

The War They Escaped Is Coming Back for Them

FOUR YEARS OF WAR

Much has changed in the world as war becomes the new normal in 2026, but for the Ukrainian and Russian Armed Forces, four years of grueling fighting have gone quickly by.

Putin's aim to [de-legitimize](#) Ukraine's sovereignty through drone and trench warfare continues to take a toll on all parties involved as the price of war is unequivocally the loss of human life.

According to the [Center for Strategic and International Studies](#), since February 24, 2022 "Russian forces have suffered approximately 1.2 million casualties (killed, wounded, and missing) and as many as 325,000 killed."

These numbers highlight that Russia is committed to a war of attrition, a military strategy aimed at stalling and prolonging the war with the hope that its opponent (Ukraine and its NATO allies) use up all its resources and appetite for supporting a war. It also shows that Russia's military leadership sees very little value in human life as many conscripts are thrown into the front-line with very little training as the [Institute for the Study of War reports](#) that some "only receive a month of training before deploying to Ukraine" in order to quickly replace depleting forces.

Russia has established this method through [predatory forms of recruitment](#) aimed at exploiting those in vulnerable socio-economic and social positions. Manpower is key to Moscow's strategy, as it represents one of the few structural advantages over Ukraine given the sheer difference in [population](#). Theoretically, Russia can continue to replace its massive losses at its current rate of exploitation with the aim of outlasting Ukraine.

REALITY AND CONTRADICTION

Theory does not equate to reality as a large portion of the Russian population understands the actual risks that come with full-scale war and actually oppose it outright.

During the first year of Russia's self-proclaimed "Special Military Operation", hundreds of thousands of Russians [lined up at the Russian-Kazakhstan border](#) seeking safety from the prospect of being forced to fight against Ukraine. Many Baltic countries [restricted entrance visas to Russian citizens](#) at the onset of the invasion leaving few choices of accessible border crossings.

Many Russians either fled further or stayed in Kazakhstan in the hope of holding out till its conclusion. While choosing to stay in a former Soviet Republic may have been convenient at the time, it has however recently become a state more closely cooperative with Putin's Russia and its war effort.

According to a Telegram post by [Slovo Zashite](#), a Russian legal defence advocacy group, draft-aged Russian men are beginning to be investigated by Kazakhstan's National Security Committee (KNSC) in a "large-scale criminal case" that claims they are involved in fake temporary residence permits.

Slovo Zashite activists currently aiding these refugees anonymously claim that this Kazakhstan state-led investigation began near the end of February 2026.

A sudden heightened cooperation between the Russian and Kazakhtani governments to take action to send Russians back is especially alarming as Kazakhstan was once a safe haven for those fleeing military duty and all the risks attributed to front-line duty. It was in September of 2022, when current Kazakhstani President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev [stated](#) “Most of them [Russians] are forced to leave because of the hopeless situation. We must take care of them and ensure their safety.”

Tokayev’s current stance sits in stark contrast to that 2022 pledge as his government is leading the investigation aimed at forcibly removing those he once swore to “ensure their safety.”

Slovo Zashite, in its [original Telegram post](#), claimed that because the investigation is being spearheaded by the KNSC, not localized migration police, Kazakhstan has strategically prepared themselves to be protected from any “accusations of violating the Geneva Convention on the Rights of Refugees with a criminal case that is not related to politics.”

In conjunction with this news, Novaya Gazeta on March 10, 2026, [reported](#) that a new bill has been introduced in the State Duma (lower house of Russian parliament) that “would allow conscripts to be drafted into the military regardless of whether they appeal against the military commission’s decision to call them up.”

The recency of these two reports might simply be coincidence though it would be wrong to completely ignore the combined effect of these decisions.

Interestingly, back in November of 2025, President Tokayev made a two-day state visit to Moscow where [according to the Kremlin](#), both Putin and Tokayev praised each other's nations and their continued bilateral partnership and future cooperation. Kazakhstan’s current investigation may have been discussed in November but there is no evidence to support this.

Regardless, if Kazakhstani-Russian cooperation expands by forcibly deporting healthy draft-age men back home, then Russia can continue to replace their massive losses for the sake of prolonging this war and ensuring an eventual Ukrainian capitulation. At least in the eyes of Putin and the rest of his military leadership.

War is returning to face those who escaped it, proving that safety continues to be an illusion as we head further into 2026.