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**Russia's strategic paradox:
Mobilisation, depopulation, and
geopolitical weakening in the Far
East**

Russia's strategic paradox: Mobilisation, depopulation, and geopolitical weakening in the Far East

Abstract:

The Russian Federation is currently grappling with a strategic paradox in its Far East, a region which remains pivotal to both its national security and its power projection in the Pacific. Whilst the Kremlin has long prioritised reversing demographic decline as a matter of state security, the military mobilisation for the conflict in Ukraine has fundamentally subverted this objective. By transforming the region into a primary source of manpower, the Government is accelerating depopulation and exacerbating structural ageing, effectively nullifying previous stabilisation efforts.

This shift has created a direct vulnerability in the realm of defence, compromising the operational readiness of key units and undermining border security against regional powers such as China, which maintains a historical interest in the territory.

Keywords:

Russia, mobilisation, depopulation, Russian Far East, geopolitics.

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Introduction

The full-scale invasion of Ukraine has compelled the Kremlin to make decisions of profound strategic significance, notably the paradox that has emerged within the Russian Far East. This vast territory, which accounts for over 40% of Russian territory, has historically been a national security priority owing to its strategic importance: its vast natural resource endowments, its access to the Pacific Ocean, and its precipitous demographic decline.

For decades, Moscow has attempted to implement policies designed to anchor the population and attract new residents. However, the imperious need for manpower for the war effort has inverted this priority, transforming the Far East into a primary source of recruitment. This document analyses how mobilisation not only accelerates a pre-existing demographic crisis but also undermines the foundations of Russian security and power projection in the most dynamic region of the twenty-first century: the Asia Pacific region.

The extraction of the Far East's primary human capital to meet immediate wartime demands is creating a demographic and military vacuum. This not only weakens Russia's posture along the Chinese border but also reduces its influence in the Pacific, putting the stability of this strategic region at risk.

The Russian Far East: a vulnerable strategic region

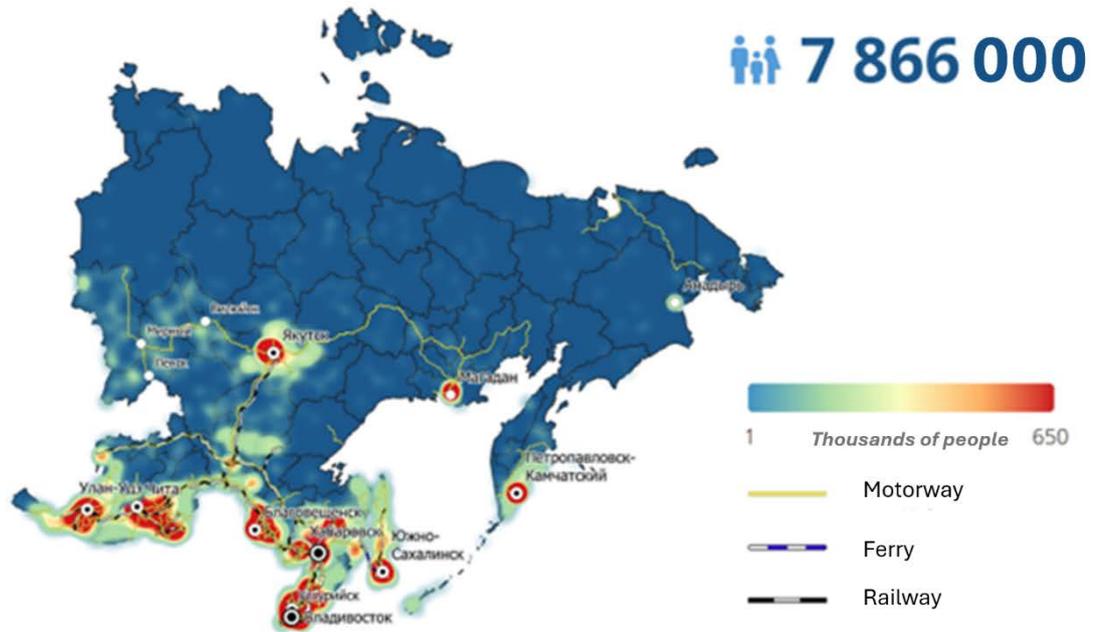
The Far East, the largest of the eight Federal Districts within the Russian Federation, extends from the Arctic to China and North Korea, and from Lake Baikal to the Pacific. Nevertheless, despite its vast territory of nearly 7 million km², barely eight million people live in the region, contributing only 6 per cent of the national GDP¹.

Furthermore, the region faces serious infrastructural challenges, which present a significant obstacle to Russian attempts to expand rail capacity to exploit trade networks proposed in various international routes² (See Map 1).

¹ Russian Federal Service of State Statistics, "Chislennost' naseleniya [Population]", 2021, retrieved from: [https://rosstat.gov.ru/storage/mediabank/demo11\(1\).xls](https://rosstat.gov.ru/storage/mediabank/demo11(1).xls) Accessed on 19.10.2025; Russian Federal Service of State Statistics, "Regiony Rossii—sotsial'no ekonomicheskie pokazateli 2020 g. [Regions of Russia: Socioeconomic Indicators for 2020]", 2019.

² PEPE, Jacopo Maria, "The 'Eastern Polygon' of the Trans-Siberian Rail Line: A Critical Factor for Assessing Russia's Strategy toward Eurasia and the Asia-Pacific", *Asia Europe Journal*, 18(3), 2020, pp. 305-324, retrieved from: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10308-019-00543-5> Accessed on 20.10.2025.

