

Russia to Start Drafting Chechen Men Into Army, Kadyrov Says

By [Anna Dolgov](#)

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A Chechen soldier stands near the government palace building during a short lull in fighting in Grozny, Chechnya, January 1995.

Five years after a brutal war between Russian forces and Chechen separatists officially ended, the first 500 Chechen men will be drafted to serve in the Russian army, its leader Ramzan Kadyrov has said.

"I was lucky enough to meet with [Russian] Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu," Kadyrov said late Thursday in a post on Instagram. "Of particular note, the minister — at our request — made the decision to this year draft 500 young [Chechen] men for regular military service."

"This is the first time in many years that this has been done. In the future, the number of draftees will increase," he added.

It remains unclear whether the men will serve together or whether they will be sent to various

other Russian army units. During the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, a number of Chechen fighters have joined separatists in the east of that country, though Kadyrov has denied the presence of any "Chechen battalions" there and estimated the number of the men at only about two dozen.

While Russia has a universal military draft for men aged 18–27, two bitter separatist wars in Chechnya that began in 1994 have resulted in the republic's inhabitants being made exempt from compulsory service.

After its separatists were largely suppressed, Chechnya in 2003 approved a constitution that granted the region a significant degree of autonomy while proclaiming it a part of Russia. But the "counter-terrorism operation" against separatists continued until 2009, when Moscow proclaimed it officially over.

In subsequent years, Chechnya's young men have been drafted for armed service, but only as interior troops stationed within the republic — part of a force that was widely seen as Kadyrov's personal army.

Kadyrov said in August that he had ordered Chechnya's military commander Akhmed Dzheirakhanov to secure the draft of Chechen men into the army.

"Chechnya has tens of thousands of young men who are ready to become soldiers," he said on Instagram at that time. "But for reasons not understood by anybody and not expressed by anybody, they are not being sent into the army."

"In March, 2003, the Chechen people voted for unity with Russia," he said. "And the law must be the same for everybody. If there are any reasons [for exempting Chechen men from military draft], they should be explained in writing."

The reasons, upon which the Russian Defense Ministry and other military agencies refused to comment according to news site Gazeta.ru, may include the bitter hostility that conscripts from other Russian regions may feel toward Chechen soldiers, or concerns about the soldiers' willingness to follow the orders of Russian commanders.

Russian attempts to resume the draft of Chechen men have also been met with protests from the republic's residents, who argued their sons could face too much danger if required to serve in the same army that fought them in Chechnya.

Chechnya, whose inhabitants rebelled against Moscow for hundreds of years since tsarist times, is renowned for its warrior culture, and a number of its men became officers in the Soviet army.

One notable example is late Air Force General Dzhokhar Dudayev, a nuclear bomber pilot, who in 1994 as then-president of the Chechen republic led the separatist rebellion against Russia.

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