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Russian Border Region Forms Volunteer Militias as Finland Plans Military Drills

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Authorities in Russia's republic of Karelia say they are forming volunteer militias to help defend the country's border with Finland following Helsinki's announcement of large-scale military exercises near Russian territory.

Local volunteers will assist border guards and help monitor the area, Karelia's Governor Artur Parfyonchikov said Thursday.

"We're working on the return of conscripts from service, closely coordinating with the Border Service and organizing community support. We're forming volunteer squads — those who can assist border guards, who know the terrain and can navigate the area," the state-run TASS news agency quoted Parfyonchikov as saying.

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Finland's military announced this week that it will hold major exercises from November to December involving around 15,000 troops in several regions, including areas along the Nordic country's 1,340-kilometer (830-mile) border with Russia.

The Finnish Army said the drills aim to train conscripts, reservists and active-duty personnel for wartime duties, with forces from allied nations also taking part.

Finland closed its eastern border in December 2023 amid an uptick in asylum seekers from the Middle East and Africa.

Finnish authorities accuse the Kremlin of encouraging the asylum seekers to cross their shared frontier in a destabilization ploy — a "hybrid attack" Helsinki sees as Moscow's retribution for having joined NATO that year.

The move to form "people's patrols" in Karelia comes amid growing militarization along Russia's western frontier.

President Vladimir Putin on Tuesday backed the creation of volunteer units to guard strategic facilities inside the country.

Shortly afterward, lawmakers in the lower-house State Duma passed legislation allowing reservists to be deployed to protect critical infrastructure such as energy hubs and oil refineries, even in peacetime.

Recruitment for such units has already begun in several regions, including Yaroslavl, Nizhny Novgorod and Tambov, according to local authorities.

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