

Does Ukraine face a “Syrian scenario?”

Ukrainian journalists
8 January 2025

This report on the disastrous state of the Ukrainian military was submitted to the WSWs by underground journalists from the assembly.org.ua website. After recently facing a two-week long, groundless suspension of their fundraising page, they ask for donations to continue their work.

The rapid collapse of the army of Bashar al-Assad in Syria, which fell apart between November 27 and December 8, has attracted a lot of attention in Ukraine. For many in the country, it became the main event of the end of 2024. A paradoxical situation has arisen: Ukrainian official propaganda is praising the successes of the pro-NATO and pro-Turkish forces against Assad as a brilliant victory over Russia, while at the same time the NATO-backed Ukrainian dictator himself is increasingly risking a repetition of Assad's fate.

In the last days of November, the worldwide English-language media confirmed what the “Assembly” had been reporting throughout the fall. *ABC News*, citing “one lawmaker with knowledge of military affairs,” wrote that there could actually be as many as 200,000 deserters in Ukraine and that “it’s a staggeringly high number by any measure, as there were an estimated 300,000 Ukrainian soldiers engaged in combat before the mobilization drive began.” They also acknowledged that desertion was one of the main reasons for the fall of Ugledar.

The Financial Times added that some of those who abandoned the 123rd Territorial Defense Brigade due to their unwillingness to defend Ugledar have already returned to the front, while others are in hiding and some are arrested. The same article also reports, citing an anonymous representative of the Polish security service, that an average of 12 Ukrainian soldiers desert from training grounds in Poland every month. This too was revealed by us earlier.

18,984 new criminal proceedings were registered under Articles 407 and 408 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine (unauthorized leaving of a unit and desertion) in November 2024, according to the Ukraine's Office of Prosecutor General. Compared to the figures in the previous overview for the WSWs, this is almost twice as much as in October 2024, when 9,487 criminal cases were registered under these articles.

In January 2024, there were only 3,448 criminal proceedings. And in total, from February 2022 to December 1 of this year, 114,280 criminal proceedings for cases of desertion have already been registered. Pro-Trump Kiev-based journalist Volodymyr Boiko, who has been fighting in the 241st Territorial Defense Brigade, posted about this on December 7:

The Ukrainian army can already be spoken of as deceased. Moreover, if 19,000 reports [of desertions] were entered into the register in November 2024, this does not mean at all that this is how many servicemen deserted. 19,000 is, in fact, the highest possible number that can be registered under this category of crime. Because in each case, the commander of the military unit must first appoint an official investigation, consider and approve the results of the official investigation, send a report on the committed criminal offense to the State Bureau of Investigation or to a specialized defense prosecutor's office, and there they must

consider the report and type the text into the register. Neither do military units have such a number of specialists who could conduct official investigations in such amounts, nor do the prosecutor's office and the State Bureau of Investigation have sufficient employees to enter tens of thousands of reports on desertion into the register.

Against this backdrop, Law 4087-IX was adopted on November 21 and came into force on November 29. According to this new law, those who are guilty of unauthorized leave of their unit (SZCh in Ukrainian) or desertion are not only allowed to voluntarily return and serve without criminal punishment, but their military service and contract are also continued. For this, they must have returned by January 1, 2025.

Last month, a host of the Ukrainian female military YouTube channel said that in the Kupyansk area of the Kharkov region, almost the entire second company in the 152nd Battalion of the 117th Territorial Defense Brigade committed SZCh because of their “butcher commander.”

Ukrainian war correspondent Yury Butusov reported on the scandal with the 155th Mechanized Brigade “Anna of Kyiv,” which was trained in France and sent to Pokrovsk. Several thousand people who had been forced into busses for the draft were recruited there, and more than a thousand of them “went home immediately upon arrival.”

In the post from December 31, he explained that even before the brigade had fired its first shot, 1,700 servicemen left without permission. After that, the State Bureau of Investigation started to work on this. From the words of Butusov, the 155th Brigade went for training in France in October. At that time the unit already had 935 people in SZCh. Then, more than 50 servicemen fled in France.

900 million Euros were spent on this scandalous formation. “A colleague from work showed up, he had been forced into a bus. [He had been] mobilized in the spring, [and] got out of the Zaporozhye front. He says that when they started to be chopped up with everything they had, they decided to go home. The whole company went into SZCh together with their commander. What's the point if they are being caught? Doesn't matter. Now he is at home. Alive,” messaged someone on December 18 in the Kharkov local chat of Northern Saltovka.

On November 25, some of the mechanisms used to combat the escape of recruits were described in the public Telegram group UFM for mutual aid to cross the border outside checkpoints:

The main problem with training camps is that everyone is watching each other there, because at the formations they immediately tell you that SZCh is bad and for an unsuccessful SZCh you will be beaten up really hard. And they immediately talk about collective responsibility – if someone leaves your tent, then they will cruelly chase around everyone in the tent.

The neighboring platoon was chased around all night when one of them left. There they were chased to the shelter all night, like an alarm, woken up with training grenades, push-ups with the whole

company in full gear, in short, they will mock everyone to the fullest, so that everyone knows that if your comrade-in-arms gets out, you will be given hell. Lie on your belly for an hour in the mud and so on.

This is done so that if you suddenly see that your companion has decided to leave, you will immediately run to inform on him, turn him in, and so on, so that your life does not turn into hell. Therefore, everyone is happy to turn each other in. Therefore, any patrol, even if it is comprised of kidnapped people, and especially [if it is comprised] of them, because the patrol must march in circles for 24 hours with full gear, and if they let someone go, then after a 24-hour visit, they will not have slept, will not have eaten normally, and will run and jump with 20+ kilograms on their bodies.

