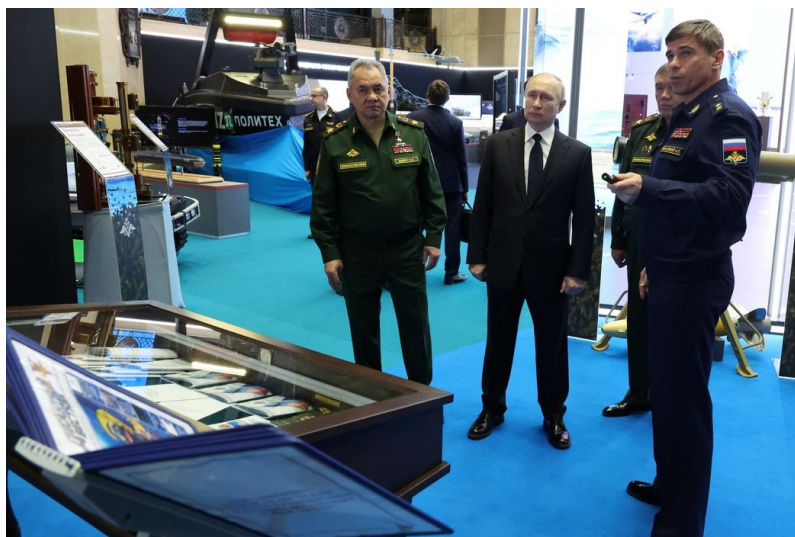
The Russian president accused the West of provoking the conflict in Ukraine and criticized the West and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization for providing weaponry and logistical assistance to Kyiv.

He also highlighted the need for the development and use of drones by Russian

forces, saying “they should be everywhere.”

In recent weeks, Russia has launched waves of drone attacks against Ukraine as the country struggles to repair damaged energy infrastructure that has left millions without power. Serhiy Kovalenko, the chief executive of Ukrainian energy company Yasno, said Tuesday that for residents of the capital, Kyiv, 10-hour blackouts are the new reality.

Mr. Putin ordered his commanders to update and maintain the combat readiness of Russia’s nuclear triad. He said that Russia’s Sarmat intercontinental ballistic missile, which Moscow has described as the “world’s deadliest missile,” capable of mounting nuclear strikes against the U.S., would soon be ready for deployment. And the Admiral Gorshkov frigate, equipped with hypersonic missiles, capable of faster speeds and longer ranges, will enter combat service in January, he said.



Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu, left, and Russian President Vladimir Putin, with other military officials, sought to dispel concerns over a new draft.

PHOTO: SPUTNIK/VIA REUTERS

During the course of the war, approaching its 11th month, the Russian leader has several times threatened to use nuclear weapons.

Mr. Putin has in recent weeks sought to shore up support among partners and friends to offset Western isolation for its war in Ukraine. Earlier this month, he told participants of the joint meeting of defense ministers, including China, India, Pakistan and some former Soviet republics, that the West had long been

trying to turn Ukraine into a colony and was now “cynically using the Ukrainian people as cannon fodder, as a battering ram against Russia [by] continuing to supply Ukraine with weapons and ammunition, sending mercenaries, and pushing it toward a suicidal path.”

On Monday, Mr. Putin made his first visit to Belarus in three years stoking concerns that he is moving to draw Moscow’s closest ally into the war. The trip came the same day that Russia said it would hold joint naval drills with China, highlighting the partnership between the two nations.

While courting support for the war abroad, at home the Kremlin has increased repression to stifle any action or rhetoric that counters the narrative that Moscow was justified in invading Ukraine and the war is largely proceeding as planned. Independent media publications have been banned or their websites blocked, human rights organizations disbanded, and several activists detained or forced to flee the country. Earlier this month, prominent opposition politician Ilya Yashin was sentenced to eight and half years in prison on charges of spreading false information about Russia’s military campaign.

Thousands of people were detained for publicly opposing the September mobilization that prompted hundreds of thousands of fighting-age Russian men to leave the country.

On Wednesday, Messrs. Putin and Shoigu acknowledged difficulties surrounding the call-up, but sought to dispel concerns over a new draft, saying that 150,000 of those already drafted were currently at training grounds and this was a sufficient reserve for conducting the military operation.

Mr. Shoigu stressed that a priority task for 2023 was “to continue conducting the special military operation until the tasks are fully completed.”

Write to Ann M. Simmons at [ann.simmons@wsj.com](mailto:ann.simmons@wsj.com)

*Appeared in the December 22, 2022, print edition as ‘Putin Boosts Military, Vows Unlimited Funds For Ukraine Campaign’.*