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MESSAGE: Andrei (The Saker) is taking time off for health reasons. The blog will function as normal.

Azov surrenders. Who will be the sacred martyr now?

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By **Batko Milacic** for the Saker Blog

On the night of May 17, after brief negotiations, Ukrainian army units, blocked by Russian troops at Azovstal in Mariupol, began to surrender. Initially, it was announced that the Ukrainian military wanted to hand over to Russia their wounded whose condition in the cellars of a huge factory was hopeless. However, it soon became clear that the entire "Mariupol garrison" as the remnants of the nationalist volunteer regiment "Azov" and the units of the Ukrainian army that had joined it were called by the Kiev-controlled media, were laying down their arms. So, on the morning of May 17, 90 wounded soldiers were pulled out of the basements and were joined by more than 250 healthy, albeit exhausted and filthy fighters. In a few days, that number reached 2,500 Ukrainian soldiers. That's why we wonder, what fate awaits them and other members of the Ukrainian army who surrender to Russian troops?

For President Zelensky and his team, Azovstal was a kind of a sacred symbol of Mariupol's resistance. Many hopes were pinned on the Azov Regiment, considered a terrorist organization in Russia. First of all, those in Kiev believed that the nationalists would hold out to the end and die as heroes, especially since in Russia they face a trial. And they will be lucky if it is in Russia, because in the DPR, unlike in the Russian Federation, they have the death penalty. And still, the Azov fighters began to surrender. In the morning, Russian social networks exploded with indignation after it became known that the militants leaving Azovstal had negotiated a bunch of conditions. No prosecution, priority exchange, no video footage and respectful treatment. The fuming Russian patriots soon calmed down though.

First, because the video with the prisoners almost instantly appeared on TV channels, and second, the State Duma adopted an appeal demanding that new prisoners be carefully filtered out and all those involved in war crimes be brought to justice. In addition, the surrender negotiations went too quickly to discuss exchange conditions and other terms at the highest level.

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The heroes of "Azov" are also human and just want to live. Even behind bars. This creates very big problems for Kiev, though. The commanders of the Azov Regiment, Svyatoslav Palamar and Denis Prokopenko, two leaders of Ukrainian ultranationalists, also surrendered to the Russian army. In this way, they publicly humiliated all Ukrainian ideology. Until yesterday, they were celebrated as immortal heroes, who swore that they would lay down their lives for Ukraine in the fight against the Russian occupiers. And despite all that – they surrendered to the Russian army.

For official Kiev, only two options were acceptable. The first to liberate Palmar and Prokopenko, along with other Ukrainian soldiers. While the other option was "glorious death". That is, Palmar and Prokopenko would die in the fight with the Russian army. That would enable Kiev to make Ukrainian anti-Russian heroes out of them. Thus, the fact that the best Ukrainian troops surrendered to the Russian army represents a strong psychological blow to the entire Ukrainian army, especially to the Ukrainian forces in Donbas. When Zelenski saw where things were going, he tried to alleviate the humiliation from Mariupol.

In the face of an imminent surrender, all that the command of the Ukrainian Armed Forces could do was to officially allow the surrender under the pretext of "saving the lives of soldiers." President Zelensky issued an appeal, stating that "we need Ukrainian heroes alive." The latter is certainly a lie. After all, if the Russians really exchange the nationalists and they return to Ukraine, the Ukrainian leader will have to explain to his right-wing allies why he did not even try to pull them out of Mariupol.

What Kiev fears the most, however, is that this may have a domino effect. After the fall of the Mariupol Fortress, the garrisons of other cities may also begin to surrender. And this will be the end of the Zelensky regime, at least in the east of the country.

In January 1943, an encrypted message arrived in Stalingrad, besieged by the Red Army. Hitler had sent his personal congratulations to the German commander Friedrich Paulus on being promoted to the rank of field marshal. The same telegram noted that not one German field marshal had been taken prisoner. In fact, it was a direct order to commit suicide. Now, Zelensky would probably like to send the same encryption to Palamar and Prokopenko...

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