

Popular Revolt Looming in Ukraine? Zelensky's Battle Over Death Numbers Speaks for Itself.

400,000 Soldiers

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President-elect Donald Trump has made the news stating that Ukraine lost around [400,000 soldiers](#) and “many more civilians” in its ongoing conflict with Russia since 2022. Posting on the Truth Social platform, he stated, on December 9, that this is “a war that should never have started, and could go on forever.”

Ukrainian leader **Volodymyr Zelensky** however gives only a fraction of that figure, insisting that 43,000 Ukrainians have died thus far plus there being 370,000 “cases of providing assistance to the wounded”. Zelensky added that, in the case of Ukraine, “approximately 50 percent of the wounded return to the ranks.”

If Trump's number could be too high, the Ukrainian leader's counting on the other hand is, simply put, hard to believe. The figure of 43,000 deaths is higher than the 31,000 he gave in February, but still is quite lower than estimates by Western intelligence agencies, [according to](#) the Washington Post. The point is that the issue of the number of people killed is critically important for Zelensky for his survival. Last week, he disputed a Wall Street Journal news report of about [80,000 deaths](#) (twice as much as he currently claims).

Beyond deaths and numbers, the situation in Ukraine is no good, regardless of how one quantifies it. For example, I [wrote](#) earlier this month about how the corruption scandals in Ukraine are ruining its energy infrastructure amid Russian attacks, with disastrous outcomes for its defense efforts. It has in fact left the country [vulnerable before the winter](#). There have been blackouts and people expect massive power cuts. Meanwhile, Mustafa Nayyem, former head of the government agency tasked with preserving strategic infrastructure, says he had requested €1.4 billion for “third-level protection” bunkers used in substations. The funds were blocked, due to (he [claims](#)) “vested interests” having to do with bribes no longer being paid to Kyiv's officers. Nayyem [resigned](#) from his post, and the political crisis goes on.

Back to numbers, the idea of “fighting to the last Ukrainian” has become a trope in political discourse – be it as it may, the figures are troublesome. Consider this:

Europe now faces the largest population displacement crisis since World War II. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported, in September, that over [6 million people](#) have left Ukraine to become refugees. There are also [3.7 million](#) people displaced within the country. This means almost a third of the population has fled their homes. Ukraine's population in February 2022 was [43.5 million](#) and is now only [37.9 million](#).

With the impacts the conflict has brought upon the economy, almost [25% of the Ukrainian population](#) now live in poverty

There are no policy in the country to address the issue of war veterans, who are exposed to [organized crime recruitment](#) risks. According to the Numbeo Crime Index 2024, four Ukrainian cities made it to the top 10 most criminal in Eastern Europe (Kyiv, Dnipro, Odessa, and Kharkiv). The organized crime issue is related to the corruption problem (the country's level of corruption is [comparable to that of Uganda](#)), and there has been a jump in illegal weapons sales.

On top of all of that, Ukraine is [debating drafting 18 years old](#). I [wrote](#) before about Ukraine's extreme large-scale conscription efforts, which include mobilizing men over 50 years old and even those who would normally be deemed as physically unfit for service.

The irony of it is that during the presidential campaign, Zelensky promised to [put an end to the War in Donbass](#) (which [started in 2014](#)). In fact, "a native Russian speaker himself", he enjoyed "[strong support from the country's Russian-speaking regions](#)." Making a peace deal is of course something the radical nationalists and their armed militias would never allow and things escalated instead.

It would not be an exaggeration at all to describe today's Ukraine as a kind of corrupt oligarchic dictatorship - with an acute far-right problem, on top of that. In fact, even pro-Maidan philosopher Serhiy Datsiuk (writing for Euromaidan Press, of all places) described his country in 2017 as "civil resistance forced the Ukrainian government to move towards an oligarchic dictatorship." He wrote: "The nationalists are responding to the threat of oligarchic dictatorship by stirring up feelings of nationalist revanchism and mobilizing civil groups under the banner of nationalism. In this case, a nationalist dictatorship is just as likely as an oligarchic one because the first is seen as an alternative and a lesser evil... So, we are now faced with a dramatic choice: oligarchic dictatorship or nationalist authoritarianism."

He also admitted that the "directive objectives outlined by (Ukrainian) nationalists" amount to "revenge on, and suspicion and hatred of Russians and Russian speakers", adding that "for many Ukrainians, the easiest way out of this turmoil and the best way to solve the Russian-Ukrainian conflict is to persecute Russian speakers in Ukraine." Regardless of one's own political sympathies, any honest discussion on the roots of the current confrontation should include such ethnopolitical issues as well as the geopolitics of NATO enlargement - or else one fails to grasp some of the key points.

The aforementioned Euromaidan Press shares its names and values with the ultra-nationalist Euromaidan Revolution of 2014. By "nationalists", Dyatsiuk refers to the Ukrainian radicals who [celebrate](#) controversial figures such as Stepan Bandera and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army combatants as national heroes ([so does the Ukrainian state today](#), in official functions). Those were Nazi collaborators who also committed war crimes against Poles - there are often considered genocide even by prominent Ukrainian historians such as Yaroslav Hrytsak.

The nationalist-oligarchic dilemma in itself already is a recipe for turmoil. Now add to it corruption scandals, blackouts during winter time and a draconian draft, with a President who tries to downplay more realistic figures pertaining to the number of people killed and maimed.

To sum it up, the risk of domestic unrest and anti-draft uprisings in Ukraine is very real.

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