



COVID-19 and the Russian Spring Draft

OE Watch Commentary: Given the uncertain situation with the coronavirus pandemic, there had been considerable speculation whether Russia's Ministry of Defense (MoD) would still go forward with the Spring 2020 conscription campaign. However, as the first excerpt from the pro-government *Izvestia* points out, "on 30 March, Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a decree on conscription from 1 April to 15 July," whereby 135,000 new recruits will be conscripted into military service for one year.

The article quotes an expert who justifies the decision by asserting that "in the event of a real military threat, the army should be able to mobilize even in difficult epidemiological conditions." He also goes on to point out that delaying the draft would force "the entire military training system... to be redrawn," presumably by either extending current draftees or allowing units to become undermanned. To protect against the spread of this virus, this expert supports the decision for a "two-week quarantine for conscripts before being sent to the troops," thus postponing the actual movement of new recruits to their units until 20 May, as well as the introduction of "special security measures... during the transportation of draftees to duty stations."

The coronavirus also caused additional downstream effects for those draft-age Russian males who will graduate from high school this spring. The virus has forced the delay of the Unified State Exam, which serves as the key document for graduating high school students to obtain admission to university education (and a deferment from conscript duty). The second excerpt from the liberal radio station, *Echo Moscow*, reports that "the Chief of the General Staff Valery Gerasimov," has directed "15 thousand students will be given the opportunity to pass the exam for admission to universities." Provided the student does well on the exam, he will begin university studies in the fall instead of entering the draft pool. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**



Military document proving conscript service of the Russian army Source: CPI-RUS.

Source: CPI-RUS via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Military_ticket_Russian_army.jpeg, Public Domain

“The draft cannot be canceled, because in the event of a real military threat, the army should be able to mobilize even in difficult epidemiological conditions.”

Source: “Эксперт оценил решение оставить весенний призыв – 2020 (An expert considers the decision to hold the spring draft – 2020),” *Izvestia*, 1 April 2020. <https://iz.ru/994384/2020-04-01/ekspert-otcenil-reshenie-ostavit-vesennii-prizyv-2020>

Director of the Bureau of Military-Political Analysis, Alexander Mikhailov, called the decision proper not to cancel the spring conscription. Earlier, on 30 March, Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a decree on conscription from 1 April to 15 July.

According to Mikhailov, the draft cannot be canceled, because in the event of a real military threat, the army should be able to mobilize even in difficult epidemiological conditions.

“Secondly, 135 thousand new recruits should not drop out of the training system for young recruits, otherwise the entire military training system will have to be redrawn,” he said.

The main difference between the spring 2020 draft is increased measures for the prevention of viral diseases and two-week quarantine for conscripts before being sent to the troops, Mikhailov noted. Special security measures will be applied during the transportation of draftees to duty stations.

For this reason, the youngest replenishment will enter the troops only by 20 May, which in the current conditions is absolutely justified, the expert said....

Source: “Выпускников школ, которым уже есть 18 лет, не будут призывать в армию этой весной (Graduates of schools that are already 18 years old will not be drafted into the army this spring),” *Echo Moscow*, 9 April 2020. <https://echo.msk.ru/news/2622019-echo.html>

Graduates of schools that are already 18 years old will not be drafted into the army this spring. This was reported by the Chief of the General Staff Valery Gerasimov. According to him, 15 thousand students will be given the opportunity to pass the exam for admission to universities, *Interfax* reports. At the same time, because of the coronavirus, the main wave of unified state examinations was moved from the end of May to June.