Map 1. Population and transport: Far Eastern Federal District (2024)



Source: Author's translation from the original Vostochnyy Tsentr Gosudarstvennogo Planirovaniya map³

The area possesses considerable military relevance as it hosts the Eastern Military District, whose forces are oriented towards strategic deterrence, the defence of the disputed Kuril Islands, and the surveillance of the extensive border with China⁴. Vladivostok, the headquarters of the Pacific Fleet, constitutes Russia's primary gateway to the Pacific and a core component of its nuclear second-strike capability, making it a strategic hub for the maintenance of Russian naval power on a global scale⁵.

Crucially, this territory secures control over immense extractive resources. According to data provided by the Eastern Economic Forum, 98% of Russian diamonds, 90% of borax, 80% of tin, 50% of gold, 40% of fish, and 14% of tungsten are extracted from the Far East. Furthermore, approximately one-third of the country's coal reserves and hydroelectric resources are located there, along with 30% of the total forest area⁶.

³ Vostochnyy Tsentr Gosudarstvennogo Planirovaniya, "Demograficheskaya Kharakteristika Dal'nego Vostoka [Demographic characteristics of the Far East]", 2024, p. 7, retrieved from: https://vostokgosplan.ru/wp-content/uploads/digest_demography_2024.pdf Accessed on 26.10.2025.

⁴ RUMER, Eugene, SOKOLSKY, Richard & VLADICIC, Aleksandar, "Russia in the Asia-Pacific: Less Than Meets the Eye", Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2020, p. 15, retrieved from: https://carnegieendowment.org/files/SokolskyRumer_Asia-Pacific_FINAL.pdf Accessed on 20.10.2025.

⁵ STANKO, John C, "The Future of Sino-Russian Relations in the Russian Far East: A Stable but Not Impervious Equilibrium", *Global Studies Quarterly*, 2(4), 2022, pp. 1-12, retrieved from: <https://doi.org/10.1093/isagsq/ksac050> Accessed on 20.10.2025.

⁶ Eastern Economic Forum, "ABOUT THE FAR EAST", 2025, retrieved from: <https://forumvostok.ru/en/about/> Accessed on 21.10.2025.

On the other hand, given that the main goal of Russian Foreign Policy is to regain great power status (*derzhavnost*), this region is essential. Firstly, because it is key for Russian integration into the new global power centre: the Asia Pacific region⁷. Secondly, as Putin highlighted, because it offers a strategic alternative to the West and “a huge area for implementing business initiatives, launching complex projects and creating whole new industries”⁸. Any loss of sovereignty over this territory would constitute a devastating blow for Moscow⁹.

Demographic imbalance and Chinese pressure

Persistent regional issues regarding demography and underdevelopment represent a major long-term challenge for Russia, especially given the territory's strategic significance.

The internal demographic crisis

The region's primary challenge is its extremely low population density, which complicates economic development and effective territorial control. The Soviet era saw heavy state-sponsored industrialisation which successfully attracted residents and expanded regional settlements. Conversely, the Soviet dissolution and the removal of subsidies triggered a severe demographic decline. This explains why, since 1991, the population of the Federal District has declined by more than 20% (See Table 1).

Table 1. Population dynamics: Far Eastern Federal District (in thousands)

	1990	2018	2023	Variación 1990-2023
Far East Federal District (Total)	10424	8119	7885	-24,4 %
Republic of Buryatia	1050	980	973	-7,3 %
Trans-Baikal Territory	1115	970	1000	-10,3 %
Republic of Sakha (Yakutia)	1319	1041	988	-25,1 %
Kamchatka Territory	478	301	289	-39,6 %
Primorsky Krai	2303	1892	1813	-21,3 %
Khabarovsk Krai	1622	1320	1281	-21 %
Amur Region	1055	790	753	-28,6 %
Magadan Region	387	141	134	-65,4 %
Sakhalin Region	715	477	459	-35,8 %
Jewish Autonomous Region	219	158	147	-33 %
Chukotka Autonomous District	160	48	48	-70 %

Source: Vostochnyy Tsentri Gosudarstvennogo Planirovaniya¹⁰

⁷ AZIZIAN, Rouben, “Russia and the Asia-Pacific: Trends, Threats and Common Threads”, en: KURILOV, Vladimir (Ed.) Russia, America and Security in the Asia-Pacific, Honolulu, HI: Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies, 2007, pp. 16-36, p. 27-35.

