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U.S. Estimates Russian Casualties in Ukraine Nearing 200K – NYT

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Personal belongings of the victims among the debris after a rocket attack on a vocational school building in Makiivka. **Valentin Sprinchak / TASS**

U.S. and other Western officials estimate that close to 200,000 Russian troops have been killed and wounded in Ukraine nearly one year into Moscow's invasion of its western neighbor, The New York Times reported Thursday.

"The figures for Ukraine and Russia are estimates based on satellite imagery, communication intercepts, social media and on-the-ground media reports, as well as official reporting from both governments," the newspaper said.

Hundreds of both Russian and Ukrainian troops have been killed or injured each day recently as fighting rages for the eastern city of Bakhmut, the longest and bloodiest battle of Russia's invasion, the officials estimate.

U.S. officials say Russia's losses in its assault on Bakhmut far outpace the strategic value of the city, which Moscow appears to view as instrumental to capturing the entire Donetsk

region of Ukraine.

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The Russian military has been following the Wagner mercenary group’s playbook by sending poorly trained troops and former convicts “straight into the path of Ukrainian shelling and machine guns” in order to “draw, and deplete Ukrainian fire,” the American officials were cited as saying.

Wagner is estimated to have recruited 50,000 troops, a share of whom were personally recruited from Russian prisons by the mercenary outfit’s founder, Yevgeny Prigozhin.

But even hundreds of thousands of losses will not alter President Vladimir Putin’s war aims due to an abolished political opposition and the framing of his invasion of Ukraine as an existential struggle, analysts say.

“From an operational perspective, this is a very unfair deal for the Ukrainians and a clever tactical move from the Russian side,” Kusti Salm, Estonia’s deputy defense minister, said last week.

“In Russia the life of a soldier is worth nothing,” Salm told the NYT in a follow-up email. “All lost soldiers can be replaced, and the number of losses will not shift the public opinion against the war.”

The Russian military placed its death toll at under 6,000 in its most recent acknowledgment of its losses in September. Open source-based media tallies have verified more than double that number of deaths.

U.S. officials cited by the NYT warn that Russia and Ukraine’s troop deaths are difficult to assess accurately due to the belligerents’ tendency to downplay their own battlefield losses.

But if true, the newspaper notes that Russia’s 11-month campaign would have claimed eight times the number of American soldiers lost in the two decades of Washington's war in Afghanistan.

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