

# [***Robots Reinforce Ukraine s Most Vulnerable District As A Key Brigade Melts Down***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BTF-10P1-DXVP-501C-00000-00&context=1516831)

Forbes.com

April 15, 2024 Monday

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**Length:** 956 words

**Byline:** David Axe, Forbes Staff

**Highlight:** One obvious advantage of drones over human soldiers: they don t have ***politics***.

**Body**

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A 67th Mechanized Brigade trooper sets up a mortar at night.

67th Mechanized Brigade

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The Ukrainian military has labored, for years, to root out far-right extremists in its ranks. The latest clash between the extremists and the defense ministry in Kyiv couldn t have come at a worse time or in a worse place.

After weeks of drama, the defense ministry redeployed and shook up the staffing within the army s 67th Mechanized Brigade this weekend. The brigade was holding the most vulnerable district in the most vulnerable city in eastern Ukraine s Donetsk Oblast:the canal district of Chasiv Yar.

Now the 67th Brigade what s left of it has redeployed to the Ukrainian rear, and a brigade of Ukrainian territorials apparently has taken over the canal district s defense.

The problem is that no territorial brigade can match a mechanized brigade s firepower. And the defenders of the canal district need a**lot**of firepower as a much larger Russian force marches closer. The Ukrainian defense ministry is hoping that an influx of drones can help.

Chasiv Yar is important. The former industrial town, with a pre-war population of 12,000, straddles the high ground overlooking the approaches to the strategic cities of Kostyantynivka and Kramatorsk. The favorable geography explains why, after capturing the ruins of the eastern city of Avdiivka in mid-February, the 400,000-strong Russian army in Ukraine pivoted toward Chasiv Yar.

A canal threads north to south on the eastern edge of Chasiv Yar, forming a natural defensive barrier. But one small district lies on the far side of the canal. If Russian regiments can capture the canal district, they could use it as a base for crossing the canal and infiltrating the town center.

If Ukraine were to lose control of Chasiv Yar, it could have dire consequences, Ukrainian analysis group Frontelligence Insightexplained.

The terrible task of defending the district initially fell to the 67th Brigade, a 2,000-strong all-volunteer unit that formed around the Ukrainian Volunteer Corps, which is part of the far-right Right Sector political group.

The Right Sector s former leader, Dmytro Yarosh, said he draws inspiration from Stepan Bandera, a Ukrainian nationalist who resisted Soviet rule in the 1940s and 50s,but who is also considered a Nazi collaborator.

To be clear, the 67th Mechanized includes many recent recruits who have no ties to the Right Sector. But there were enough extremists in the brigade that it became a problem.

In late January, a medical unit as well as an assault group assigned to the brigade s 1st Assault Company a kind of elite infantry unit specializing in close combat split from the 67th Brigadeand joined the 59th Mechanized Brigade, instead.

Militaryland.net, which closely tracks Ukrainian combat units,attributedthe schism to personal issues with the command of the 67th Mechanized Brigade.

The unit s internal turmoil only escalated. Even as the 67th Brigade battled nearly daily Russian assaults in and around the canal district, many of its members were also busy squabbling with each other.

The brigade began losing ground earlier this month, handing the Russians a critical toehold just east of the canal district. While it s true that the 67th Brigade, like all Ukrainian brigades, has been struggling with ammunition shortages ever since Russia-friendly Republicans in the U.S. Congress blocked further aid to Ukraine starting in October, a lack of ammo didn t explain all of the 67th Brigade s recent troubles.

The defense ministry in Kyiv investigated. It discovered, among other scandals, that the 67th Brigade s officers were sending new volunteers those**without** ties to the Right Sector into combat with inadequate training and support.

The officers derisively called the new volunteers pixels after the pixelated pattern on their newly-issued uniforms. As bad as the Right Sector troops attitude was toward apolitical troops, the attitude toward the pixels was even worse, **Ukrainian Pravda**reported. They were the first to be sent into combat, and their lack of experience made them lose territory.

Abruptly this weekend, the ministry yanked the 67th Brigade off the front line and began reassigning any brigade leaders with Right Sector ties.

Gen. Oleksandr Syrskyi, commander-in-chief of Ukrainian forces, defended the changes in Chasiv Yar,stressing the need to improve the quality of training, including the moral and psychological component.

The main task of these measures is to increase the fighting capacity of our troops, save the lives of our soldiers, disrupt the enemy's plans and ensure the preparation of reserves, Syrskyi added. Everything else, including the divisive politicking of far-right political groups, is a distraction.

It seems the defense of the canal district now falls to the next nearest unit: the 241st Territorial Brigade. While it surely is a relief to Ukraine s eastern command that its garrison in Chasiv Yar is no longer rife with political extremists, the command now has a new problem.

Ukrainian territorials are the equivalent of U.S. Army National Guardsmen. They, like the American Guardsmen, generally have older and lighter weaponry than active army units have. In losing the 67th Brigade, Chasiv Yar s defenders**also** lost the 67th Brigade s tanks and artillery.

Syrskyi seems to appreciate the risk. It s not for no reason that he singled out Chasiv Yar for a major robotic reinforcement. One main conclusion from the defense ministry s overhaul of Chasiv Yar s garrison was to increase the number of high-tech unmanned systems of various purposes, with trained operators, Syrskyi announced.

One obvious advantage of drones over human soldiers: they don t have ***politics***.

**Load-Date:** April 16, 2024

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