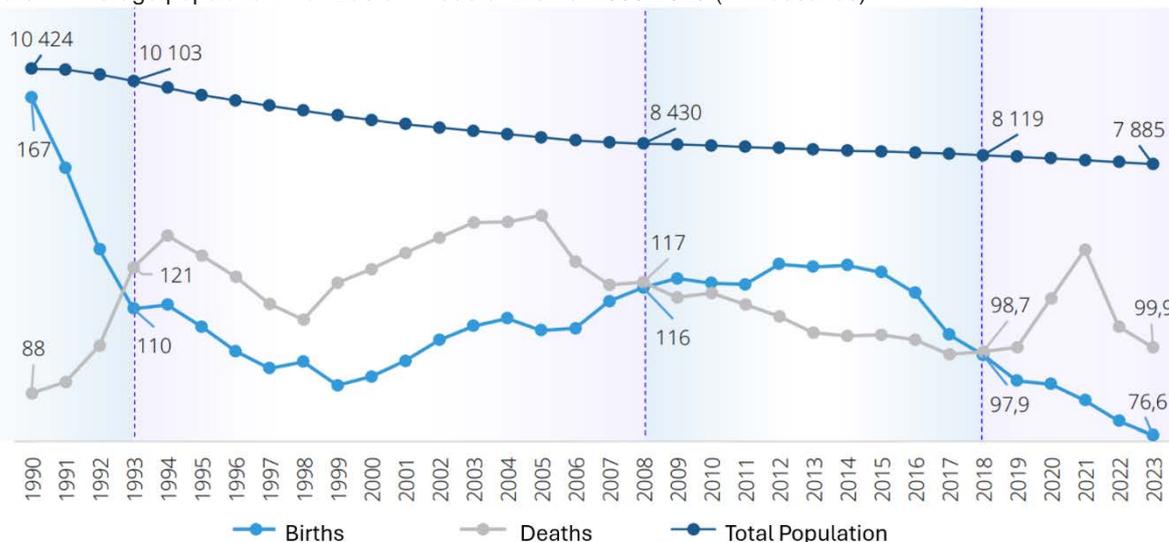
⁸ PUTIN, Vladimir, “Plenary session of the 9th Eastern Economic Forum”, 2024, retrieved from: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/75029> Accessed on 22.10.2025.

⁹ STANKO, 2022, p. 8.

¹⁰ Vostochnyy Tsentri Gosudarstvennogo Planirovaniya, 2024, p. 9.

Since then, the region has faced a demographic crisis marked by low birth rates, high mortality, and intense migration towards the western part of Russia¹¹ (See Figure 1) (See Map 2). This situation is exacerbated by harsh climatic conditions, high transport costs, and a lack of infrastructure and opportunities in a region isolated from the rest of the country¹².

Figure 1. Average population: Far Eastern Federal District 1990-2023 (in thousands)



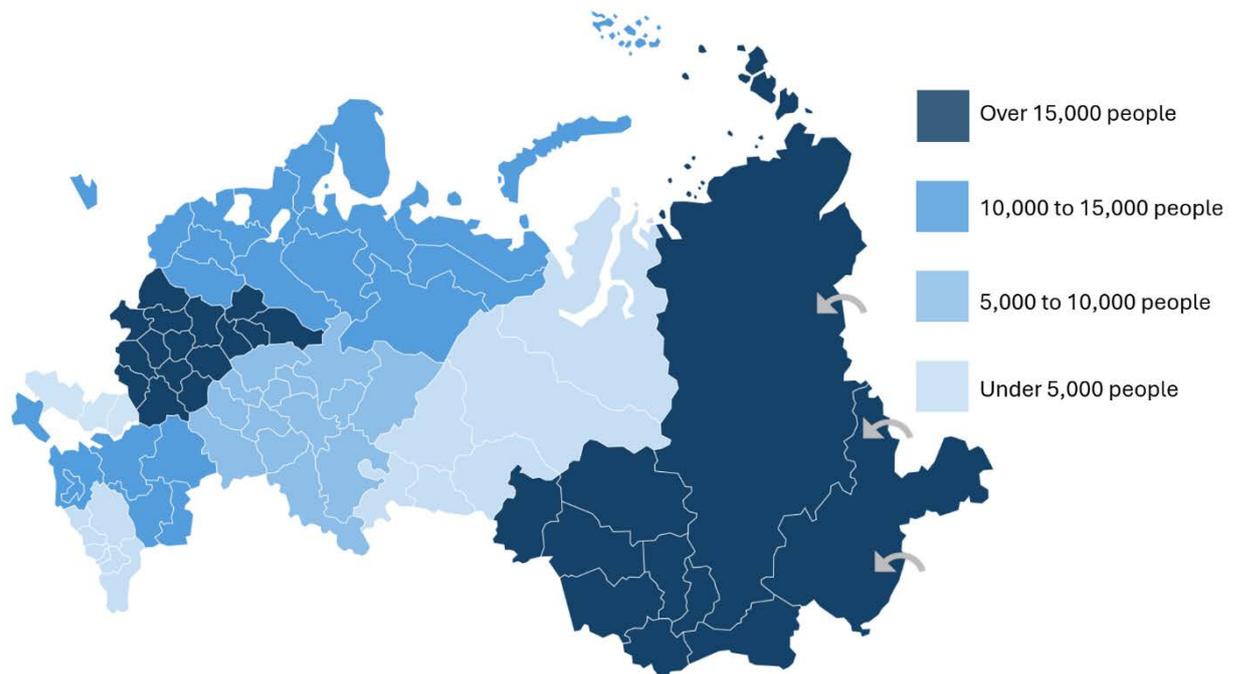
Source: Author's translation from the original Vostochnyy Tsentr Gosudarstvennogo Planirovaniya chart¹³

Map 2. Interregional migration: Far Eastern Federal District (2023)

¹¹ KOLIPAKA, Sharath Kumar, "Demographic changes in Russia's Far East: An emerging challenge", Centre for Security and Strategy Studies (CESCUBE), 2021, retrieved from: <https://www.cescube.com/vp-demographic-changes-in-russia-s-far-east-an-emerging-challenge> Accessed on 24.10.2025.

