

Why Conscription Is Archaic and Unnecessary, and What to Replace It With

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The Minister of Defense of Ukraine Andriy Zagorodniuk announced his desire to abolish military conscription. Like, Ukraine is moving to a professional army by NATO standards.

Not everyone is happy about this initiative. The irreconcilable political opposition is fundamentally in the position of Baba Yaga, who is always opposed, seeing in every step of the Zelensky-Goncharuk government another example of the dismantling of statehood — so it is “obvious” to them that the cancellation of the conscription was initiated to strike a devastating blow to the armed forces.

To a certain extent, they can be understood: six years ago, President Viktor Yanukovich abolished conscription in Ukraine, two weeks before the start of the Euromaidan. In 2014, it was gone.

“Today, we have such weapons, such military technologies, which require a very high professional level... The equipment is very complex, so the army must now be professional,” was how the future resident of Rostov-na-Donu explained his decision.

But the war, which began in particular due to Yanukovich, slightly adjusted the reform of the Armed Forces — conscription was resumed, and the constituents even had time to take part in the fighting at the beginning of the war. However, then the war was left to contractors and mobilized, and the victims of the conscription were ordered to remain in the PDD (military base).

Much of the Armed Forces’ top brass and officer corps are also skeptical about attempts to cancel conscription. Now, when Ukrainians are in no hurry to sign a contract with the Armed Forces, to cancel conscription means to significantly reduce the already insufficient number of soldiers in the brigades. In some cases, it is critical to reduce it. If the brigade goes into the area of the JFO (Joint Forces Operation) — there will be no one to stay at the PDD.

But this is not the whole truth about the motivation of the commanders’ commitment to the conscript army. Today, the life blood of the military units is designed precisely to attract cheap labor in the form of conscript soldiers. They carry out a considerable part of the work on which depends not only on the effectiveness of the brigade as a combat unit, but also its material functioning as an economic complex. It is an old and reliable mechanism that works, and commanders do not want to break it. Moreover, slaves in pixelated uniforms can also be used for their own colonel, general and even sergeants’ interests.

And this is one of the main arguments of the supporters of the complete cancellation of the draft and conscript service. They rightly point out that the existing system of forced involvement of Ukrainian citizens in the Armed Forces is a relic of the USSR, goes back to the Russian Empire and is therefore outdated and inefficient.

The mass involvement of young people in the conscript service from the beginning was aimed at forming large masses of minimally-trained fighters with very basic military specialties, who can be quickly applied in the event of war — as it was in the USSR, which hoped to overwhelm any unceasing wave of cannon fodder and steel, knocking down an enemy (or knocking it out) with a nuclear strike.

The Ukrainian “line” is an attempt to adjust this completely irrelevant system to modern requirements. To be honest, it does not turn out very well, because the modern army requires motivation and professionalism, and neither the former nor the latter can be expected from youth forced to serve. Unmotivated young men from poor families, mainly from the provinces, can be kept in check by violence and constant tasking, the sole purpose of which is to deprive soldiers of their free time and the remnants of independent thinking. This also includes a bunch of non-sensical rules that subordinate the life of conscripts, maintaining a formal “order.” The point of these rules is to cultivate obedience and to be able to punish at any time for violations. It is in the reproduction of “order” and involvement in various kinds of economic work that last throughout the whole term of service — soldiers are not often engaged in military affairs.

Of course, all this nonsense is solely based on violence, with violence being informal, which is legally called “non-constitutional relations”, and informally — since Soviet times, “hazing.” In fact, these are established, traditional, violent, discriminatory, and degrading practices by one group of servicemen against other, lower-term and senior-level positions. The conscript system, especially if it is unpopular, is simply forced to reproduce such an inhuman mechanism of internal informal self-regulation, and the command is well aware of this.

As a result of his conscript service, the soldier acquires some basic military skills, becomes first a victim then participates in systematic violence, and becomes accustomed to obeying or carrying out punishment due to a lack of honest compliance with stupid rules devoid of logic. In general, one and a half years of a boy’s life goes under the dog’s tail. It is eighteen months of humiliation, filth, and emptiness. Not everyone is able to admit it — many compensate for it with the axiom of “Never served, not a man”, “The army is the school of life” and other such wisdom, the meaning of which is one and the same- to cover up the bitter truth about that illustrious time.

Therefore, eliminating the relic of conscript service, this place of incarceration, is definitely necessary, notwithstanding the suffering of the conservative generals and the state of affairs of the opposition.

But...

Yes, there is a “but”.

We live in a world that, to put it mildly, is not and will not be a safe space.

