

# Ukrainian government expands military conscription among women

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As part of its ongoing campaign to militarize its population and prepare for war against Russia, on December 17 the Ukrainian Ministry of Defense vastly expanded the conscription of women between the ages of 18 to 60.

There are already 31,000 women serving in the Ukrainian armed forces and women in select professions were previously subject to wartime conscription.

The updated law expands the list of professions subject to conscription for women between the ages of 18 to 60 to include doctors, librarians, journalists, and more who are now required to register for potential military service. Even pregnant women and mothers of small children will now be conscripted.

Speaking to the American military website *Coffee and Die* magazine, Oleksandra Ustinova, a Ukrainian parliament member and representative of the center-right Holos Party, called the measure “logical, timely, and sensible.”

“This sends a powerful signal to Moscow that Ukrainians are ready to resist. Although we strive for introduction of the contract army, in the current situation, the decision to educate as many people as possible to hold arms and to be ready to serve seems a good one,” Ustinova said.

While the country’s major political parties have fully supported the effort, the Ukrainian population has been less receptive to the revised measure.

Demonstrating the widespread rejection of the government’s attempts to militarize the civilian population for a war against a nuclear-armed Russia, an official petition addressed to President Volodymyr Zelensky to cancel the measure has already reached over 36,000 signatures in a matter of days. The threshold for the president to review the petition is

25,000 signatures.

On the heels of the announced changes in conscription, the New York Times published a glowing and uncritical story, titled “Training Civilians, Ukraine Nurtures a Resistance in Waiting,” on the Ukrainian government’s attempts to convince the population they must prepare to fight and die against Russia.

The author, Andrew E. Kramer, fails to mention the role of the country’s far-right paramilitary groups such as the Azov Battalion and Right Sector in leading such volunteer efforts. In an attempt to whitewash their neo-Nazi background, the New York Times just referred to them as “volunteer brigades.”

Kramer speaks glowingly of their efforts and cites a dubious opinion poll as proof for “some support for the effort.” According to Kramer, the poll “showed 24 percent of Ukrainians saying they would resist ‘with a weapon in hand’ if Russia invaded. Among men, 39 percent said they would resist with weapons. Ukrainians have taken to posting selfies on social media holding rifles.”

In reality, since the ongoing civil war first began in 2014 in Eastern Ukraine, tens of thousands of Ukrainian men have purposely evaded conscription. While the Ukrainian army has been careful not to release military evasion statistics in subsequently years, at the height of the initial fighting in 2014, 85,792 of those summoned for conscription didn’t appear for mobilization.

In the western provinces of Ukraine, which are typically depicted as the most nationalistic and patriotic by the western media, 9,969 were proven to be illegally avoiding military service.

In 2015, ten months after the start of the civil war, Roman, a draft evader from the western city of L’viv told Foreign Policy, “I am against every war, but

especially this war, because it's meaningless. I think this conflict was created artificially. The Ukrainian mass media helped this along by spreading this patriotic hysteria."

Rather than being met with an influx of willing conscripts, the Ukrainian army instead began the war in 2014 with just 6,000 combat-ready soldiers. In its ongoing civil war against pro-Russian separatists, Kiev has primarily relied on far-right and neo-Nazi paramilitary groups such as the Azov Battalion.

These far-right groups have also been incorporated into the country's newly created National Guard and are instrumental in carrying out the propagandized militarization of Ukrainian society by leading military classes, fund drives, and right-wing children's summer camps.

Today, Ukraine reports having approximately 255,000 active military personnel with 900,000 reservists. If the mass evasion of 2014 repeats itself, it is doubtful Kiev could rely on its reservists to actually report for mobilization.

In comparison, Russia has over one million active duty personnel and has already positioned over 120,000 troops close to the Ukrainian and Belarusian borders in reaction to NATO military activities in Ukraine and the Black Sea.

This week, Moscow announced that more than 10,000 troops had finished military drills near the Ukrainian border and are returning to their permanent bases.

The Russian oligarchy is desperate for an agreement with Western imperialism, with President Vladimir Putin recently pleading with NATO to give "something, at least something."

Since the 2014 western-backed coup that removed the pro-Russian Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich from power with the deployment of right-wing thugs, the United States has given Ukraine \$2.5 billion in military assistance.

While Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has spent the last year publicly begging for NATO membership, such a step is considered a red line for Russia due to the disadvantageous military position they would quickly be placed in.

According to Putin, "If this infrastructure moves further—if US and NATO missile systems appear in Ukraine—then their approach time to Moscow will be

reduced to seven or ten minutes."

Talks between the NATO powers and Russia are now reportedly being planned for early January.

As noted by the WSWS, Western imperialism meanwhile is primarily concerned with following a policy recently expressed by the statement made by Democratic Senator Chris Murphy that "Ukraine can become the next Afghanistan for Russia if it chooses to move further."

There is little evidence that the vast majority of the Ukrainian working class is eager at all to go to war, but the danger of such a military conflict is very real. To stop the drive to war, the resistance of the working class to war must be politically mobilized. This requires the building of an international revolutionary socialist leadership that is determined to put an end to the root cause of war, the capitalist system.



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