



Russia Forms Two New Divisions in the Southern Military District

OE Watch Commentary: According to the accompanying excerpted article from *Izvestiya*, the 19th Motorized Rifle Brigade and the 136th Motorized Rifle Brigade, in the 58th Combined Arms Army (Chief of the General Staff, General Valeri Gerasimov's former command), will be converted back into divisions. These units were converted from divisions to brigades during the 2008 'New Look' reforms. The general consensus of Russian opinion on the reason for this conversion is that antiterrorist operations are now less of a concern (for which the brigade is better suited), while the possibilities of peer-to-peer conflict are on the rise (for which the division is better suited).

The location of where these new Russian divisions are, or are not, is of particular interest. All of these new divisions are in the Southern Military District and the southern half of the Western Military District. These dispositions should be expected, as the Southern Military District is adjacent to, or contains, hotspots and/or territorially disputed areas such as Abkhazia and South Ossetia (two breakaway regions of Georgian territory occupied by Russia since the end of the August 2008 Russo-Georgian War), conflict areas in Eastern Ukraine, and the Crimea. Although a few divisions have been formed in the Western Military District, near the Ukrainian and Belarussian border, curiously no divisions have been formed near the Baltics, despite Russian claims these divisions are intended to combat NATO. The Russians have been adamant that they have no desire for territorial expansion in the Baltics and the decision not to place divisions near this area may be a way of messaging this intent.

The exact structure of these divisions has yet to be announced, but it is likely these units will not be fully manned. The typical structure of a motorized rifle division consists of three motorized rifle regiments, one tank regiment, one artillery regiment, one air defense regiment, and a few separate battalions, companies, and platoons. (Tank divisions have a similar structure, but one motorized rifle regiment, and three tank regiments.) In current practice, most divisions are missing one or more motorized rifle or tank regiments. There is a high likelihood that these "missing" regiments are intended to be fleshed out with reservists in the event of large-scale mobilization, similar to the cadre system the Russians maintained before the 2008 New Look reforms. This may appear to be rolling back the 2008 reforms, but this is not the case. Prior to 2008, most divisions had a very low level of combat readiness and had difficulty even fielding a single battalion tactical group for operations in Chechnya and the 2008 Russo-Georgian War. Today, all brigades and divisions are considered "permanently ready," usually having manning levels of over 80 percent, with each maneuver brigade and regiment (supposedly) capable of forming at least one battalion tactical group.

End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)

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Source: Nikolay Surkov, Aleksey Ramm, Yevgeniy Andreyev, “Северный Кавказ укрепили дивизиями (The North Caucasus Has Been Strengthened with Divisions),” *Izvestiya*, 16 February 2018. <https://iz.ru/705714/nikolai-surkov-aleksei-ramm-evgenii-andreev/severnyi-kavkaz-ukrepili-diviziiami>

The Defense Ministry has begun an unprecedented reorganization of 58th Army, the main striking force in southern Russia. It will be strengthened considerably through the activation of two new motorized rifle divisions equipped with BMP-3s and the newest T-72B3 tanks. Existing military posts will be taken out of mothballs and new ones created in Mozdok and Vladikavkaz. A portion of 58th Army will be redeployed to Stavropol and Krasnodar regions. Experts note that in this way Russia is forming general-purpose forces that will deter the threat from NATO.

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Viktor Murakhovskiy, editor-in-chief of the journal Arsenal Otechestva, told Izvestiya that the reinforcement of 58th Army is a portion of the measures for creating the nucleus of combined-arms armies based on division structures in the Southern and Western districts. According to him, it is necessary to activate general-purpose forces that will deter the threat from NATO on a guaranteed basis.

“The experience of combat operations and exercises has shown that the division is a more self-sufficient formation [соединение] than the brigade. The latter usually requires reinforcement by combat and logistic support assets and weapon assets,” the expert noted. “The division is more adapted to the physical geographic features of the European part of Russia, where there are large expanses and a considerable length of lines of contact and of fronts.”...