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Kremlin Planning New Mobilization for Kharkiv Offensive – Vyorstka

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Mobilized Russian servicemen in eastern Ukraine's Donetsk region. **Ivan Noyabrev / TASS**

Updated with comments from source close to Russia's Defense Ministry.

Russia is planning to recruit 300,000 soldiers for a renewed offensive to seize the Ukrainian city of Kharkiv, the investigative news outlet Vyorstka reported Friday, citing sources in the Kremlin, Defense Ministry and regional governments.

"We're 300,000 snouts short, that's why everything's ready for 'mobilization 2.0'," one Kremlin source was quoted as saying by the outlet.

"Kharkiv is next on the plan, with [the intention to] preserve the city. That's only possible in case of encirclement," the source said, claiming that Moscow seeks to avoid turning Kharkiv into a "second Mariupol" and showcase that Russia "knows how to fight in a civilized manner."

An anonymous Defense Ministry source confirmed the 300,000 recruitment target to

Vyorstka and suggested March 25 as a key date in the plans without elaborating further.

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President Vladimir Putin announced a "partial" mobilization of 300,000 reservists in September 2022, several months after ordering the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, which prompted thousands of Russians to flee the country and sparked some protests.

He declared an end to the highly unpopular recruitment drive a month later but has not formalized its conclusion in writing, meaning that Russia is still legally in a state of mobilization.

This year, as Vyorstka reports, Russian authorities will seek to reach their target through a range of recruitment strategies without officially declaring a new mobilization drive.

"It was indiscriminate and harsh the last time, so now the authorities will probably try a soft and creeping mobilization through conscripts, military students, specialists enlisted for exercises and so on," political scientist Ilya Grashchenkov told the outlet.

Russia's widely rumored military recruitment plans follow the March 15-17 presidential election in which Putin was said to have secured over 87% of the votes, despite an uneven political playing field and widespread reports of fraud.

But even such a high margin of support does not give the Kremlin "carte blanche" to launch a new mobilization campaign, Grashchenkov told Vyorstka, suggesting that such a move would spark a negative reaction across Russian society.

A source close to Russia's Defense Ministry, who spoke on condition of anonymity because they are not authorized to talk to the press, later told The Moscow Times that the Kremlin remains hesitant about mobilizing a large number of men.

"In general, it [a second mobilization] is needed. However, the domestic reaction from society [toward the 'partial' mobilization in 2022] has not been pleasant for the Kremlin," the source said.

"Therefore, this demand from the military is being pushed aside," they added.

In his victory speech Sunday, Putin said he was considering the creation of a "buffer zone" in the Kharkiv region to stop mounting attacks and incursions into western Russia's border regions.

Kyiv slammed the Russian leader's comments as a sign that he was seeking to escalate the war.

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