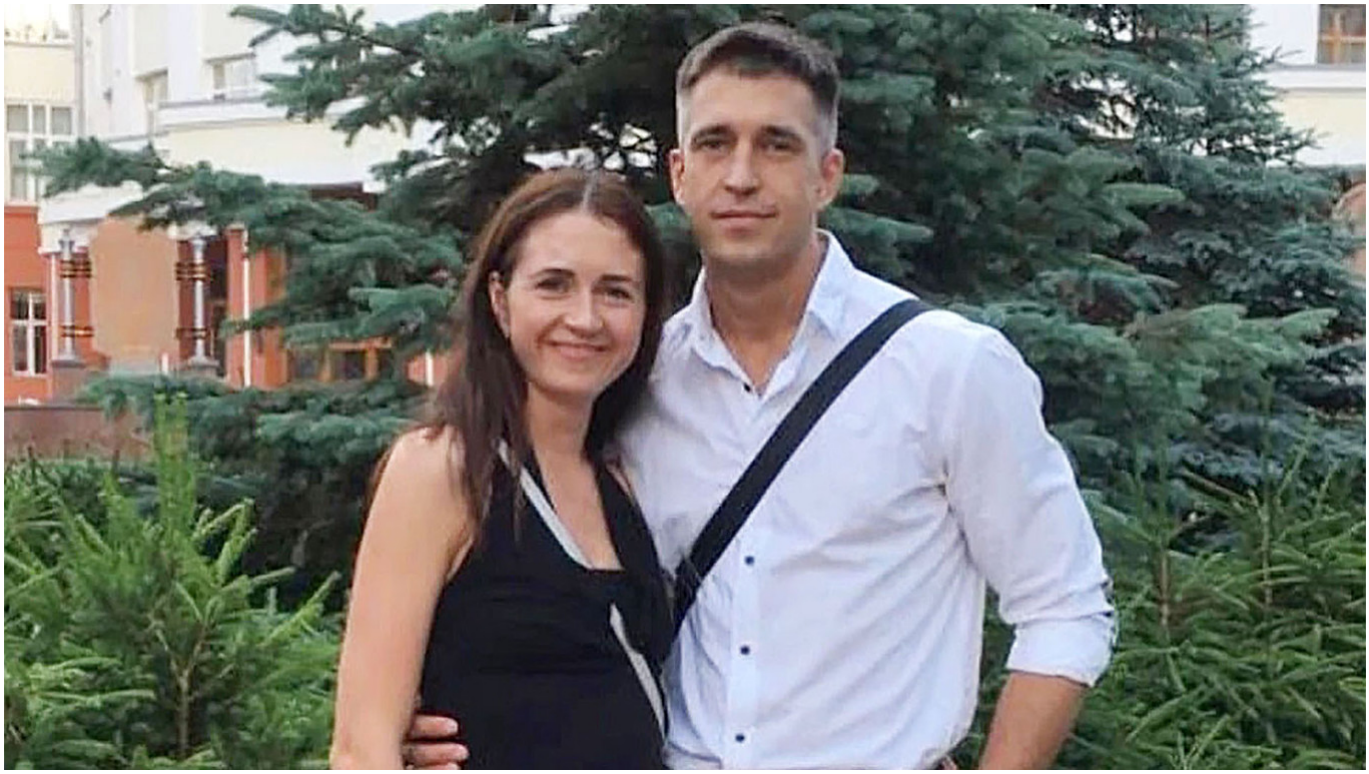
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Former Presidential Guard Jailed for 6 Years for Deserting Russian Army

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Mikhail Zhilin and his wife Yekaterina. **Photo from personal archive**

A court in Siberia has sentenced a Russian citizen to six-and-a-half years in jail on charges of desertion for fleeing to neighboring Kazakhstan to avoid Russia's mobilization drive last fall, media reported Friday.

Former presidential guard officer Mikhail Zhilin, 36, sought asylum in Kazakhstan after entering the former Soviet republic illegally from Russia last fall. As a federal employee with access to state secrets, Zhilin was not legally permitted to leave Russia.

Zhilin had requested permission to resign from the Federal Guard Service (FSO), where he worked as a shift supervisor in a department in Siberia overseeing Putin's contacts with the Russian regions, after the outbreak of war in February 2022, but the FSO rejected his request.

The Kazakh authorities refused Zhilin's asylum claim, however, and deported him to Russia in December, making him the first known draft dodger returned by Astana to Russia.

Related article: Ex-Presidential Guard Who Fled Russian Draft Faces Extradition, Jail

A military garrison court in the Siberian city of Barnaul found Zhilin guilty of desertion and illegal border crossing and sentenced him to six-and-a-half years in a maximum-security prison colony and stripped of his officer's rank, regional news website Tayga.info reported.

Zhilin's wife reportedly fled Kazakhstan to France in January, where she was expected to seek asylum.

Kazakhstan has pledged not to extradite Russian draft dodgers unless they are under criminal investigation.

The Kazakh authorities say that over 400,000 Russian nationals have arrived in the country since Russian President Vladimir Putin announced a "partial" mobilization of military reserves in September 2022.

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