¹² LEVIE, Matthew Benjamin, "Depopulation and Migration in the Russian Far East: International, Federal and Local Factors", Asian International Studies Review, 18(2), 2017 pp. 85-109, p. 89, retrieved from: https://www.kci.go.kr/kciportal/landing/article.kci?arti_id=ART002293118 Accessed on 24.10.2025.

¹³ Vostochnyy Tsentr Gosudarstvennogo Planirovaniya, 2024, p. 7.



Source: Author's translation from the original Vostochnyy Tsentr Gosudarstvennogo Planirovaniya map¹⁴

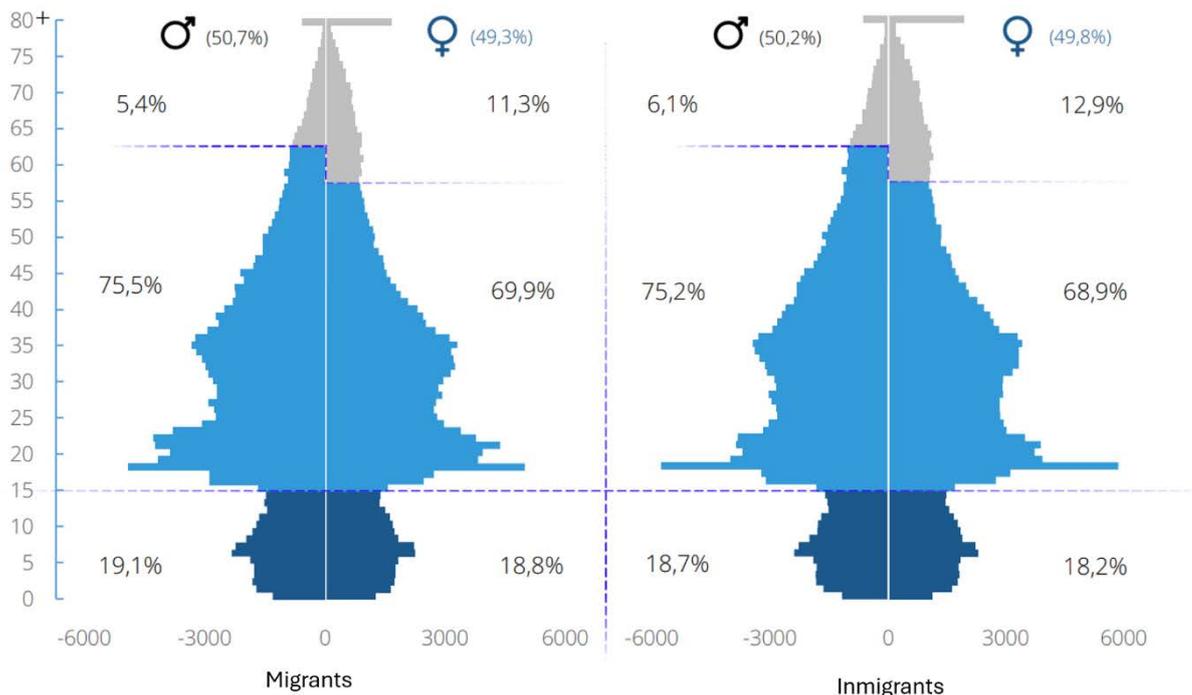
The latest report from the Vostochnyy Tsentr Gosudarstvennogo Planirovaniya shows that emigration is primarily driven by labour and economic motives (46.7%), evidencing that nearly half of those who emigrate do so for employment reasons¹⁵. This economic emigration deepens the demographic crisis as the region loses its most vital sector for development: young people with reproductive and labour capacity (See Figure 2). This diminishes its potential for demographic growth and its economic dynamism¹⁶.

Figure 2. Migration by age and gender: Far Eastern Federal District (2023)

¹⁴ Vostochnyy Tsentr Gosudarstvennogo Planirovaniya, 2024, p. 41.

¹⁵ Vostochnyy Tsentr Gosudarstvennogo Planirovaniya, 2024, p. 44.

¹⁶ LEVIE, 2017, p. 90.



Author's translation from the original Vostochnyy Tsent Gosudarstvennogo Planirovaniya chart¹⁷

At the same time, immigration from neighbouring countries presents challenges. Most of these migrants are temporary workers without full integration or access to citizenship¹⁸. In the case of Chinese migrants, whose numbers are estimated between 200,000 and 400,000 people (including those with irregular status), academic consensus suggests this presence is seen as both an economic necessity and a significant security concern for Moscow¹⁹.

The external challenge from China

This problem is worsened by the fact that the region is the main point of contact between Russia and China, two countries with a history of mistrust and border conflicts. From the Treaty of Nerchinsk (1689) to the Treaties of Aigun (1858) and Peking (1860), China ceded territories to the Russian Empire, perpetuating a deep-seated narrative of historical resentment that remains central to the Chinese national identity²⁰. In addition to other

¹⁷ Vostochnyy Tsent Gosudarstvennogo Planirovaniya, 2024, p. 43.

¹⁸ LEVIE, 2017, p. 91; LUKIN, Artyom, "The Russia–China Entente and Its Future", *International Politics*, 58(3), 2021, pp. 363-380, p.372, retrieved from: <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41311-020-00251-7> Accessed on 26.10.2025; TRENIN, Dmitri, "True partners? How Russia and China see each other", *Centre for European Reform*, 2012, p. 36, retrieved from: https://carnegie-production-assets.s3.amazonaws.com/static/files/Trenin_CER_Eng.pdf Accessed on 26.10.2025.

