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Russian Army Denies University Students Face Pressure to Join Drone Forces

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Donat Sorokin / TASS

Russia's Defense Ministry on Monday dismissed reports that university students are being pressured to join its drone forces.

Deputy Defense Minister Viktor Goremykin, speaking at a large gathering of officials, insisted that enlistment remains voluntary and that commanders are explicitly prohibited from transferring drone recruits to other military branches without their written consent.

"We have no intention of forcing students to take part in the special military operation," Goremykin said, using the official term for Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. "An individual who has enlisted to join drone units remains strictly within that division of forces."

Russia has increasingly turned to universities as a fresh source of recruits for the war against Ukraine as enlistment numbers dwindle and war casualties soar into the hundreds of

thousands.

While Russia's mass army recruitment campaign with promises of high pay started shortly after the full-scale invasion in 2022, efforts targeting students in particular have intensified this year, Idite Lesom ("Get Lost"), an NGO that helps Russians avoid conscription, told The Moscow Times in March.

Related article: 'Are You All Cowards?': Russian Universities Pressure Students to Fight in Ukraine

Goremykin said Monday that commanders will be held personally responsible for ensuring personnel serve their full service term within the drone units before being discharged. He said additional instructions enforcing the ban on nonconsensual transfers would be distributed to military leadership by the end of the month.

In a statement, Russia's Defense Ministry dismissed what it described as "claims circulating in opposition Telegram channels" that some universities have threatened students with expulsion if they refuse to sign military contracts.

Deputy Science and Higher Education Minister Dmitry Afanasyev said officials investigated six complaints about expulsions related to military service, but claimed "not a single one was confirmed" to be true.

Goremykin also cited a Defense Ministry survey claiming that 93% of students currently serving in drone units expressed confidence that their contract terms were being honored.

Russia's Higher Education and Science Ministry said it would set up a hotline that students can call if they come under pressure from university staff to sign a military contract.

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