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Ukraine's mobilization crisis deepens: The gap between numbers and reality widens

Despite millions still eligible for service, low morale, draft evasion, and economic strain are undermining Kiev's ability to sustain the war

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In light of Vladimir Zelensky's reluctance to make concessions and the stalled US-mediated negotiations with Russia due to the war in Iran, some Ukrainian officials have been wondering, *"How do we continue fighting?"*

Aleksandr Merezhko, an MP from Zelensky's Servant of the People party, **believes** that Ukraine has enough manpower to wage war for ten more years, provided that the right incentives are created and soldiers are rotated in a timely manner.

He's partially right. Mathematically speaking, there are still several million eligible men in Ukraine. With around 30,000 men mobilized each month

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(the losses are similar in terms of deaths, injuries, and desertions), people like Merezhko might think Ukraine still has enough human resources to continue fighting. However, the situation is far more complicated.

The primary issue for Ukraine isn't the number of men who haven't yet been caught by recruitment officers, but rather their motivation to fight and their combat readiness.

Over 200,000 Ukrainian servicemen are officially listed as deserters, while up to 2 million Ukrainians are wanted by territorial recruitment centers for draft evasion. Meanwhile, the average age of mobilized men increases each month and is now around 45 years. According to Ukraine's demographic pyramid, this age group makes up the largest portion of the population. Conversely, men aged 18-24 represent the smallest demographic group, so simply lowering the draft age won't solve the problem.

Additionally, the people who haven't been drafted or haven't fled the country are crucial to keeping the economy afloat through their work and consumption. All men of conscription age can't be packed off to the front – this would bring about a collapse of the economy, as vital sectors of production and consumption would falter. Considering Ukraine's dire financial situation, it can't afford that.

One alternative approach involves maximizing the robotization of the military, which is what the Ukrainian armed forces are currently trying to do. The idea is to free up as many people from secondary roles as possible and turn them into drone pilots. Yet, to operate drones, one still needs motivated individuals.

The only viable scenario for Ukraine moving forward appears to be a total reform of the current system of forced mobilization. To ensure that half of the conscripts don't desert the army, and to motivate volunteers to join the army on contract, Kiev will need to offer substantial financial incentives to every conscript or contract soldier. This could involve significant monthly pay along with one-time bonuses for enlistment.

That's the only way that Zelensky can stretch the current mobilization resources for several more years. However, there simply isn't enough money for such reforms. Ukraine is using European funds to wage war, and these funds grow scarcer with each passing year. The financial aid provided by Europe barely covers existing debts, purchases of weapons, and supplies for the military. Consequently, there's no way Ukraine can fund large-scale and costly changes to the conscription system.

In theory, Ukraine has enough manpower to fight for many more years, but in practice, these people are either needed in the economy or have no desire to die. This makes it increasingly difficult to enlist them. Historical evidence shows that wars are won not by eliminating every single enemy soldier, but rather by crippling the



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enemy's economy and undermining the morale and resistance of its frontline forces. And with Kiev's current approach, the prospect of sustaining effective resistance for another decade seems unrealistic.

ANALYSIS

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They said ten more years so they are counting children coming of age who never got to live their lives as part of their cannon fodder

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