



Ukraine, CIA Director John Ratcliffe: «New Russian recruits hold the front for just 20-30 minutes»

Published on 17/07/2026

The new Russian recruits sent to the battlefield in Ukraine reportedly have an average operational expectancy of just 20 to 30 minutes before being killed or wounded. This dramatic assessment was provided by John Ratcliffe, Director of the United States Central Intelligence Agency, speaking at the Pennsylvania Defense and Innovation Summit. The video of Ratcliffe's statement [is available on YouTube](#) on Senator Dave McCormick's channel.

«Our information is consistent with some of the reports coming from open sources in Ukraine», Ratcliffe stated. «The average expectancy of a Russian recruit arriving on the battlefield today is estimated between 20 and 30 minutes».

The data does not naturally indicate that every Russian soldier survives only half an hour from the moment of their arrival in Ukraine. The assessment mainly concerns soldiers newly deployed in the most exposed areas of the front line, where the risk of being spotted and hit has become extremely high.

Drones transformed into low-cost combat machines

According to the CIA director, the main cause of this impressive lethality is represented by the evolution of Ukrainian drones, increasingly specialized, economical, and integrated with automation and artificial intelligence systems.

Small FPV aircraft, reconnaissance drones, loitering munitions, and observation systems now allow for constant surveillance of vast portions of the front. A group of soldiers, a vehicle, or even a single soldier can be spotted a few minutes after entering an open area.

Once the target is identified, the coordinates can be transmitted to the artillery or directly to an attack drone. The result is an increasingly transparent battlefield, where moving without being observed has become extremely difficult.

The new technologies have also drastically reduced the cost necessary to hit a man or a vehicle. A relatively inexpensive drone can destroy vehicles worth millions of euros or pursue individual soldiers within trenches, buildings, and tree lines.

The combat zone extends for kilometers

The front line is no longer just the strip where infantry and armored vehicles directly confront each other.

The continuous presence of drones has created a vast "kill zone" that can extend for numerous kilometers behind the advanced positions. Roads, paths, gathering points, depots, artillery positions, and supply routes are constantly observed.

For this reason, both sides try to move men and materials mainly at night, taking advantage of unfavorable weather conditions, electronic warfare systems, anti-drone nets, and small groups that are difficult to detect.

Even these countermeasures, however, no longer guarantee complete protection. Drones employ thermal sensors, navigation systems increasingly resistant to interference, and alternative links that allow them to continue the mission even in the presence of electronic disturbances.

Russian tactics of small infiltration groups

The growing threat posed by drones has also forced Russian forces to change their tactics.

Large armored columns and assaults conducted by numerous soldiers concentrated in the same sector have become particularly vulnerable. Moscow therefore increasingly uses small infantry units tasked with infiltrating between Ukrainian positions, occupying a trench, or identifying a weak point in the defenses.

These groups often advance on foot, by motorcycle, with quads or small vehicles, trying to reduce their visibility. The dispersion of forces allows limiting losses caused by a single attack, but exposes the military to extremely dangerous missions and makes it more complicated to supply, evacuate, or recover them in case of injury.

The figure indicated by the CIA director must therefore be read in the context of this war of attrition: numerous soldiers are sent to positions already monitored by drones and sensors, with limited possibilities to move without being discovered.

Unprecedented Russian losses since World War II

Ratcliffe's statements come as several Western analysis centers describe extremely high Russian losses.

According to a recent assessment by the Center for Strategic and International Studies, between February 2022 and June 2026, Russia would have suffered about 1.4 million military personnel killed or wounded, with a number of casualties that could reach 450,000 units.

The report also estimates that in 2026 Moscow continued to lose about 30,000 men per month overall between dead and wounded.

These are, however, assessments developed through intelligence information, satellite images, obituaries, official communications, and open sources. In the absence of complete data published by the parties involved, the exact numbers of losses remain difficult to verify independently.

The ratio of losses would have changed

According to the CSIS, during the first half of 2026, the ratio of Russian to Ukrainian losses would have reached at times close to eight to one, compared to an average ratio of between two and three to one observed during other phases of the conflict.

This estimate is, however, particularly delicate. Ukraine also continues to suffer heavy losses, while Kyiv and Moscow keep much of the data on their casualties and wounded confidential.

The CIA director's statement is therefore primarily an assessment of U.S. intelligence, not a verifiable statistical data applicable uniformly to every unit or sector of the front.

Technology as a force multiplier

Ratcliffe used the Ukrainian example to highlight a lesson destined to profoundly influence Western armed forces.

Ukraine has a smaller population, economic resources, and industrial capabilities compared to Russia. However, it managed to compensate for part of this imbalance through a rapid cycle of innovation, in which military personnel, technicians, and companies continuously modify drones, software, and communication systems based on experiences gathered directly in combat.

A model very different from traditional Western military programs, which can take years to move from design to distribution to units.

According to Ratcliffe, mastery of emerging technologies is now as important as conventional military strength. Drones, artificial intelligence, electronic warfare, and distributed production can allow a numerically inferior force to slow down or block a larger adversary.

A slow advance paid with thousands of men

The CIA director also noted that Russia would currently control about 20% of Ukrainian territory, compared to the 19% occupied when he took office, about a year and a half earlier.

In other words, despite continuous offensives and heavy losses, the Russian advance would have produced relatively limited territorial gains.

Moscow still maintains significant numerical and industrial superiority, using artillery, gliding bombs, missiles, and drones to exert constant pressure on Ukrainian defenses. The front cannot therefore be considered completely static, but advances often occur slowly and at the cost of a high consumption of men and equipment.

The True Lesson of the War in Ukraine

The claim that a new Russian recruit could be killed or injured within 20-30 minutes of arriving in combat is bound to draw attention, but the more important significance of the statement concerns the transformation of land warfare.

The combination of inexpensive drones, sensors, digital links, electronic warfare, and artificial intelligence is making the battlefield increasingly observable and lethal.

The soldier no longer has to worry only about the enemy he sees in front of him. He can be spotted by an almost invisible small drone, tracked for several minutes, and hit by a system controlled by an operator located kilometers away.

In this scenario, survival increasingly depends on the ability to hide, disperse, disrupt enemy sensors, and continuously adapt tactics and equipment.

The war in Ukraine is demonstrating that numerical superiority remains important, but it is no longer sufficient. On the contemporary battlefield, even a few minutes can separate arrival at the front line from detection and attack.

Sources

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- **Speech by CIA Director John Ratcliffe at the Pennsylvania Defense and Innovation Summit**

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- **Center for Strategic and International Studies - “Russian Blood and Treasure: The Ballooning Costs of Putin’s War”**

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