

## **Fit to Fight Tonight: Medical Readiness as the Decisive Edge in Ukraine's National Defense**

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Combat power is not theoretical. It is the direct expression of human capability, the capacity to move under load, endure sustained contact, maintain cognitive dominance under pressure, and execute without impairment from **preventable conditions**. In Ukraine's defense of sovereignty, this is the governing reality.

The strength of the force is determined at the level of the individual soldier, fully capable from teeth to toes. Oral health, musculoskeletal integrity, endurance, and cognitive clarity are not auxiliary concerns; they are co-equal components of combat effectiveness. Degradation in any domain reduces the whole. A soldier removed from the fight due to preventable physical decline is not an isolated loss, it is an immediate erosion of combat power at the point of engagement.

### **Internal Attrition and Force Degradation**

A persistent internal attrition (exacerbated illness) places measurable strain on the force. Disease and non-battle injuries are reducing available combat strength through cumulative degradation rather than decisive loss. The scale is significant. Rates of debilitating conditions exceed those observed in prior conflicts, indicating sustained operational demand without adequate recovery cycles.

This burden is intensified by force composition. The average Ukrainian soldier is approximately 40 years old; sustained combat operations at an age where physical resilience, recovery capacity, and tolerance for prolonged strain are inherently reduced when compared to younger forces. Many carry pre-existing or chronic conditions into the fight. Under continuous operational stress, these vulnerabilities accelerate. Fatigue compounds, recovery slows, and susceptibility to injury increases across the formation. This is not a marginal factor; it is a defining condition of force sustainability.

Dental readiness provides a clear illustration. A substantial portion of the force remains at elevated risk for dental emergencies, with conditions progressing to the point of impairing performance or removing personnel from duty. The operational cost is disproportionate. A single preventable case can divert multiple personnel and assets for extended periods, degrading mission focus and tempo. At scale, this constitutes a persistent drain on combat capability.

Musculoskeletal strain and cumulative fatigue further degrade core soldier functions, movement, load-bearing, and sustained positioning. Cognitive performance follows the

same trajectory. Exhaustion and prolonged stress impair decision-making, reaction time, and judgment. These effects do not manifest as immediate collapse. They reduce margin, compress decision space, and degrade performance incrementally until failure occurs under pressure.

### **The Requirement: Fit to Fight Now**

“Fit to fight tonight” is not aspirational. It is the minimum condition required for sustained combat operations. It demands immediate capability, not deferred readiness.

The current battlespace compresses the traditional sequence of injury, treatment, and return to duty. Care is often delivered later than intended and sustained closer to the point of contact, shifting responsibility for maintaining function to the unit itself. When intervention is not timely, outcomes deteriorate, complications increase, and available combat power declines.

Simultaneously, non-battle conditions accumulate without resolution. Issues that would be contained under routine care cycles now persist, intensify, and recur. The force continues to operate, but under increasing physiological strain.

### **Command Risk and Force Sustainability**

Commanders are operating within a constrained decision space. Maintaining forces in position preserves combat mass, cohesion, and defensive continuity. Units embedded in their sector provide stability that cannot be rapidly regenerated.

This approach carries cost. Personnel who remain in the fight while managing unresolved conditions operate with diminished endurance, reduced focus, and slower response. These degradations accumulate and compound across time and formation.

Alternatively, removing forces for comprehensive recovery restores long-term capability but reduces immediate combat strength and disrupts defensive structure. Even temporary reductions introduce exposure in a contested environment. This is not a binary choice. It is a continuous risk calculus where both options carry operational consequences.

### **Aligning the System to the Fight**

The current tension between sustaining combat power and restoring it reflects misalignment between system design and battlefield demand. The objective is not to manage this friction indefinitely. The objective is to remove it.

Forward-positioned medical capability expanded training across the force, and integrated support systems are shifting care closer to the point of need. This reduces time loss, preserves personnel in place, and sustains operational continuity.

At the structural level, transformation efforts emphasize mobility, integration, and responsiveness across command echelons. These changes enable a system that sustains readiness while maintaining combat operations, rather than forcing separation between the two.

Targeted initiatives in dental readiness further reinforce this approach. Standardized assessments, forward capability, and expanded training reduce preventable losses and preserve combat strength across the formation.

## **Conclusion**

Ukraine is defending its sovereignty and its right to exist as a free nation. The condition of its soldiers directly determines its capacity to sustain that defense. Combat effectiveness is not maintained by presence alone, but by a force that can continue to move, think, and fight without degradation from preventable conditions.

The requirement is immediate and continuous. The force must be capable at the moment it is engaged. That condition must be sustained under pressure, across every echelon, and across the full spectrum of soldier health.

Ukraine has demonstrated the ability to hold the line. Sustaining that success depends on preserving the strength of the force at its most fundamental level, from teeth to toes, across every soldier, every unit, and every day of the fight. *“Readiness is the edge, and in this fight, the edge must hold.”*

## **References**

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