Zelensky dismisses head of secret service, state prosecutor general

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On Sunday, Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky suspended the head of Ukraine's secret service (SBU), Ivan Bakanov, and the state prosecutor general, Irina Venediktova, accusing both of allowing mass "collaboration" with Russia by officials of their agencies. Zelensky also revealed that there are 651 ongoing criminal investigations into suspected cases of "treason" among officials of both agencies.

The head of the SBU, Ivan Bakanov, is a close childhood friend of Zelensky, his former adviser and the former head of the ruling Servant of the People Party. He was suspended for "failure to fulfill … official duties, leading to the loss of human life and other severe consequences or creating the threat of such consequences."

Since the beginning of the war, tensions between Zelensky and Bakanov have run high, with Zelensky blaming Bakanov and the SBU for some of the major defeats of the Ukrainian army on the battlefield, including the fall of Kherson to Russia. There have also been several high-profile cases of defections to Russia by SBU officials, as well as arrests and charges of high treason brought against top SBU officials.

Bakanov's previous deputy, Vasily Maliuk, a 39-year old career SBU official, will now be the acting head of the SBU. Maliuk was involved in the July 16 arrest of Oleg Kulinich, the head of the SBU's division for Crimea and assistant to Bakanov, who has now been charged with treason. The arrest reportedly occurred without Bakanov's involvement and was arranged for by the Office of the President, which, according to a June report by *Politico*, has directed the SBU's daily activities for some time.

Both Venediktova and Bakanov were named in last year's Pandora papers and, like virtually all Ukrainian officials, have been involved in countless corruption scandals.

The secret service SBU and the office of the state prosecutor are both central to Ukraine's war effort and its campaign of domestic repression.

In a country with a pre-war population of just 40 million people, the SBU has 27,000 employees, almost as many as the FBI, and more than any other secret service in Europe. The SBU has been in charge of a violent campaign of domestic repression, which has involved not only the banning of Ukraine's largest opposition party, but also the mass arrest of opposition politicians, the killing of members of Ukraine's official negotiating team, and the violent persecution of anyone opposed to the war.

According to Russian media reports, the SBU is also the nodal point for the billions of dollars of weapons that are now being pumped into Ukraine by the NATO powers for the war. The *Financial Times* reported last week that both EU and US agencies are increasingly concerned that many of these weapons are going "missing" once they cross the border of Ukraine, with some ending up in the hands of organized crime groups.

The state prosecution has been centrally involved in the crackdown on suspected "collaborators" with Russia. Prior to the war, Venediktova's office prosecuted former President Petro Poroshenko, who came into office after the Western-backed 2014 coup in Kiev, on charges of treason. Poroshenko, who has close ties to both Western officials and the far right, has repeatedly accused Zelensky of being "soft" on Russia. Poroshenko was rumored to be preparing to replace Zelensky just before the war began. Venediktova's replacement, Oleksiy Symonenko, is a trained SBU officer.

The purge exposes the severe crisis in the Zelensky

government and intense conflicts within the ruling class and state apparatus. It comes less than half a year into the imperialist proxy war in Ukraine and amidst serious setbacks and losses for the Ukrainian army. Accusations of treason are a means of purging the state apparatus of individuals whose support for the war is doubted by the CIA. Moreover, the large number of state officials now under investigation indicates the extent of broader public opposition in Ukraine—entirely concealed by the pro-war American and European media—to the US/NATO-instigated war and even sympathy for the Russians.

The *Washington Post* noted in June that "the war in Ukraine is on track to be among modern history's bloodiest," as it was "killing far more soldiers per day than the typical war." Russia, which itself has lost thousands of soldiers, claimed in April to have killed over 23,000 Ukrainian soldiers. While these figures were denied by Kiev, Ukrainian officials acknowledged in June that up to 500 men were dying in battle in East Ukraine every single day. Many more have been wounded.

Washington has pushed for the sacking of Bakanov, in particular, and is playing a major role in the restructuring of both agencies.

The *New York Times* noted in its report on the sackings that "American officials said the moves reflect Mr. Zelensky's efforts to put more experienced leaders in key security positions. U.S. intelligence agencies have been providing huge amounts of information to Ukrainian partners."

The German *Der Spiegel* openly welcomed Bakanov's dismissal as a "long overdue decision."

The NATO powers have long demanded that the SBU undergo a major reform as part of the country's integration into the military alliance, and Bakanov's appointment by Zelensky in 2019 has provoked much criticism both from NATO and Zelensky's domestic opponents.

The Western media and think tanks routinely note that a large number of the SBU's employees have been trained by the Soviet-era KGB, drawing a connection between this background and the many defections to the Russian side since the beginning of the war. What is politely omitted by the bourgeois press, however, is the fact that the SBU is notorious for its infestation with far-right elements and admirers of the Nazi collaborator

and Ukrainian fascist leader Stepan Bandera.

More than perhaps any other government agency, the SBU has played a central role in the imperialist-backed efforts of the Ukrainian state to rehabilitate and promote the World War II-era fascists from the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA), a campaign that has now spread to the pages of the leading Western bourgeois media outlets.

As the successor of the Soviet-era Ukrainian KGB, the SBU controls key historical archives and influences the writing of history in schools and at universities. Viktor Yushchenko, who came to power after the US-backed "Orange Revolution" in 2004-2005, appointed Volodymyr Viatrovych as director of the SBU archives, who was simultaneously working as the head of an OUN-B front organization, the Center for the Study of the Liberation Movement, and publicly glorified the Nazi collaborators from the OUN-B as martyrs and heroes.

The former head of the SBU, Valentyn Nalyvaichenko, who had also played a major role in the Western-backed 2014 coup, has openly denied the role of the OUN in anti-Jewish massacres and its anti-Semitism. He declared in 2015 that the SBU's work would "build on the traditions of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists and UPA in the 1930s-1950s."

When Zelensky appointed his longtime ally Bakanov after his election in 2019, it was likely at least in part a largely unsuccessful attempt to keep these far-right elements in check, under conditions where Zelensky faced intense pressure and mass protests by the Ukrainian far right. The Western-backed purge of the SBU will no doubt further embolden these neo-fascist forces, which are now functioning as the main shock troops of imperialism in the war against Russia.