

Ukrainian parliament expands conscription to dragoon young people to the front

Jason Melanovski, Clara Weiss
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On April 11, the Ukrainian parliament (Rada) passed a new law to expand conscription to the army. It is estimated that at least 400,000 Ukrainians have already been slaughtered in the imperialist proxy war against Russia in Ukraine. After a catastrophically failed “counteroffensive” last year, the Ukrainian army continues to lose territory to Russia in the Donbass region.

Millions of Ukrainians have fled the country, many of them to avoid conscription. Confronting a severe shortage of men at the front, 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.

All men aged 18 to 60 will be required to update their personal information within the next 60 days with the authorities responsible for conscription. This requirement will also go for Ukrainian men living abroad. The new law will make it easier for Ukrainian authorities to issue draft notices, including through an electronic system, and obliges local governments and the police to aid the military in the conscription drive.

The final version of the bill passed does not include a provision for the demobilization of men after three years of service. Since the fall, the wives and families of soldiers who in many cases have been fighting on the front for over two years have been protesting regularly in major Ukrainian cities to demand that their husbands, fathers and brothers be allowed to return home. The move has already provoked a popular backlash on social media, including by soldiers.

The new mobilization law comes just a week after Zelensky signed a bill lowering the age of conscription from 27 to 25. The move was widely unpopular

domestically but openly demanded by Kiev’s imperialist backers. When US Republican Senator Lindsay Graham visited Kiev last month, he ridiculed the Zelensky government for not sending enough of the country’s youth into battle. “I can’t believe it’s at 27,” he told reporters. “You’re in a fight for your life, so you should be serving—not at 25 or 27. We need more people in the line.”

On Wednesday, the Ukrainian parliament also endorsed a measure that would permit the mobilization of certain categories of convicts underlining the severe shortage the Ukrainian military is facing. Current inmates would be also be eligible for parole if they agree to join the military, and Ukraine is expected to expand the categories of criminals with more serious offenses that can be mobilized.

As Kiev is in the midst of a new wave of mobilization, it has simultaneously ramped up its provocative strikes on both civilian and energy infrastructures within Russia using drones, missiles and artillery. On Wednesday, the regional governor of the Kursk Oblast in Russia reported that a Ukrainian drone strike had killed a father and his two daughters while driving.

These drone strikes, which are taking place alongside terrorist attacks and incursions of Russian territory, would not be possible without Western technology and funding.

An April 2 report in the *Financial Times* claimed that US officials had urged Ukraine to hold off on drone strikes on Russian oil refineries over concerns that high oil prices could provoke social unrest in the population. However, on Wednesday, Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Celeste Wallander clarified the US’s position by stating that the White House clearly has approved the strikes and only subsequently voiced vague “concerns” to protect itself from backlash from its NATO allies, who had not been included in the decision to increase strikes on Russia proper.

As the *Atlantic Council*, a think tank with close ties to NATO, recently acknowledged:

“Ukraine’s partners have also backed Kyiv’s focus on drone warfare. In January 2024, the United Kingdom pledged to spend at least \$250 million to rapidly procure, produce, and deliver 1000 one-way attack drones to Ukraine. Although precise details regarding Ukraine’s drone stockpile remain undisclosed, the rhetoric of Ukrainian senior officials and the ongoing strikes suggest the current bombing campaign inside Russia is likely to continue gaining momentum.”

Earlier this week, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky hinted in a joint interview with the German news outlet *Bild* and the American-based *Politico* that Ukraine would carry out another counteroffensive in the future.

“Yes, we have a plan for a counteroffensive. But that also requires weapons. Also from the USA. We will definitely win. We have no alternative. But I can’t promise that and give a date,” Zelensky stated.

Last June, following months of propaganda regarding an upcoming counteroffensive that would retake lost territory, tens of Ukrainian soldiers were killed after being sent head on into heavily fortified and mined Russian defensive positions. Across the frontlines Ukrainian soldiers died before even breaching the initial line of Russian defenses. Despite the mass casualties, the counteroffensive resulted in minimal territorial gains and exhausted Ukraine’s and NATO’s ammunition stores.

While the full cost in terms of lives may never be acknowledged, according to the Russian military, between early June and late October of last year Ukraine lost roughly 90,000 troops, 600 tanks and 1,900 other armored vehicles.

Meanwhile the Zelensky government continues to absurdly claim it has lost just 31,000 troops in over two years of war but cannot account for 700,000 soldiers apparently missing from its forces.

As usual, Zelensky blamed all military failures on the lack of Western-delivered armaments. Taken in Kharkiv (Kharkov), where Ukraine is busy building new defenses amid an increase in Russian air attacks, the interview was obviously staged to pressure German Chancellor Olaf Scholz to provide Ukraine with Taurus cruise missiles, which he has so far ruled out.

Zelensky also used the interview as an opportunity to squash any plans of a potential peace for territory plan that is reportedly favored by Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump.

While expressing a willingness to work with Trump, Zelensky made clear the Ukrainian government is not willing to give up any territory lost during the course of the war.

“If the deal is that we just give up our territories, and that’s the idea behind it, then it’s a very primitive idea,” Zelensky said.

When Trump promised to end the NATO-backed war “within 24 hours” in March of last year, the Zelensky government responded by inviting Trump to Ukraine to see the war in person.

“We expressed our desire for Donald Trump to come to Ukraine so that he could see the situation with his own eyes and draw certain conclusions. I am definitely ready to meet with him,” Zelensky said obviously hedging his bets prior to the November elections.

Zelensky’s comments follow a recent visit of British Foreign Secretary and former Prime Minister David Cameron to Trump’s Florida resort, where he reportedly pleaded with Trump to support the imperialist war effort against Russia.

Within the ruling class and NATO, there is significant worry that Trump as president would abandon the war effort against Russia that was decades in the making, in favor of a focus on a war against China.

Last week in Brussels, NATO Secretary Jens Stoltenberg announced a proposal to set up a \$107 billion fund to support the Ukrainian war effort for the next five years. Stoltenberg made clear the fund’s purpose would be to protect NATO’s long-term war plans from any vacillations due to domestic political situations within the 32-member bloc.

“We need to shift the dynamics of our support,” Stoltenberg said. “We must ensure reliable and predictable security assistance to Ukraine for the long haul ... less on short-term offers and more on multi-year pledges.” In the US Congress over \$60 billion in aid is currently still being held up.

But whatever conflicts within the ruling class and tensions between the imperialist powers, the new mobilization law and the escalating strikes on Russian territory underscore that a dangerous escalation of the imperialist war against Russia is already underway.



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