A world where citizens can safely forget about their own physical involvement in protecting the country exists in two cases: first, if their country is rich enough, strong and successful enough to have a modern professional, trained and equipped contract army, and second if the security of the country is guaranteed by a modern, strong, trained and equipped allied military. Neither of these cases describe our situation.

We live in a country that is currently in a state of armed conflict with a much more powerful state, and no peacekeeping effort by the Zelensky administration will save us from further Russian aggression or the intense domestic conflict of Russia.

In these circumstances, basic military skills are not an option, but just as necessary as personal hygiene, reading, reading and writing, computers, or public transport. For the most part, students are convinced that they will not need algebra in their lives, but the Ministry of Education and Science (thank Darwin!) does not cancel the teaching algebra in schools. Although algebra in most cases is not really necessary to them, but the synaptic connections — that is, a more developed brain — will come in handy when studying it. With military training, it is even easier — in Ukraine, it can be of benefit to anyone at any time, not directly but indirectly.

When war comes to your city, you either have to flee, hide, or fight. By the way, running or hiding will not always work. And the percentage of civilians among those killed in the Donbas is already almost a direct message whispering in your ear: “With a rifle you will have a better chance.”

Therefore, it is a direct interest of all citizens to study military affairs, though they may not be really aware of this yet.

This basic interest is shared by basic military training. Today, the subject with the pathos-laden name “Homeland Defense” (formerly the stationery “Pre-military training”) is taught at school, but the quality of this teaching is somewhere at the bottom level, because the absolute majority of Ukrainian students have no desire to approach the army at all, and they will be at war if they do fill that vacancy, so it is not able to motivate students. It is understandable: few people want to combine life with the army by signing a contract, much less to serve a “term,” (of conscription) that is, to throw one and a half years of life in the garbage can. But even in the presence of students’ interest in military subjects, it is impossible to give them at least an initial course of military affairs within a school purely technical.

Non-governmental organizations that conduct military training are not at odds with this, at least because NGOs are voluntary and require some financial input from each participant. Although at the voluntary level, some NGOs provide fairly decent initial training. Another downside of militaristic NGOs is that some of them have a radical political agenda that, to put it mildly, does not always meet Ukraine’s constitutional norms in the area of government and human rights. At present, the state is pleased that these politicized NGOs are doing their state work on military training of the population, but this may later come to Ukraine.

Therefore, a separate state basic military training course in the Armed Forces is needed, which would be completed by all. Except for those who have no health or religious beliefs, they do not take up arms. Two to three months of intensive training is enough to master the basic skills. But it has to be the most intense military training in the morning until the evening: physical training, possession of basic models of small arms, tactics, domestic assistance, familiarity with basic models of military equipment and, of course, theoretical studies. No kitchen duty and sweeping area.

On the way out, we get — no, not a professional soldier, of course, but a man who understands what the commander wants from him and knows how to do it consciously, is able to act on the battlefield on his own, in the infantry unit, division and platoon.

Why is it better than the “term” of conscription?

Because it is much faster, more intense, more interesting. There is no hazing, because recruits will not deal with “grandfathers” or “hunks” but only with professional instructor sergeants who can teach.

You can still anticipate additional perks. For example, only those who have completed basic military training will have access to higher education. That is, during the competition, the results of the entrance exams for higher education will be enhanced for those holding a military ticket, which indicates the completion of the basic military training course.

As mentioned, military training is not an option, but a basic need, like secondary education. In addition, public service should be accessible only to holders of the same military tickets.

Is this discrimination? Everything is known by comparison. For example, in Israel, which exists in a state of permanent military threat, they serve three years. Therefore, to take three months of interesting intensive military training for further higher education and a civilian career is a small sacrifice.

Whoever finds they like the army in these three months will be able to get a contract, and, after serving a certain period of time, go for NCO courses and make a career. By NATO standards is very desirable, because according to them a sergeant is not just a kind of soldier who has the right to command other soldiers, but a full deputy commander and mediator between the officer and the rank and file. It is believed that only those who have served a certain length of time as a soldier should be trained as an officer.

Yes, the military really needs to move to quality NATO standards — they have proven themselves fairly well in all the armed conflicts of recent decades. The army really needs to be professional and contractual because it takes at least a year and a lot of money to train a professional soldier to a high standard, and then it takes service and continuous improvement and professional growth to justify these investments.

But in the face of a constant military threat from a much more powerful Russian Federation, this is not enough. Therefore, a reserve must be trained and it will be formed from those who have completed basic military training. In addition to the reserve – territorial defense troops, which can also voluntarily go after the course, undergo regular training and annual meetings, and have additional “perks” such as military uniforms, ammunition and personal weapons that can be stored at home, some social packages, and more.

Agreed, this is much better than conscript service — a relic of the cannibalistic era. If only this was understood by those who make the relevant decisions in government and parliament...

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