

Russia Brands Azov Regiment 'Terrorists,' Paving Way for Captured Fighters' Imprisonment

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Azov Battalion at the parade in Mariupol, 2021. **Wanderer777 (CC BY-SA 4.0)**

Russia's Supreme Court declared Ukraine's Azov Regiment a "terrorist" organization Tuesday, paving the way for the unit's captured fighters to be tried in Russian courts and potentially face lengthy prison terms.

Moscow has regularly decried the Azov battalion for its past extremist right-wing links, using it to justify its invasion of Ukraine that the Kremlin calls its "denazification" of Kyiv this year. The battalion formed in 2014 as a far-right volunteer paramilitary unit fighting against pro-Moscow separatists in eastern Ukraine, but was later reformed and integrated into Ukraine's national guard.

The Russian Supreme Court handed down the ruling declaring the Azov battalion a terrorist organization in a closed session, state-run news agencies reported.

It was the court's third attempt to declare the regiment "terrorist" after previous hearings were postponed in May and June.

The decision could pave the way for Azov Regiment members held in Russia to be tried as terrorists.

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Russia's Criminal Code punishes those found guilty of organizing terrorist activity with life in prison and participants with 10-20 years in prison.

Around 2,500 Ukrainian defenders of the port city of Mariupol, including members of the Azov Regiment, surrendered in May to besieging Russian forces after holding out at the city's Azovstal steel works for weeks.

Around 1,000 of the surrendered fighters have reportedly been transferred to Russia. The others are held by Moscow-backed separatists in eastern Ukraine, where authorities threaten to sentence them to death.

Kyiv has vowed to return the Mariupol defenders home through a prisoner swap and says prosecuting the soldiers would be in breach of the Geneva conventions.

Related article: [Surrendered Azovstal Defenders May Face Death Penalty – Separatists](#)

Russia's Embassy in Britain called over the weekend for Azov Regiment fighters to face a "humiliating" execution by hanging, drawing outrage from Kyiv.

The diplomatic mission's tweet came as Moscow and Kyiv traded blame over a strike on a jail on Russian-held territory that killed around 50 Ukrainian prisoners of war, including members of the Azov Regiment.

Despite Russia's threats, dozens of Azov Regiment fighters were included in a prisoner exchange in late June.

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