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## **THE MILITARY POTENTIAL OF THE SELF-PROCLAIMED «DONETSK PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC» AND «LUGANSK PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC»**

The aim of the article is to study the state of the military potential of the self-proclaimed «DNR» and «LNR» created in the period from June to July 2014<sup>th</sup> at the East of Ukraine as a result of the military-political conflict that began in 2014<sup>th</sup>. One of the objectives of the study is to analyze the process of founding the ideological center of the basis of the «DNR» and «LNR» army which included officers of the reserve, retired officers, supporters of the idea of the Russian peace, the revival of Orthodoxy. The method of analysis made it possible to study the process of the struggle for power between the small groups of terrorist army of Donbass since the beginning of the military-political conflict. The author analyzed the principle of forming the structural military forces of the terrorists and defined the facts of financing of the «DNR» and «LNR». The article reflects the problem of looting, pushing civilians out of cars, handing over scrap metal, and so on by an average number of «militiamen» in the temporarily occupied territory of the East of Ukraine.

**Keywords:** illegal armed formations, self-proclaimed republics, armed units, people's militia, army, armed forces.

The situation prevailing at the beginning of 2014<sup>th</sup> in Donbass was a consequence of ignoring the socio-demographic characteristics of the region by the authorities, on the one hand, and the result of effective advocacy work, supporters of the development of the «Russian peace», on the other hand, which provoked the resolution of armed conflict.

The tactics of conducting operations for the seizure of administrative buildings clearly showed the witnesses excellent combat training of people like «from the people's militia of Donbass». Private citizens who did not have the skills of professional sabotage actions were simply incapable of organizing such a level of discipline and management as demonstrated by the «DNR» and «LNR» troops in the first days of armed conflict. Another argument in favor of thinking about the planning of these shares by external forces is the fact of providing arms, as a rule, of Russian production, and military equipment. The aforementioned maxims confirm how the external origin of these groups, as well as thorough early preparation (possibly for more than one year) of those who participated in power actions, are most likely recruited and professionally trained in sabotage.

Almost all major battalions fighting in the ranks of the DNR and LNR were created in the period from June to July 2014<sup>th</sup>. Typically, in the middle of each of them, a certain ideological center was formed, which included officers of the reserve, retired officers, supporters of the idea of the Russian peace, the revival of n Orthodoxy. The routine was formed on the principle of voluntary desire to fight on the side of the self-proclaimed republics «DNR» and «LNR». Despite the fact that new troops appear, the battalions form the basis of the DNR army:

1. «Oplot» (the total number of about 1000 persons serving as police and, as a rule, are located in the city of Donetsk and its environs, present in all the block of posts, the secretly designated subdivision is considered «a manual army» O. Zakharchenko);

2. «East» (numbering about 500 people, actually withdrawn from participation in combat operations on the front line, because it serves as a special command, whose task is to detect and neutralize the enemy's intelligence groups on the territory under the control of the separatists);

3. «Kalmius» (includes about 500 people mainly from the Don Cossacks who control positions in Gorlovka, Shakhtarsk, Zuges);

4. «Novorossia» (the total number is more than 1000 people);

5. Shakhtar (numbering about 300 people);

6. Death (consisting of 300 immigrants from the Chechen Republic, who have chosen the place of permanent deployment of the city of Snizhne and the city of Novoazovsk);

7. «Rus» (a women's battalion with a population of about 100 people, dominated by people from Chechnya, Abkhazia, the main district of the city of Makeyevka, specializing in the sniper cover of sabotage and reconnaissance groups);

8. «Somalia» (the number is 300, the main place of deployment – the suburb of Makiivka and the city of Donetsk, performs the functions of the assault detachment);

9. «Sparta» (number of 300 people, controls the area of Donetsk airport and the line of contact Avdeevka-Yasinuvata-Piski<sup>1</sup>).

As part of the army, «LNR» also has its own fist, created in the summer of 2014, it includes the following battalions:

1. «Zorya» (was under the personal leadership of I. Plotnytsky, was elite of the army «LNR», in its staff numbered 500 people);

2. «Don» (infantry battalion, consisting of 200 people);

3. «Rusich» (there were about 300 people, mainly from Serbia, who specialize in sabotage and reconnaissance work);

4. «Stanichno-Lugansk» (formed as an analogue of a military formation for a special purpose, consisted of former fighters of the Airborne Forces and Afghans in the number of 500 people);

5. «USSR» (in its composition there are about 500 people)<sup>2</sup>.

