



The Russian Army's Domestic Support for Civil Authorities

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying excerpted articles discuss the Russian Army's support for Russian civil authorities due to the COVID-19 crisis. The article from *Kommersant* discusses how the Russian military will create four task forces for the purpose. Apparently, these units will be built around existing Radiation, Chemical, and Biological (RKhB) Defense units, with substantial engineering and logistic support. Of particular interest, the article mentions the size of Russian RKhB defense brigades, approximately 1000 personnel. The article from *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* discusses Russian plans to mobilize reservists, if necessary, to man mobile field hospitals. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**



ARS-14KM decontamination and degassing station.

Source: Vitaly Kuzmin, <https://www.vitalykuzmin.net/Military/282nd-NBC-Protection-Troops-training-center/hr2nqDd, CCA NC-ND 4.0>

“...The mobile reserve of the General Staff in this case means organizations involved in medical support for the troops. These are depots for special medical equipment, decontamination vehicles, and so on. These are so-called temporarily mothballed military hospitals, medical laboratories, and other subunits designed to conduct anti-epidemiological measures...”

Source: Oleg Mukhin, “Коронавирус остановят броней (Stopping Coronavirus with Armor),” *Kommersant Online*, 26 March 2020. <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/4302151>

Stopping Coronavirus with Armor

Two of the four Russian Defense Ministry task forces for countering the spread of “viral infections” will be stationed in Black Earth regions. Their creation was announced on Wednesday (25 March) evening. Their nucleus could be the 27th Separate Radiation, Chemical, and Biological (RKhB) Defense Brigade from Kursk, and they will also include medical and engineering subunits, supply and logistics resources, and military police.

For the time being, subunits are concentrating at training grounds as part of a readiness inspection, but the command room at the military district HQ headquarters will be analyzing “a simulated epidemiological situation” around the clock...The creation of the first task forces “for the purpose of containing emergency situations” was announced on Wednesday evening (25 March) by the Western Military District press service. So far, it is the only district to announce the formation of such bodies; the decision to do so was made by the district’s commanding officer, Colonel General Aleksandr Zhuravlev.

At the district, they stress that the task forces are being created solely “as part of an inspection of readiness for containing emergency situations arising from the threat of mass contamination and spread by viral infections.”...The events should take place “solely at training grounds” of the armed forces, without civilian services being involved. Also to be inspected will be the military’s transport resources for moving required forces and assets by air and rail to assist the sick and carry out quarantine and treatment measures.

Judging from the stated purpose and list of equipment being brought out by the military, the nucleus of the two Black Earth task forces could be the 27th Separate RKhB Defense Brigade in Kursk — one of the largest entities of its kind (about 1,000 personnel). Its purpose is to work in the focal points of radioactive, chemical, and biological contamination; analyze the level of contamination; treat localities or sites; and lay smokescreens.

The brigade is regularly on exercise and has new equipment — mobile chemical protection complexes, degassing stations, ARS-14KM spray stations, TMS-65U special heat treatment machines (including for disinfecting equipment and places), KLP-10 field laboratories (for situation analysis), and special treatment stations. And it is this equipment, according to the Defense Ministry, that will gather at the training grounds in the first instance.

The remaining part of the Black Earth task forces, to judge from the district’s news roundups, could be drawn mostly from subunits of the 20th Guards Combined-Arms Army (headquartered in Voronezh). According to a report by the district, apart from RKhB defense troops the task forces will consist of medical and engineering subunits, supply and logistics resources, and military police. The 20th Army in Voronezhskaya Oblast — in Voronezh and Boguchar — has subunits of this type...



Continued: The Russian Army's Domestic Support for Civil Authorities

Source: Vladimir Mukhin, “На борьбу с COVID-19 армия бросит мобильные резервы Генштаба (General Staff Mobilizes Reserve to Combat COVID-19),” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta Online*, 26 March 2020. http://www.ng.ru/politics/2020-03-26/1_7828_army.html

General Staff Mobilizes Reserve to Combat COVID-19

...The Defense Ministry is preparing not only to safeguard its personnel, but also if necessary to give help to the civilian population, as Russian military specialists are doing in Italy. The Russian Federation Defense Minister said the Defense Ministry plans by mid-May to complete the construction of 16 modular infection centers in various regions of the country...

The construction of all the modular infection centers, which is being carried out around the clock by railroad troops and engineering troops (4,000 people and 750 items of equipment are involved), is due to be completed by 15 May. This is the period when experts predict the spread of COVID-19 will peak...

Judging by comments in social networks and the media, many people did not really understand the phrase “mobile reserve of the General Staff.” As a former senior officer in the Defense Ministry recounted, on condition that he remained anonymous, “the mobile reserve of the General Staff in this case means organizations involved in medical support for the troops. These are depots for special medical equipment, decontamination vehicles, and so on. These are so-called temporarily mothballed military hospitals, medical laboratories, and other subunits designed to conduct anti-epidemiological measures and to provide protection against weapons of mass destruction.”

They can play a dual role — protecting the troops and protecting the population. The main question here is finding military specialists capable of putting the reserve into operation. “If two or three mobile field hospitals are deployed, there will be enough officer specialists. But if the mobile reserve of the General Staff has to be deployed in order to protect cities with a population of more than 1 million against this particularly dangerous infection, it will be necessary to call up specialists from the reserve, in other words, reservists,” the expert noted.

As *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* was told by Lieutenant General Yuriy Netkachev, he remembers how, in order to resolve medical, anti-epidemic, and other tasks in the interests of the country, reservists were called up in large numbers in Soviet times, when the Chernobyl tragedy occurred in April 1986. “At that time, the military commissariats called up several thousand specialist servicemen liable for callup, as reservists are now customarily called, from which several civil defense regiments were formed. They were subordinate to the USSR Defense Ministry and carried out the main functions in the cleanup after the tragedy,” the expert stressed. In the event of an unfavorable scenario with the spread of COVID-19, something similar might happen in Russia, he reckons...



Decontamination of armored vehicles with ARS-14KM decontamination and degassing station.

Source: Vitaly Kuzmin, <https://www.vitalykuzmin.net/Military/282nd-NBC-Protection-Troops-training-center/i-ktVvTPZ>, CCA NC-ND 4.0



Field hospital.

Source: Vitaly Kuzmin, <https://www.vitalykuzmin.net/Military/ISSE-2009/i-fvtvDgf/A>, CCA NC-ND 4.0



TMS-65U decontamination vehicle.

Source: Vitaly Kuzmin, <https://www.vitalykuzmin.net/Military/282nd-NBC-Protection-Troops-training-center/i-9bRZxc8/A>, CCA NC-ND 4.0