¹⁹ LUBINA, Michal, "Russia and China: A Political Marriage of Convenience—Stable and Successful", Opladen: Barbara Budrich Publishers, 2017, p. 216-217; ZAYONCHKOVSAYA, Zhanna. A, "Immigration: there's no alternative", en: MUKOMEL, V. I. y PAIN, A. (Eds.) *Are Immigrants Necessary to Russian Society?*, Moscow: "Liberal Mission" Fund, 2007, pp. 7-30.

²⁰ ADDA, Iacopo, "Sino-Russian relations through the lens of Russian border history museums: the Nerchinsk treaty

territorial clashes, the Sino-Soviet split of 1956 led to the conflict over Damansky (Zhenbao) Island in 1969. Despite subsequent agreements and the 2008 border delimitation, these disputes continue to feed a latent mistrust, reinforced by nationalist sensibilities and references to the “Century of Humiliation” that remain deeply embedded in the Chinese socio-political consciousness²¹.

Today, Sino-Russian relations in the region are defined by a large demographic gap. The scale of this imbalance is illustrated by the fact that the three contiguous Chinese provinces, Heilongjiang (30 million), Inner Mongolia (25 million), and Jilin (24 million), collectively dwarf the entire population of the Russian Far East²². This creates a geopolitical imbalance with strategic implications, as the sustained growth of the Chinese population could lead to a growing for more land and resources. The contrast between China's population density and the depopulation of the Far East is a threat to stability, potentially encouraging Beijing to assert its influence more aggressively²³.

For China, the region also has a symbolic-strategic dimension. As Michael Hunt noted, the legitimacy of Chinese leadership has historically been sustained by the preservation of the cultural core and the control of peripheral regions that guarantee its security²⁴. From this territorial logic, sectors of Chinese strategic thought consider parts of the Far East as spaces belonging to their natural sphere of influence. An example of this is that in the map published by the Ministry of Natural Resources of the People's Republic of China in 2023, Bolshoy Ussuriysky Island appeared as Chinese territory²⁵.

and its problematic representations”, *Eurasian geography and economics*, 62(5-6), 2020, pp. 557-581, retrieved from: <https://doi.org/10.1080/15387216.2020.1831938> Accessed on 28.10.2025; STANKO, 2022, p.7.

21 SANDOR, Filip, y GURNAK, Daniel, “The Far East Region-The stumbling block in Sino-Russian relations?”, *Human Geographies*, 19(1), 2025, pp. 1-19, p. 5-6, retrieved from: <https://www.humangeographies.org.ro/articles/191/a1915.pdf> Accessed on 28.10.2025; SWANSTRÖM, Niklas, “Sino-Russian Relations at the Start of the New Millennium in Central Asia and Beyond”, *Journal of Contemporary China*, 23(87), 2014, pp. 480-497, p. 484, retrieved from: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2013.843911> Accessed on 28.10.2025; STRONSKI, Paul & NG, Nicole, “Cooperation and Competition: Russia and China in Central Asia, the Russian Far East, and the Arctic”, *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 2018, retrieved from: <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2018/02/cooperation-and-competition-russia-and-china-in-central-asia-the-russian-far-east-and-the-arctic?lang=en> Accessed on 28.10.2025; ZUENKO, Ivan & CHRISTOFFERSEN, Gaye, “Northeast China and the Russian Far East: Positive Scenarios and Negative Scenarios”, en: RADCHENKO, Sergey & ROZMAN, Gilbert (eds.) *International Relations and Asia's Northern Tier: Sino-Russia Relations, North Korea, and Mongolia*, Singapore: Springer Singapore, 2018, pp. 215-238.

22 National Bureau of Statistics of China, “China Statistical Yearbook 2024”, Beijing: China Statistics Press, 2024, retrieved from: <https://www.stats.gov.cn/sj/ndsj/2024/indexeh.htm> Accessed on 28.10.2025.

23 IOFFE, Grigory & ZAYONCHKOVSKAYA, Zhanna, “Immigration to Russia: Inevitability and Prospective Inflows”, *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, 51(1), 2010, pp. 104-125, retrieved from: <https://doi.org/10.2747/1539-7216.51.1.104> Accessed on 28.10.2025.

24 HUNT, Michael. H, “The Genesis of Chinese Communist Foreign Policy”, New York: Columbia University Press, 1996.

25 Ministry of Natural Resources of the People's Republic of China, “2023 Standard Maps 2023 officially released”,

From a geopolitical standpoint, Beijing aims to secure its energy supplies and establish a maritime corridor to the Pacific via the Tumen River basin. This territory, ceded to Russia under the Treaty of Peking, currently serves as a barrier that denies China direct access to the Sea of Japan²⁶. As Fiona Cunningham explains, direct access to the Pacific would grant China a strategic advantage against potential maritime route blockades²⁷. Such an aspiration is integrated into the strategy to develop the northeast of the country and incorporate it into the Belt and Road Initiative.

In recent years, Chinese influence in the Far East has taken on a strategic role that goes beyond formal economic cooperation. As Andrei Zakharov and Anastasia Napalkova observe, the combination of Chinese investment in agriculture, mining, and transport alongside the leasing of vast tracts of arable land and a steady influx of cross-border labour, is establishing a firm foothold in Russian territories that remain historically sensitive²⁸. Despite bilateral cooperation, Russian suspicions about long-term Chinese goals persist. Beijing could be awaiting a more advantageous negotiating position to reclaim territories lost in the past²⁹. This mistrust explains Russia's caution over joint projects in the Tumen River and the preventive nature of military exercises such as Vostok, which are designed to offset Chinese numerical superiority³⁰.