Unlike the «DNR» army, in the ranks of the «LNR» army, the struggle for power between the small groups headed by so-called Cossack atamans continued for a long time. In October, 2015<sup>th</sup> on the territory of «LNR» the idea was realized to unite all the belligerent battalions into a single People's Militia «LNR».

If the principle of forming the structural military forces of the terrorists is clear, then the issue of financing in the battles of the «DNR» and «LNR» is not so transparent. Only in contrast to Ukraine, the situation is diametrically opposed. The peak of the high salaries of the terrorist army's soldiers fell for the period from May to July 2015<sup>th</sup>, when the ordinary «militia» received fixed \$ 300, plus \$ 1,000 for the enemy's destroyed combat equipment. Since July 2015<sup>th</sup>, funding has shrunk sharply, and «local» fighters have begun to crowd out foreign mercenaries, usually Caucasian or with a typical Russian «talker». For the fourth year of a continuing conflict, the flow of money is unsystematic and unstable; in fact the main source of income is the result of looting, pushing cars out of civilians, handing over scrap metal, and so on.

Recognized favorites of the «DNR» and «LNR» military forces are the «Oplot» battalion, which is dominated by «local» – from Donbass, but even in it the situation with financing is rather complicated. The average number of militiamen receives an average of UAH 2,000, but they see this money every two months, so predominantly the barter service payment prevails. Fighting in the ranks of terrorists, «local» actively sell their rations to the population both in the occupied and controlled territories of Ukraine.

The so-called «Orthodox Army» (according to unofficial data, its financing is associated with the name of K. Malofeev) is allocated to the general background of illegal armed groups «DNR». According to the members of the militia, the fighters of the given battalion are 90% represented by mercenaries from Russia, from former Afghans and the so-called «ideological» Don Cossacks. The remuneration for the service in Donbass for them is from 1000 to 5000 thousand dollars.

On the territory of «LNR» the situation with financing is completely different, the principle «everything that controls all mine» operates. This was especially true of the Cossack battalions: A. Ghostov's «Ghost» and A. Kostin's «Augustus», which existed mainly due to sales of coal mined in the «mines» and the sale of scrap from the ruined mines of the region. On average, an ordinary «local militia» received in 2015<sup>th</sup> a stable equivalent of \$ 300-500. But in other units of the army «LNR» the situation was critical, the salary was constantly delayed.

Regarding the financing of mercenaries from Russia, Serbia, Chechnya, Abkhazia, then, of course, the order of the numbers of their payment is much higher than that of the local contingent, and does not yield to the standard minimum payment for mercenary services in the average hot spot of the planet, from 5 thousand US dollars.

<sup>1</sup> Томс Джерри Кто и за что воюет в рядах боевиков «ДНР». <<http://baurgroupe.com/diktatory/23068>> (2017, September, 28).

<sup>2</sup> Никоноров, А. Структура гибридной армии луганских сепаратистов. *DepoDonbas* <<https://dn.depo.ua/rus/lugansk/struktura-gibridnoyi-armiyi-luganskih-separatistiv-20170209516443>> (2018, January, 10).

The period of the summer campaign in 2015<sup>th</sup>, completed the structural transformation of the armed formations of terrorists, allowing the disparate battalions «DNR» and «LNR» to rearrange into the army units. However, the attempts of the enemy to join forces and create a united army of Novorossiysk never succeeded. In the spring of 2015<sup>th</sup>, all media-controlled terrorists announced the allegedly successful completion of the first phase of the restructuring of the military forces. As a result, the bipolar, infantry and artillery brigades, including the Republican Guard, joined the 1<sup>st</sup> Army Corps (which included the following battalions: «Oplot», «Vostok», «Kalmius», «First Slavic», «Berkut», «Shakhtar», «Rus», «Ryazan», «Orthodox army of Donbass» and others). The reorganization and the army «LNR», «People's militia» that united all the brigades and battalions (namely: «Zorya», «Rusich», «USSR», «Stanichno-Lugansk battalion» and others) did not disappear and got the status of 2<sup>nd</sup> Army Corps of the Army of Novorossia<sup>1</sup>.

