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Russia's National Guard Promises 'Tough Response' to Election Disturbances

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Kirill Zykov / Moskva News Agency

Presidential election disturbances will receive a tough response from Russia's National Guard, its senior security officer has warned two months ahead of the vote.

President Vladimir Putin is widely expected to win re-election when voters go to the polls on March 18, according to recent polling data. Opposition leader Alexei Navalny, who was barred last month from running as a presidential candidate, has called on supporters to participate in a mass boycott of the elections.

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"We always expect and prepare for contingencies. If this happens, we will be ready and will

act strictly but within the constraints of current legislation," Major General Alexei Zinin was cited as saying by the state-run RIA Novosti news agency on Thursday.

Together with police and private security firms, the National Guard will provide security at more than 93,000 precincts, the state-run TASS news agency cited Zinin as saying.

Russia's National Guard is a powerful defense force that was founded by Vladimir Putin in 2016 to take over the functions of Russia's riot police and better combat terrorism and protect public order. Critics, however, say that the force was designed to target anti-government protesters.

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