Responses and structural limitations in Russian policy towards the Far East

Since the 2000s, Putin warned that without a real effort in the region, “within a few decades even the original Russian population will speak mainly Japanese, Chinese, and

2023, retrieved from: https://www.mnr.gov.cn/dt/ywbb/202308/t20230829_2798404.html Accessed on 29.10.2025.

²⁶ STANKO, 2022, p. 9; COTTON, James, “China and Tumen River Cooperation: Jilin’s Coastal Development Strategy”, *Asian Survey*, 36(11), 1996, pp. 1086-1101, p.1101, retrieved from: <https://doi.org/10.2307/2645637> Accessed on 29.10.2025; FREEMAN, Carla P., “Neighborly Relations: The Tumen Development Project and China’s Security Strategy”, *Journal of Contemporary China*, 19(63), 2010, pp. 137-157, p. 141, retrieved from: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10670560903335850> Accessed on 29.10.2025.

²⁷ CUNNINGHAM, Fiona S, “The Maritime Rung on the Escalation Ladder: Naval Blockades in a US–China Conflict”, *Security Studies*, 29(4), 2020, pp. 730-768, retrieved from: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2020.1811462> Accessed on 30.10.2025.

²⁸ ZAKHAROV, Andrei & NAPALKOVA, Anastasia, “Why Chinese farmers have crossed border into Russia’s Far East”, *BBC News*, 25 October, 2019, retrieved from: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-50185006> Accessed on 30.10.2025.

²⁹ LARUELLE, Marlene & PEYROUSE, Sebastien, “The “Chinese Question” In Central Asia: Domestic Order, Social Change And The Chinese Factor”, New York: Columbia University Press, 2012.

³⁰ ABRAHAMIAN, Andray, “Tumen Triangle Tribulations: The Unfulfilled Promise of Chinese, Russian, and North Korean Cooperation”, en: CATHCART, Adam, GREEN, Christopher & DENNEY, Steven. (Eds.) *Decoding the Sino-North Korean Borderlands*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2021, pp. 269-287; RØSETH, Tom, “Moscow’s Response to a Rising China: Russia’s Partnership Policies in Its Military Relations with Beijing”, *Problems of Post-Communism*, 66(4), 2019, pp. 268-286, p. 279, retrieved from: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10758216.2018.1438847> Accessed on 02.11.2025.

Korean”³¹. With that premise, the development of the Far East was declared a “national priority of the 21st century”, with several measures implemented³² (See Table 2).

Table 2. Kremlin strategies to address the Far East situation

1996	Federal Programme Development of the Far East and Baikal Region to 2013 ³³
2009	Strategy for Socio-Economic Development of the Far East and Baikal Region to 2025 ³⁴
2011	Far East and Baikal Region Development Fund ³⁵
2012	Creation of the Ministry for the Development of the Far East ³⁶
2013	Renewal of the Programme Socio-Economic Development of the Far East and Baikal Region until 2025 ³⁷
2014	Priority Development Zones Act ³⁸
	Adoption of the investment project selection methodology for the Far East and Baikal region ³⁹
	Approval of the ‘Socio-economic Development of the Far Eastern Federal District’ State Programme ⁴⁰
2016	Amendments to the Economic and Social Development of the Far East and Baikal region programme ⁴¹

³¹ PUTIN, Vladimir, “Vstupitel'noye slovo na soveshchaniy «O perspektivakh razvitiya Dal'nego Vostoka i Zabaykal'ya» [Opening speech at the meeting “On the development prospects of the Far East and Transbaikalia]”, 2000, retrieved from: <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/21494> Accessed on 02.11.2025.

³² PUTIN, Vladimir, “Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly”, 2013, retrieved from: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/19825> Accessed on 02.11.2025.

³³ Pravitel'stvo Rossii, “Postanovleniye Pravitel'stva Rossiyskoy Federatsii ot 15 aprelya 1996 goda № 480 Ob utverzhdenii federal'noy tselevoy programmy “Ekonomicheskoye i sotsial'noye razvitiye Dal'nego Vostoka i Baykal'skogo regiona na period do 2018 goda” [Resolution of the Government of the Russian Federation of April 15, 1996 No. 480 “On the approval of the federal program of objectives “Economic and social development of the Far East and the Baikal region for the period until 2018”]”, 1996.

³⁴ Pravitel'stvo Rossii, “Stratyegiya sotsial'no-ekonomicheskogo razvitiya Dal'nego Vostoka i Baykal'skogo regiona na period do 2025 goda, Utverzhdena rasporyazheniyem Pravitel'stva Rossiyskoy Federatsii ot 28 dekabrya 2009 g. № 2094-r [Strategy for the socio-economic development of the Far East and the Baikal region until 2025, approved by Order of the Government of the Russian Federation of 28 December 2009 No. 2094-r]”, 2009.

³⁵ Pravitel'stvo Rossii, “Razvitiye Dal'nego Vostoka i Baykal'skogo regiona: nekotoryye rezul'taty i pokazateli 2015 goda. [Development of the Far East and the Baikal region: some results and indicators for 2015]”, 2016, retrieved from: <http://government.ru/info/22709/> Fecha de la consulta 02.11.2025.