For the sake of justice, it should be noted that this association is more declarative in nature, in practice, the fighters «DNR» and «LNR» are still subordinate leaders of their pseudo-republics and direct curators from the Russian Federation. Moreover, according to «local militias» at the beginning of August 2015<sup>th</sup> in the territory of the «DNR», all paramilitary structures were conditionally divided into 12 battalions of territorial self-defense. For example, in the area of the Sand – the 11<sup>th</sup> Territorial Battalion was operating, along the Olenovka-Dokuchaevsk 12<sup>th</sup> Territorial Battalion.

The number of fighters in the ranks of the Army «DNR» and «LNR» is estimated ambiguously, as leaders of the pseudo-republics, and the General Staff of the Armed Forces. In the winter of 2015<sup>th</sup>, O. Zakharchenko dreamed «to bring the number of armies «DNR» and «LNR» to one hundred thousand servicemen, first of all at the expense of volunteers, arguing that in February 2015<sup>th</sup> in the ranks of the «DNR» there were about 30 thousand bayonets. According to the Ukrainian side, the figures are quite different. President Poroshenko stated that the number of militants was 40 thousand, of which 9 thousand – military personnel of the Russian Federation<sup>2</sup>.

At the same time, Secretary of the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine O. Turchinov voiced even more significant figures of the military presence in Donbass, namely: «The number of permanent buildings is up to 35 thousand people. In addition, in the occupied territory there is a military reserve consisting of 21 tactical group of the Russian Federation (15 battalion, 6 companies) with a population of more than 9 thousand people. At the eastern border of our country are concentrated 53 more tactical groups of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation (of which 39 battalion, 14 companies) numbering 50 and 5 thousand people»<sup>3</sup>.

Consequently, the main backbone of the Army «DNR» and «LNR» is not just «local militias», but mercenaries.

**Firstly**, the number of gunners and tankers to prepare from the local «militia» in such a short period of time is physically impossible, it is necessary to have at least elementary knowledge of military affairs. Announced in the autumn of 2014<sup>th</sup> and in spring 2015<sup>th</sup>, mobilization in the «DNR» and «LNR» allowed to replenish the rows totaling no more than 2500 thousand people. The main reason for this shortage is the departure of men of a busy age abroad, first of all in Russia. The second reason is the sharp drop in wages in illegal armed groups. According to the relatives of the «militias», those who came from the regions of Ukraine controlled by Krasnogorsk, Marinka, Katerinovka, Vugledar in 11 battalions of the territorial defense of the Army «DNR» that carried the service in the district of the Sands, since May 2015<sup>th</sup>, the level of earnings dropped sharply from \$ 500 to \$ 100 a month. True, all charges on funeral in case of death of the «militia» are assumed by the government of the «DNR», in addition, the family of the deceased can count on a one-time assistance in the amount of \$ 5,000. But even such a prospect does not contribute to the massive inclusion of local residents in the ranks of the armies of self-proclaimed republics.

**Secondly**, in the army of the «DNR» and «LNR», there is a significant number of persons of the Caucasian appearance, which is not precisely characteristic of the ethnic characteristics of the inhabitants

<sup>1</sup> Марионетки Кремля. <<http://ochakiv.mk.ua/pdf/DOC/Marionetki-Kremlya-Doroga-vojny-na-Donbasse.pdf>>. (2017, December, 15).

<sup>2</sup> На Донбассе находятся 9 тысяч военнослужащих РФ – Порошенко. *Украинская правда*. <<https://www.pravda.com.ua/rus/news/2015/08/4/7076634/>> (2017, December, 23).

