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Russian Soldier Denies 'Willingness to Shoot Protesters' Poll After Pressure

July 25, 2019



Andrei Nikerichev / Moskva News Agency

A former Russian serviceman who had claimed that his unit expressed a willingness to shoot protesters was forced to retract his explosive allegations by a senior officer, the Znak.com news website has reported.

Unit members in Siberia allegedly gave affirmative answers when asked by superiors whether they would be willing to fire at demonstrators if ordered, the soldier had claimed this year. The Russian Defense Ministry dismissed the claims as a "primitive hoax," and a ministry-run website published video of the soldier denying his own words a few days later.

The soldier, Artur Yepifantsev, shared audio of his alleged 45-minute talk with a senior officer of a recently formed army directorate, Znak reported Tuesday.

"Did you think your speech wouldn't blacken the cherished memory of your great-grandfather, who'd fought in the Great Patriotic War [World War II]?" the outlet cited the officer as asking.

Major general Viktor Miskovets, the deputy head of the army directorate claimed to be speaking with Yepifantsev, allegedly promised the soldier he would receive the army's "protection" if he issued a video denial to his earlier claims.

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Yepifantsev was reportedly discharged last month. In the audiotape by Znak, he claimed to be in the process of obtaining Armenian citizenship and expressed a desire to serve in the North Caucasus nation's army.

The Russian Defense Ministry said it had no information about the audio recording or conversation, according to a statement carried by Znak.

The new patriotic army directorate in Russia's military was reportedly created to ensure soldiers' loyalty and morale.

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