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Russian Supreme Court Exempts Soldiers Fighting in Ukraine from Criminal Prosecution

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A Russian soldier. **Russian Defense Ministry**

Russian soldiers may now be able to avoid criminal prosecution if they serve on the frontline in Ukraine, the Kommersant business daily reported Wednesday, citing a recent ruling by Russia's Supreme Court.

The new legal precedent was set in a deadly automobile accident case where Corporal Vladislav Ustinov was handed a two-year prison sentence in May 2022 for running over and killing two people.

But instead of being dismissed from the military following his conviction, Ustinov was sent to to fight in Ukraine, where Kommersant says he is still serving.

Russia's Supreme Court ruled on June 28 that Ustinov no longer poses a threat to society because he is "performing combat tasks in the zone of the special military operation" in

Ukraine.

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The court also noted that the second-degree felony was Ustinov's first offense and he admitted his guilt, while he also "voluntarily" compensated damages, Kommersant said.

Russian courts will now be able to cite a defendant's involvement in military operations as mitigating circumstances and grounds for reviewing sentences, according to Ustinov's lawyer Sergei Bizyukin.

Days before the Supreme Court ruling, Russian lawmakers approved legislation allowing convicts to clear their criminal records in exchange for joining the country's depleted military.

Legal experts told Kommersant that Russian courts could now use both the new law and the Supreme Court precedent in Ustinov's case to free criminally convicted soldiers who serve in Ukraine.

President Vladimir Putin, who last month admitted to granting pardons for prisoners fighting in Ukraine, signed a law in November allowing the conscription of Russian citizens with unexpunged or outstanding convictions for serious crimes.

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