<sup>3</sup> Турчинов: РФ создала на Донбассе сухопутное соединение двух корпусов. *FORBES Ukraine*. <<http://forbes.net.ua/news/1400865-turchinov-rf-sozdala-na-donbasse-suhoputnoe-soedinenie-dvuh-korpusov>> (2017, December, 20).

of Donbass, and even in this contingent there are changes, the presence of mercenaries from Chechnya is reduced, but the share of natives increases from South Ossetia. In this regard, it should be borne in mind that since the summer of 2014<sup>th</sup>, the town of Snizhne and the city of Torez were the main centers for the deployment of armed groups from the republics of the North Caucasus. The local population recorded a regular influx of mercenaries in these cities, and since the summer of 2015<sup>th</sup> their flow has stopped. For example, about 100 Chechens left Snowy in July 2015<sup>th</sup> in the direction of the Ukrainian-Russian border and did not return. A similar situation occurred in the Petrovsky district of Donetsk city, as if on June 3, 2015<sup>th</sup>, at the peak of sharp attacks of terrorists in Marinka, there were Chechen mercenaries, then since August there was a rotation during which in the Petrovsky and Kirov districts of Donetsk became a prevailing mercenaries Slavic appearance with a characteristic Russian dialect<sup>1</sup>.

At the beginning of 2016<sup>th</sup>, a «human hunger» was observed in the ranks of the «DNR» and «LNR» Army, according to «militiamen», there was a disastrous shortage of skilled tankers and artillery drivers. Training centers created by terrorists to train military personnel cannot solve these problems. They work in the Budionivsky and Leninsky districts of Donetsk, Shakhtarsk, the city of Snizhny, Lutugino and Perevalsk, and are mainly engaged in the training of fighters for the possession of small arms and are designed for local recruits, whose number has dropped sharply in 2015<sup>th</sup>. This is evidenced by the fact that in the city of Snizhny, a training point, which was completed in autumn 2014<sup>th</sup> recruits in 2016<sup>th</sup> idle. The main feature of the summer of 2015<sup>th</sup> was the intensified training and training of sabotage and reconnaissance groups.

As for the training of gunners, it is only known about the existence of a fully functioning training base in the neighborhood Bose of the Leninsky district of Donetsk. It is clear that its graduates are preparing in small volumes and not at the level of qualification required by modern high-precision technology, and therefore the main hope in the armies of self-proclaimed republics exclusively on mercenaries-professionals from the Russian Federation.

At the same time, problems with the direct subordination of military formations to the united command of the «DNR» and «LNR» in the person of O. Zakharchenko and I. Plotnitsky existed in the continuation of 2014-2017. It is not so obvious that this fact was present on the territory of the «DNR» where a cult of odious commanders such as Givi (the Somali battalion), the Motorola Sparta battalion, and the E. Ryazan battalion, E. Gilazov, formed formally, who formally recognized the leadership of O. Zakharchenko, but secretly issued orders in their areas of the front and in the settlements at points where their counter in spring were present deeds. In the territory of «LNR» Cossack spirit, although it was suppressed, but remained unconquered. Despite the official entry of all LNR battalions into a single People's Police, the remaining epicenter of the Cossack cells in the cities of Rovenky, Stakhanov, Perevalsk, Sverdlovsk, which secretly controlled the coal mining market. Despite the successful elimination of the Cossack leaders M. Kositsyn, E. Ishchenko, A. Bednov and O. Mozgovoy, the problem remains unresolved. It is complicated by periodically emerging Cossack rebellions of local significance, as a rule, caused by I. Plotnitsky's repeated attempts to establish his full control over coal mining in the «mines» and to realize its implementation through well-established channels into Russia, this also applies to metal.

In the second half of January 2015<sup>th</sup>, with the personal involvement of the Russian Special Forces, the centers of Cossack cells in the cities Sverdlovsk, Stakhanov, Pervomaysk, Rovenki were purposefully cleared. Thus, the idea of creating a «Cossack People's Republic» was destroyed. As a result, the Cossacks lost their charismatic leaders, thanks to which there was a struggle against the general line of leadership, headed by a prostitute of the pro-Russian forces I. Plotnitsky. From the authorities were eliminated Cossack atamans – in the city of Rovenki commandant of the Ataman of the Don Cossacks of the North-West district Pavel Reznikov, left the city, and the power went under the control of «LNR»; the Cossack commandant of Pervomaysk city was killed, the right hand of the ataman Mykola Kozitsyna – commandant Yevgeny Ishchenko<sup>2</sup>.