³⁶ Pravitel'stvo Rossii, “Polozhyeniye o Ministerstve Rossiyskoy Federatsii po razvitiyu Dal'nego Vostoka, Utverzhdeno postanovleniyem Pravitel'stva Rossiyskoy Federatsii ot 30 iyunya 2012 g. №664 [Regulation on the Ministry of the Russian Federation for the Development of the Far East, approved by Resolution of the Government of the Russian Federation of June 30, 2012, No. 664]”, 2012.

³⁷ Pravitel'stvo Rossii, “O prodlenii federal'noy tselevoy programmy «Ekonomicheskoye i sotsial'noye razvitiye Dal'nego Vostoka i Baykal'skogo regiona» [Regarding the extension of the federal program of objectives “Economic and social development of the Far East and the Baikal region”]”, 2013.

³⁸ Prezident Rossii, “Federal'nyy reliz ot 29.12.2014 g. № 473-FZ. Territorii sotsial'no-ekonomicheskogo razvitiya Rossiyskoy Federatsii. [Federal Law No. 473-FZ of December 29, 2014. On the territories of advanced socio-economic development in the Russian Federation]”, 2014.

³⁹ Pravitel'stvo Rossii, “Postanovleniye ot 15 aprelya 2014 g. № 308 Ob utverzhdenii gosudarstvennoy programmy Rossiyskoy Federatsii “Sotsial'no-ekonomicheskoye razvitiye Dal'nevostochnogofederal'nogo okruga” [Resolution of April 15, 2014, No. 308, On the approval of the State program of the Russian Federation “Socio-economic development of the Far Eastern Federal District”]”, 2014.

⁴⁰ Pravitel'stvo Rossii, “Ob utverzhdenii metodiki otbora investitsionnykh proyektov, planiruyemykh k realizatsii na Dal'nem Vostoke i v Baykal'skom regione [Regarding the approval of the methodology for the selection of investment projects planned for implementation in the Far East and the Baikal region]”, 2014.

⁴¹ Pravitel'stvo Rossii, “Postanovleniye ot 2 iyunya 2016 g. № 496 O vnesenii izmeneniy v federal'nuyu tselevoy programmu “Ekonomicheskoye i sotsial'noye razvitiye Dal'nego Vostoka i Baykal'skogo regiona na period do 2018 goda” [Resolution of June 2, 2016 No. 496 On the modifications to the Federal Programme of Objectives “Economic and Social Development of the Far East and the Baikal Region until 2018”]”, 2016.

	Far Eastern Hectare Initiative ⁴²
2017	Demographic Policy Concept for the Far East ⁴³
2019	Far Eastern 2% Mortgage Programme ⁴⁴
	Expansion of the Ministry for the Development of the Far East to include the Arctic ⁴⁵
2020	National Programme for Socio-Economic Development of the Far East to 2035 ⁴⁶
2025	Far East Master Plan to 2036 ⁴⁷

Source: Author's own elaboration.

Despite the proliferation of policies, results have been limited. Although the population exodus has partially slowed, the region continues to face an ageing population. Dependence on insufficient federal financing prevents sustainable development, while Chinese investments have increased Beijing's influence in border areas⁴⁸. This situation has worsened since 2022, when the Far East became one of the primary sources of recruitment for the war against Ukraine.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine: partial mobilisation and the Far East

General characteristics of the mobilisation

Due to a shortage of military personnel on the Ukrainian front, the Kremlin chose a hidden partial mobilisation instead of a general one, which would be very unpopular. While in the large cities of Western Russia mobilisation was limited to avoid social discontent, recruitment focused disproportionately on men from remote regions with economic difficulties. Consequently, the Far East became a main target for a strategy based on both pragmatic and political reasons⁴⁹.

⁴² Pravitelstvo Rossii, "Dal'nevostochnyy gektar [Hectare of the Far East]", 2016, retrieved from: <http://government.ru/rugovclassifier/728/events/> Accessed on 03.11.2025.

⁴³ Pravitelstvo Rossii, "O proverke Demografo-politicheskoy kontseptsii Dal'nego Vostoka. [On the approval of the Far East Demographic Policy Concept]", 2017, retrieved from: <http://government.ru/docs/28228/> Accessed on 03.11.2025.

⁴⁴ Ministerstvo po razvitiyu Dal'nego Vostoka i Arktiki Rossiyskoy Federatsii, "Dalnevostochnaya ipoteka pod 2% stala real'nost'yu [2% mortgages in the Far East have become a reality]", 2019, retrieved from: <https://minvr.gov.ru/press-center/news/dalnevostochnaya-ipoteka-pod-2-stala-realnostyu-23959/> Accessed on 03.11.2025.

⁴⁵ Prezident Rossii, "Rasporyazheniye Prezidenta Rossiyskoy Federatsii ot 15.03.2019 g. № 73-rp. [Order of the President of the Russian Federation of 15 March 2019 No. 73-rp]", 2019.

⁴⁶ Pravitelstvo Rossii, "Mikhail Mishustin utverdil Natsional'nuyu programmu razvitiya Dal'nego Vostoka [Mikhail Mishustin approved the National Programme for the Development of the Far East]", 2020, retrieved from: <http://government.ru/docs/40487/> Accessed on 03.11.2025.

