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Russia's Arctic Soldiers May Be Rewarded With Free Homes in Crimea

By The Moscow Times

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Russian soldiers who serve in the rough and inhospitable Arctic could be compensated by the state with real estate in Crimea, or other desirable locations in southern Russia, a Defense Ministry official said Thursday.

Russia is pursuing a major military expansion in the Arctic that aims to reoccupy abandoned Soviet positions and assert Russia's territorial claims in the resource-rich North.

"Naturally, military personnel service in remote Arctic garrisons can count on quality accommodation in Russia's central and southern regions," the Interfax news agency quoted Sergei Pirogov, director of the Defense Ministry's housing department, as saying Thursday.

The Defense Ministry has been working to increase the standard of living for its soldiers by building them modern housing and increasing wages for contract soldiers in the hopes of attracting more quality applicants for volunteer service.

Pirogov said that in the last two years, over 2,000 servicemen from the Northern Fleet — upon which Russia's new Arctic command is being built — have been provided with housing in central and southern Russia.

Arctic military personnel may qualify for brand new apartments in the Crimean city of Sevastopol and in Sochi, Pirogov was quoted as saying. Other less exotic locations include Moscow, St. Petersburg, Voronezh, Smolensk, Tver and other areas with developed infrastructure, he said.

Though much of Russia's Arctic expansion is focused on naval and air power, there is also a significant ground component. In addition to an existing Arctic brigade in Murmansk, two more are being formed by 2016 that will be deployed to Murmansk and the Yamalo-Nenets autonomous district.

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