It must be borne in mind that, unlike the spring-winter period of 2015<sup>th</sup>, at the beginning of 2017<sup>th</sup>, there was no significant threat to the image of I. Plotnitsky by the Cossacks. However, the preservation

<sup>1</sup> Дмитриев, С. «Добровольцы» Донбасса: кто и за кого сражается на востоке Украины. <<http://ru.rfi.fr/ukraine/20140722-dnr-lnr-dobrovoltsy-donbassa-kto-i-za-kogo-srazhaetsya-na-vostoke-ukrainy>> (2017, December, 18).

<sup>2</sup> Никоноров, А. Структура гибридной армии луганских сепаратистов. *DepoDonbass*. <<https://dn.depo.ua/rus/lugansk/struktura-gibridnoyi-armiyi-luganskih-separatistiv-20170209516443>> (2018, January, 24).

of Cossack cells as such is likely to be beneficial to the Russian Federation for the ability to hold on the «short leash» of the leader of «LNR».

After the removal of the leaders of the Cossacks, I. Plotnitsky's people were appointed to vacant positions who took over the management of local communities with the support of so-called detachments of the People's Police of the «LNR». The purpose is the following actions: firstly, the territory of «LNR» is used by terrorists as a base for the concentration of recruits and equipment from the open Ukrainian-Russian border; secondly, in conditions of almost complete transport and economic blockade on the part of Ukraine, the only source of income remains «illegal» mining of coal and its sale to Russia. Exactly, Sverdlovsk, Stakhanov, Pervomaysk and Rovenky are centers of concentration of «cobblestones» – forms of illegal coal mining in Donbass.

Thus, the existing potential of the Army «DNR» and «LNR», taking into account the active rotation of the troops for the entire period of armed operations, indicates a deliberate delay in the conflict in Donbass. At the same time, since summer 2015<sup>th</sup>, the tactics of joint work of DRG and gunners, which allows combining sabotage with artillery bombers, is more likely to confirm the presence in the ranks of the enemy of significant resources of living power.

At the same time, in the territory of the pseudo-republics, from the beginning of 2016<sup>th</sup>, there are processes of systemic departure from the open idea of the construction of «Novorossia», but instead the inevitable return of the region to the format of Ukraine is proposed, but by the formula it is profitable exclusively for the pro-Russian forces. Confirmation of the reality of these trends is the fact of clearing the series «DNR» and «LNR» from the fanatics of the ideas of the Russian world, which are actively ongoing today. In fact, people in the state structures of both pseudo-republics are deprived of any ideological orientation and are, for the most part, loyal to any government that will give them wages and food rations. Among the indications of the «fanatics of Novorossia» include the confusion from the post of chairman of the People's Council «LNR» O. Karyakin and chairman of the council «DNR» A. Purgina, the physical removal of the adviser of the head of «LNR» D. Kargayev, expulsion from the parliamentary body of deputies «DNR» B. Litvinov, M. Ragozin and others.

If in general speaking about the combat capability of the Army «DNR» and «LNR», then the situation is obvious. The mercenaries who carry out tasks to destabilize the situation in the region are usually working, as a rule, they are professional, narrow-profile military with foreign citizenship. Confirmation of this statement is the coordinated work of snipers along the line of separation of Avdeevka-Krasnogorsk-Marinka. The shells of which, large-scale sniper rifles from 9 to 20 mm are practically everyday, with the zone of impression reaches up to 3 km, which allows us to talk about the use of such systems as OSV-96 and SVLK-14S, which are in service only in the Russian Federation. For example, during the spring and summer of 2016<sup>th</sup>, from the heights of the heaps located in the village of Trudovsky, snipers of the Dnieper Army carried out precise shelling as a checkpoint «Marinka» and civilian institutions of the Marinka town: schools, hospitals, topographically located in the heart of the city's development.

Despite repeated pronouncements of the introduction of «cease-fire regimes» the real picture in the ATO zone suggests the preservation of combat activity along the entire line of separation with the allocation of zones of the so-called «wave» escalation, which is provoked by the actions of terrorists to include the city: Shastia, Avdeyivka, Krasnogorsk, Marinka; Popasna-Bakhmut, Dokuchaevsk–Novotroitskaya area. At the same time, in these areas, snipers work or a complex of joint actions of small DRG with the support of heavy artillery is involved. The above suggests that there is a high likelihood of terrorists preparing for the tactical implementation of procedures for conducting terrorist sabotage attacks in densely populated urban settings.

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