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Ukrainian Breakaway Region to Conscript Over-55s 'Voluntarily'

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Reservists at a mobilization station for citizens of the Luhansk People's Republic. **Alexander Reka / TASS**

One of Ukraine's two breakaway regions is recruiting men over 55 as part of a military mobilization amid renewed shelling that the pro-Russian separatists and Kyiv blame on each other.

An order published on the self-proclaimed Luhansk People's Republic leader Leonid Pasechnik's website Monday amends an earlier decree announcing the mobilization of able-bodied men aged 18 to 55.

"Carry out a conscription of male citizens over the age of 55 on a voluntary basis," the amendment states.

It came as Europe's monitoring mission in eastern Ukraine reported a massive spike ceasefire violations over the weekend.

Luhansk cabinet chief Sergei Kozlov linked the “voluntary mobilization” with “a large number of people willing to join the service” among men over 55.

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Luhansk and the self-proclaimed Donetsk People’s Republic announced evacuations of children, women and the elderly into neighboring Russia on Friday. They said they planned to evacuate 700,000 civilians.

Russia’s emergencies minister said Monday that 60,000 refugees have arrived so far.

The rebel leaders in eastern Ukraine accused Kyiv of planning and carrying out attacks, while Ukraine’s government has denied any plans to regain control of separatist-held areas using force.

Ukraine and its allies also accuse the separatist republics of purposely escalating the conflict with the evacuation and increase in shelling.

The United States, which has warned that Russia could stage a false-flag operation to justify an incursion into Ukraine, called the evacuation a "cynical" move by Moscow.

Western leaders have for weeks raised alarm over the build-up of Russian troops around Ukraine.

The U.S. has issued increasingly detailed warnings, based on its intelligence that Ukraine has pushed back against, that an imminent attack could take place with more than 100,000 Russian troops surrounding the country.

The Kremlin denies plans to invade Ukraine but seeks extractions from the U.S. and NATO, including a permanent ban on Ukraine’s future NATO membership.

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