

Amid ongoing recruitment crisis, Zelensky government prepares to mobilize Ukrainian convicts

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The Ukrainian government under Volodymyr Zelensky is preparing to draft convicts into the armed forces. A bill is expected to be registered in the Verkhovna Rada next week, and Ukrainian Justice Minister Denys Maliuska indicated that he expected the bill to be approved this spring.

The NATO-armed and -backed Ukrainian Armed Forces are currently struggling to maintain territory against advancing Russian forces in the Donbass region amid a severe manpower and ammunition shortage. Following Ukraine's loss of the strategic city of Avdeevka on February 17, Russian forces have pushed three miles farther west.

As the *Washington Post* admitted in an article titled "Zelensky in bind over how to draft more troops as Russian troops advance," the issue of mobilization "has fueled deep divisions in Ukraine's parliament and more broadly in Ukrainian society."

In August of last year, a military recruitment scandal made headlines when it was revealed that regional recruiting stations were accepting bribes of approximately \$10,000 to evade military service, an unreachable amount for many in what is officially Europe's poorest country. Such divisions, which are ultimately class-based, will be exacerbated by the continued deterioration of the situation at the front.

Confronting a severe shortage of men at the front throughout the past year, the Ukrainian military has resorted to kidnapping people off the streets, grabbing them at shopping malls and other public places and forcibly drafting them into the army. In his year-end address in December 2023, Zelensky announced a proposal to conscript another 500,000 Ukrainian soldiers at a cost of \$13.3 billion in 2024 to replenish

the massive losses at the front, which have been hidden from both the Ukrainian people and the international public.

A new draft mobilization bill was passed in February but was subsequently held up in parliament due to over 4,000 revisions and widespread opposition to aspects of the bill, including provisions that would block draft dodgers from buying real estate and revoke their passports to force their return to the country.

The measures to further expand the draft follow protests that erupted last fall against the often years-long deployment of men to the front. This marked the first outbreak of mass discontent over the war. Frequent protests have also been held in the capital city of Kiev, as well in smaller cities such as Ternopil, Odessa and Dnipro.

In a clear attempt to appease growing popular opposition to conscription, Zelensky signed a decree on Thursday authorizing the demobilization of a limited number of conscripts who were forced to remain in the armed forces following the outbreak of full-scale war in February 2022 and the imposition of martial law.

The decree is deceptive in that it applies only to conscripts between the ages of 18 and 27 who generally do not serve on the front lines, and it does not apply to the huge number of soldiers called up following the declaration of martial law and general mobilization in February 2022. The term of conscription in Ukraine ranges from 12 to 18 months, and the last conscription was held in October 2021. Ukrainian authorities declined to reveal how many conscripts would actually be demobilized as a result of the decree.

Speaking of the decree in his daily address, Zelensky stated that conscripts would begin to be sent home "in a

few weeks,” starting in April. He ludicrously claimed that the demobilized soldiers would be eager to sign up for another deployment in the NATO-provoked war that has already killed untold hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian soldiers.

As BBC Ukraine reported in November, 650,000 Ukrainian men aged 18 to 60 years old have left Ukraine for Europe since the start of the war. Zelensky’s former adviser Alexey Arestovich recently claimed that 4.5 million Ukrainian men, nearly half of the Ukrainian male population, had fled abroad to avoid military service, and that 30 to 70 percent of military units consist of “refuseniks,” who have gone absent without official leave (AWOL).

Following the initial announcement of Zelensky’s plan to draft another half million men, Ukrainians across Europe were seen waiting in line at consular offices to renew their passports before a new mobilization law could take effect. In Valencia, Spain, 550 people reportedly waited in line for hours to renew their passports and ensure their legal status for the upcoming year.

Despite the obvious recruitment crisis, Zelensky continues to absurdly claim that just 31,000 Ukrainian soldiers have been killed so far in over two years of bloody fighting, while simultaneously claiming that just 300,000 of the 1 million soldiers have seen combat on the front lines. Even the pro-war *Washington Post* noted the wildly illogical line being propagated by the Zelensky government, writing that “no one in the Ukrainian military leadership or presidential office is able to explain the whereabouts of the 700,000 missing soldiers,” or “what they have dedicated themselves to.”

As David North, chairman of the WSWS International Editorial Board, noted on X/Twitter in response to the *Washington Post* article on the crisis:

It would appear that the government cannot account for the whereabouts of 700,000 mobilized soldiers. What has happened to them? Zelensky claims that only 31,000 Ukrainian soldiers have been killed. But the fact that the Ukrainian regime cannot explain what has happened to 700,000 out of 1 million soldiers strongly indicates that the number of military deaths is a substantial multiple of the official

KIA figure claimed by Zelensky. NATO has bled Ukraine white.



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