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Russian Soldiers Forced to Serve Motherland Through 'Bribery, Blackmail and Extortion' – Novaya Gazeta

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Sergey Kiselev / Moskva News Agency

Russia's military top brass are forcing junior officers to serve in the armed services against their will, often long after they apply for dismissal, the investigative Novaya Gazeta newspaper reported Monday.

Russian law makes it "nearly impossible" to resign from the army without a compelling reason, lawyers say.

"This issue affects everyone [in the military], but it's true that it's most difficult for lieutenants" to successfully quit the military, Novaya Gazeta quoted an unnamed lawyer who represents servicemen of various ages as saying.

Testimonials from the customers of a legal firm that offers servicemen help in terminating their contracts shed light on the range of tactics that officers use to threaten their juniors. At

least four lieutenants said their higher-ups threatened them with jail time. Two warrant officers said they were warned with potential violence by "bandits." A captain was unable to obtain a discharge for 22 years, according to the firm's testimonials.

"Bribery, blackmail and extortion: any means will do to keep you serving," Viktor Dey, a lieutenant featured in Novaya Gazeta's report and one of the legal firm's clients, quoted a senior official who urged him to stay as saying.

Dey sought to force his superiors' hands by violating the terms of his contract, but the higher-ups closed their eyes to his violations, according to the report. Dey eventually resolved to change his line of work while still being listed as an active-duty servicemember, doing the bare minimum to avoid disciplinary action, Novaya Gazeta reported.

The Defense Ministry denied rumors of an internal "ban" on discharging contract soldiers or that soldiers are "persecuted" and "insulted" for seeking a discharge.

The ministry added that it's "interested in keeping the most motivated and competent specialists in the military service."

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