So if you go into SZCh, no one must know about it, no one must see you. Even those who are there in the forest for some reason on some stupid duty. And all these stories about how there are no fences there, that someone just went and left – that is b***. If you have decided to leave, your main enemy is your neighbor in the tent.

However, a deserter from the Kiev region, who wished to remain anonymous, has a slightly different experience with this matter:

Of course, there is a fair amount of truth to this. But not everything is so gloomy. Now training camps are staffed almost 100 percent with those who have been forcibly mobilized. Training companies are slightly diluted with ideological, zealous idiots and even women. The remaining 99 percent are potential SZCh. And everyone knows this very well. And this is already a basis for basic solidarity. In my company at the Yavoriv training ground, when another soldiers disappeared, many wished him good luck aloud. And this happened almost every day. Naturally, we were pestered when we had to run to dugouts, when our rations were taken away and all that stuff. But since someone fled every single day, I simply don't know what would have happened if no one had fled.

I was taken in on June 17. I fled on June 30. And I left for Romania on September 25. They started looking for me somewhere in November. I wasn't at the front. Thank god, I managed to escape before I took the oath. If you're an SZCh and you're caught a second time, you'll most likely be released with a written commitment to return to your unit. That's what the guys who were caught a second time told me. I didn't leave [the country] right away. I went back home to Brovary. I prepared for three months and then went to Romania. Who knows if I was wanted or not? I didn't live at my address. Now I'm definitely wanted. The cops are calling my relatives.

Those who are forced into buses and then to the front in Kharkov are usually sent for training, not to the west of the country, but to the Dnepropetrovsk region in the east. We have obtained the following account about what has been waiting for them there since November 29:

The day before yesterday, a comrade was grabbed [on the streets], yesterday he was already in training, in Dnipro, 120 km from the front. The convoy was greatly reinforced [with military personnel], it's impossible to escape, like in a concentration camp.

The young pastor was beaten, because he had refused to sign up [for the military]... The mobilization of priests, as we see, is more important than the mobilization of the police.

That's what's happening now... And those who refuse doing anything at all are being sent to zero [to the cutting edge at the front line]. A company of avatars [drinking soldiers]. They disappeared without a trace... Without docs, without registration. They were simply kidnapped and [sent into the] meat[grinder]. Brutally. They take away phones, docs, they don't give a shit where you want to go. If you're not a [parliamentary] deputy – they don't give a shit. There was a guy, a pastor, they broke him, beat him up... They took him to zero somewhere... Full of securities, and checkpoints in the town, several on all sides. [He could] Go to the toilet only with a senior [commander]. To the store – with a receipt and only with a senior [commander], only 5 people can go...

If this is accurate, it means that the same method of “zeroing out” is used in the Ukrainian troops to get rid of undesirables, as is the case in Russian units on the eastern front. At the same time, another source told us that in the last days of autumn, two to three weeks ago, 50 people were brought to Dnieper and 37 of them fled.

The lucky ones manage to escape before they end up in these facilities. *“This week my workers were going to work, they took away all five of them. When they were bringing them to training, a van broke down near Kharkov. There were 11 men, and the other two with automatic rifles. The men said, either you let us go to the field, or we'll kill you, [because] there are more of us. They let us go. Now everyone is in Kharkov, barely got there,”* a Kharkov owner of a residential housing business wrote us on December 22.

On December 14, the above quoted Kiev-based, pro-Trump journalist Volodymyr Boiko wrote:

Kilometers of trenches were dug near Kurakhove [a city in the eastern Donetsk region]. I recently spoke with the deputy commander of one of the battalions in that direction – he says that a Russian tank mistakenly drove into our positions, drove for 10 minutes until it realized that it had lost its way, and then turned back. Not a single shot was fired at the tank, because there was no one in the positions.

An infantry company from near Kherson was transferred to this battalion as reinforcement – ??so out of 90 people, three reached Kurakhove, the rest ran away on the way. And this is the situation everywhere. And what is happening in the training centers? Take, for example, military unit A1363 – a training center located in the Samarivsky (formerly Novomoskovsky) district of the Dnipropetrovsk region. Recently, 70 recruits “made it to heaven” there in one day. Before that, on November 10, 2024, four people escaped, one of whom is a relative of my acquaintance. The escapee says that there is no military training, during the three weeks of stay in the training unit, the recruits were only engaged in digging toilets and doing some household chores, and the main reason for the escape was “hazing” and bullying of the newcomers.

Therefore, on November 3, four people also escaped, and in just one month, 30 servicemen deserted... Analyzing the statistics of war crimes, back in February-April 2024, I predicted that at the end of the summer the front would begin to collapse, and by the spring of 2025 the army would simply disperse.

Individual rebellions against the state and the war have also become more frequent after the initial decline in autumn. In November, we recorded at least four cases in Kharkov alone. In particular, a 39-year-old man, after fleeing from the army a year and a half ago, met with weapons the cops that came to his apartment in response to his threat to kill a patrol policeman. He had an automatic rifle, a pistol and grenades. Still, he was detained without shooting.

On the night of December 28, three border guard vehicles were burned down in the Transcarpathian border town of Chop, including a new Peugeot pickup. A 22-year-old local resident, after being detained by the police, explained his act during the interrogation by pointing to his “hostile relations” with the State Border Service of Ukraine.

In total, in November 2024, Russian troops captured 4.7 times more territory than in the whole of 2023. In the first four days of 2025, they already took eight villages south of Pokrovsk, and only seven kilometres left to the border of the Dnepropetrovsk region, where there had been no hostilities yet and there are minimal fortifications. Despite such a critical situation, there is no visible patriotic upsurge among the population of Ukraine. Too many working people no longer see any fundamental difference in who will rob them.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact