

Ukraine's Ministry of Internal Affairs forms far-right "stormtrooper" brigades

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The Ukrainian Ministry of Internal Affairs has announced plans to form "offensive guard" assault brigades, or what it is calling "stormtroopers," that will be tasked with the "liberation of Luhansk, Donetsk and Crimea" in a planned offensive this coming spring.

The brigades, which were initiated by the former Minister of Internal Affairs Denys Monastyrskyi prior to his death in a helicopter crash in January, will be organized on an "ideological" basis, according to an adviser within the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Rostyslav Smirnov. The infamous neo-Nazi Azov Battalion, which has undergone several reorganizations within the Ukrainian military already, will be among the brigade's volunteers who can be chosen from.

According to Smirnov, the brigades will be organized as follows:

- "Steel Border" (brigade of the State Border Service of Ukraine);
- "Kara-Dag" ("punishment for Crimea" is meant to play a central role in an offensive aimed at "retaking" Crimea);
- "Red viburnum" (the brigade includes fighters who already participated in the battles in Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts, and the defense of Kiev);
- "Liut" (a brigade of the National Police of Ukraine);
- "Rubizh" (frontier will consist of soldiers who defended the Hostomel airport near Kiev at the beginning of the war);
- "Spartan" (an assault brigade which was involved in the defense of Kharkiv);
- "Bureviy" (described as a "disposal brigade of the Russian military" by Smirnov);
- "Azov" (the notorious neo-fascist battalion, which is described on the webpage of the Ukrainian Interior Ministry as a "legendary unit" that "heroically"

defended Azovstal' in Mariupol)

In addition to incorporating the remnants of Azov, an openly neo-Nazi paramilitary organization, into the newly created brigades, the right-wing Ukrainian government has designated the newly created brigades as "stormtroopers" or "storm brigades," terms that were first used by the German army in World War I. Later, the term was associated with the Nazi Party's own paramilitary formation, the Sturmabteilung (storm detachment), or SA.

The use of the term "stormtrooper" is by no means accidental, as both the Azov Regiment and the Ukrainian military leadership have made no secret about their fascination with Nazi Germany and their Ukrainian collaborators in the Holocaust. Valerii Zaluzhnyi, the Commander-in-Chief of the Ukrainian Armed Forces, is regularly photographed with OUN memorabilia and portraits of the Nazi collaborator Stepan Bandera. Andriy Biletsky, the founder and former head of Azov, stated in 2010 that he believed the "national purpose" was to "lead the white races of the world in a final crusade ... against Semite-led Untermenschen [subhumans]."

As Smirnov's post makes clear, the Ukrainian government is in dire need of such "ideological" volunteers, who are prepared to die in the NATO-backed effort by Ukraine to retake Russian-held territories. In exchange, these "volunteers," the majority of whom will inevitably be drawn from far-right and lumpen elements, will be given significant social privileges and the opportunity to serve in a "unit that corresponds to your values and ideology" rather than the regular army.

This past Saturday, the National Guard of Ukraine announced it has received more than 20,000 applications by people who want to become part of the

assault brigades.

Earlier in February, the Ukrainian press had reported that Azov, which as a paramilitary had always fallen under the jurisdiction of Ukraine's Ministry of Internal Affairs, was moving to become a formal part of the Army under the Defense Ministry. This was later corrected with Azov itself declaring that the organization remains part of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and becomes part of the new "storm brigades."

It is unclear exactly why the Ukrainian media reported that Azov was moving to the Defense Ministry. However, the announcement of the formation of these new "stormtroopers" under the Ministry of Internal Affairs is clearly bound up with the war's escalation by NATO which has been accompanied by corruption scandals and a political crisis of the Ukrainian government.

In January, Defense Minister Oleksii Reznikov was implicated in a procurement scandal, after reports emerged that the Defense Ministry signed a contract to purchase food for the military at inflated prices two to three times higher than store prices.

Reznikov attributed those prices to a "technical mistake" and remained in his position. His deputy, Viacheslav Shapovalov, however, did not escape the scandal and supposedly tendered his resignation. Later in early February it was widely reported that Reznikov would finally be replaced with Kyrylo Budanov, who was named Ukraine's Head of Defense Intelligence by President Volodymyr Zelensky in 2020.

However, last week, France24 reported that Reznikov would remain in his position as there was not enough support within Zelensky's Servant of the People political party to replace him. Reznikov's close ties with Western governments undoubtedly played a role in him holding onto his position as Ukraine prepares its spring offensive with newly acquired missiles and tanks sent from the United States and NATO.

By forming its own "stormtroopers," the Ministry of Internal Affairs is positioning itself to influence the war's conduct separate from the sometimes rival Defense Ministry, as well as to get its hands on billions of military aid from NATO.

So far, it appears that the new "stormtroopers" will consist of inexperienced new recruits who will have to be trained quickly. That such recruits and adherents of fascist ideology rather than regularly trained army

soldiers will be tasked with playing a central role in the planned counter-offensive this spring is a tacit admission by Kiev that the war is not going as well as it is portrayed in the war propaganda on the pages of the Western press.

With over 100,000 military casualties reported for both Russia and Ukraine back in November and evermore drastic measures by the government to crack down on "deserters," it is obvious that much is being hidden from the public both in Ukraine and around the world regarding the real state of the war. As reporter Seymour Hersh recently stated in an interview following his exposure of the United States' destruction of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline, "The war I know about is not the war you're reading about."



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