⁴⁷ Prezident Rossii, "Plenarnoye zasedaniye X Vostochnogo ekonomicheskogo foruma [Plenary session of the 10th Eastern Economic Forum]", 2025, retrieved from: <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/77927> Accessed on 03.11.2025.

⁴⁸ STANKO, 2022, p. 7.

⁴⁹ LOSSOVSKYI, Ihor, "How Moscow "eliminates" its national minorities in the war with Ukraine", European Centre for Minority Issues, 17, 2022, retrieved from: <https://doi.org/10.53779/KGPE6877> Accessed on 02.11.2025.

The highest mortality rates are concentrated in Siberia, the Far East, and Northern Russia, which are regions with lower levels of development. While Buryatia and Tuva lead the list, with approximately 240 deaths per 100,000 men, large western cities like Moscow and St. Petersburg present the lowest values, at 3.1 and 10.2 respectively⁵⁰. This gap shows that mobilisation is geographically unequal, driven by three main factors: existing military infrastructure, economic vulnerability, and the Kremlin's belief that it could apply more pressure here with less risk of national political instability.

Effects on the Far East Federal District situation

Since recruitment has focused on young men of military age, who constitute the demographic pillar of any society, their mass extraction from an already depopulated region is producing long-term multiplier effects. Mobilisation has thus acted as a potent accelerator of negative demographic trends, driven by both combat fatalities and the significant wave of emigration prompted by the threat of conscription.

The long-term effects of this mobilisation are likely to be significant. The loss of many young men starts a chain reaction: it reduces birth rates, weakens the workforce, and speeds up the ageing of the population. This makes the economic outlook for an already fragile region even more difficult. At present, the Kremlin has tried to ease these pressures by moving units from the Eastern Military District to the south, specifically near Zaporizhzhia, where the scale of hostilities is currently more contained⁵¹.

Militarily, the reorientation of resources from the Far East to the front has weakened surveillance and defence capacity in the region. By relocating strategic assets, Russia has reduced its monitoring of remote but critical zones in geostrategic terms, most notably those located along the border with China, offering Beijing a strategic opportunity⁵². According to leaked documents, Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) fears that China could attempt to annex part of the Far East, including Vladivostok⁵³.

⁵⁰ BESSUDNOV, Alexey, "Ethnic and regional inequalities in Russian military fatalities in Ukraine: Preliminary findings from crowdsourced data", *Demographic Research*, 48(31), 2023, pp. 883-898, p. 888, p. 894, retrieved from: <https://www.demographic-research.org/volumes/vol48/31/48-31.pdf> Accessed on 03.11.2025.

⁵¹ LATYPOVA, Leyla, "In Numbers: How Russia's Regions Entice Ukraine War Recruits With Money", *The Moscow Times*, 11 noviembre, 2024, retrieved from: <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2024/11/11/in-numbers-how-russias-regions-entice-ukraine-war-recruits-with-money-a86980> Accessed on 04.11.2025.

⁵² AGUIAR, Paulo, "China's Quiet Threat to Russia: Espionage Rattles the Far East", *Geopolitical Monitor*, 13 junio, 2025, retrieved from: <https://www.geopoliticalmonitor.com/chinas-quiet-threat-to-russia-espionage-rattles-the-far-east/> Accessed on 04.11.2025.

⁵³ SONNE, Paul, TROIANOVSKI, Anton & JUDAH, Jacob, "China, Russia Spies Documents Put Putin at War", *The*

Conclusions

The full-scale invasion of Ukraine has created a strategic paradox for Russia in the Far East, a region already very vulnerable demographically. For decades, the worrying population decline forced Moscow to prioritise the development and repopulation of this territory. This was seen as essential for national security and achieving wider strategic goals. However, the urgent need for troops at the front has completely reversed this priority. This decision, driven by the demands of the war, ignores previous warnings from Russian authorities about the risk of losing control over the region.

By focusing mobilisation disproportionately on this area, Moscow has chosen to prioritise immediate military needs over the Far East's future stability. The Kremlin is accelerating the very depopulation it feared by taking away the young people that its own policies had tried to keep since the 1990s. Consequently, mobilisation is a major driver of the negative demographic trends, such as people leaving, an ageing population, and low birth rates, that already threatened the region's future.

This situation is further exacerbated by another consequence of the war in Ukraine: Russia's dependency on China. Since the onset of the conflict and the subsequent collapse of Russo-Western relations, Moscow has found in Beijing an indispensable partner for its economic and diplomatic survival. Through mobilisation in the contested Far East, the Kremlin is creating the conditions for greater Chinese penetration and influence. Given its current position of subordination, Russia may find itself forced to make concessions to Chinese interests.

Ultimately, the war in Ukraine and the designation of the Far East as a primary source of military manpower have aggravated the pre-existing threats of depopulation and underdevelopment. This undermines Russian control over a territory that is vital both domestically and externally, especially given China's growing presence. The military mobilisation shows a major strategic paradox: in its attempt to secure immediate wartime objectives, the Kremlin is risking the stability of the Far East, which remains a critical vector for its projection in the Asia Pacific region.

By subordinating the demographic security of the Far East region, Russia not only

New York Times, 7 junio, 2025, retrieved from: <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/06/07/world/europe/china-russia-spies-documents-putin-war.html> Accessed on 04.11.2025.

weakens its territorial control but also deepens an asymmetric dependency on China. This vulnerability gives Beijing a tactical advantage that could encourage it to reopen border disputes, sacrificing Russia's long-term stability for the urgent needs of the war.

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