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Russian Regions Launch Drive to Recruit Reservists for Critical Infrastructure Defense

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Petr Kovalyov / TASS

At least 20 Russian regions have begun recruiting military reservists to guard strategic infrastructure under a new law that allows the military to deploy them during peacetime, the Kommersant business newspaper reported on Monday.

President Vladimir Putin last Tuesday authorized the use of reservists known as BARS to be called up for "special training" to protect "critical and other life-support facilities," including against drone attacks.

Experts told The Moscow Times that the Kremlin was likely seeking to quietly grow its military manpower without ordering a new wave of mobilization due to the unpopularity of its "partial" mobilization in September 2022. Russia's General Staff has said that reservists will not be sent to fight in Ukraine.

The regions forming reservist units to combat drone attacks are widely distributed across western and central Russia, with the Krasnoyarsk region the only eastern territory highlighted in a map published by Kommersant.

Authorities in the republics of Tatarstan and Bashkortostan are reportedly forming specialized units tasked with countering drone attacks against local oil refineries and petrochemical sites.

Reservist units known as BARS had already been created in 2024 in the Belgorod, Bryansk and Kursk regions near the border with Ukraine. Under the new law, Bryansk and Kursk will reportedly form additional detachments to help thwart sabotage attempts and assist in emergency evacuations, while Belgorod appears set to maintain its current personnel numbers.

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Although the law does not explicitly state that reservists would serve within their home regions, Kommersant reports that the territorial restrictions would be spelled out in their contracts.

A draft government decree published last Friday allows for members of the reserve to be called up for training sessions lasting up to six months per year, the newspaper said.

During their service, reservists will receive full military status, pay and benefits comparable to active-duty troops.

The recruitment drive marks the first large-scale peacetime use of reservists since Russia launched its so-called “special military operation” against Ukraine in 2022.

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