

Zelensky government shaken by political crisis as NATO prepares escalation of war with Russia

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As NATO is preparing a major escalation of the war against Russia in Ukraine, the government of President Volodymyr Zelensky is gripped by an intense crisis. On Tuesday, top officials including Zelensky's top adviser, six deputy ministers and five regional governors resigned or were dismissed by the Cabinet of Ministers amid widespread corruption allegations.

Kyrylo Tymoshenko, Zelensky's deputy head of office, was the highest-ranking official to resign. Tymoshenko was responsible for media content within the Zelensky regime. While no reason was given for his resignation, Tymoshenko had previously been accused of using expensive cars donated to the Ukrainian government in order to evacuate civilians for his own personal use.

Earlier in December of 2022, Ukrainian news outlet *Ukrainska Pravda* spotted Tymoshenko driving around in a \$100,000 Porsche Taycan amidst martial law.

Reports have also emerged that the five dismissed regional governors were forced to resign due to their ties with the outgoing Tymoshenko.

Earlier on Monday, Ukraine's Deputy Infrastructure Minister Vasyl Lozynskyi was fired and detained by police after being accused of accepting a bribe worth \$400,000 for the purchase of generators. Russian missile strikes have caused widespread blackouts in recent months, leaving millions without power and access to critical infrastructure.

Defense Minister Oleksii Reznikov has also been implicated in a corruption scandal, after reports emerged that the defense ministry signed a contract to procure food for the military at inflated prices two to three times higher than store prices.

Reznikov claimed those prices were a "technical mistake" and has remained in his position so far. However, his deputy, Viacheslav Shapovalov tendered his

resignation. As defense minister, Reznikov is a central figure in the war. A little over a week ago, Reznikov openly declared that "Ukraine is a member of NATO de facto."

In an address Tuesday night, Zelensky tried to present the purge of his government as part of an effort to fight "corruption" and announced that government officials would be banned from traveling abroad for vacation or nonofficial purposes. Zelensky also indicated that more firings may be coming. He warned that he had "made personnel decisions" involving "ministries, regional governments, law enforcement agencies and other departments."

David Arakhamia, the head of Zelensky's Servant of the People party, warned in a Telegram post, "Officials at all levels have been constantly warned through official and unofficial channels: focus on the war, help the victims, reduce bureaucracy and stop doing dubious business. Many of them have actually listened, but some, unfortunately, did not," he said.

"If it doesn't work in a civilized way, it will be done according to the laws of wartime. This applies both to recent purchases of generators and to fresh scandals in the ministry of defense."

Prior to the invasion by Russia in February 2022, government procurement scams were a favorite of the Ukrainian oligarchy with both former President Petro Poroshenko and former Interior Minister Arsen Avakov implicated in similar scandals. While such scandals are pitched as part of the "fight against corruption" as Ukraine seeks entrance to NATO and the EU, in reality such scandals are above all a mode of internal warfare between the various factions of the Ukrainian oligarchy. In 2021, Transparency International ranked Ukraine 122 out of 180 in its list of most corrupt countries.

Whatever the fraudulent nature of Zelensky's claims to be fighting corruption, the revelations indicate that the crisis of the Zelensky government is not least of all fueled by growing social discontent within the population. They leave no doubt that the corrupt oligarchy that has emerged out of the restoration of capitalism by the Stalinist bureaucracy is shamelessly using a significant portion of the tens of billions of dollars that are flooding the country for NATO's war against Russia in order to further enrich itself.

Meanwhile, 8 million out of Ukraine's pre-war population of 39 million have fled the country and another 8 million have been internally displaced. Within Ukraine, 11.4 million have only "insufficient food consumption," an increase of over 3 million over the the past three months, according to the World Food Program. Over one in five children (22.9 percent) in the country are now suffering from chronic malnutrition.

There are also indications that the Ukrainian military is in a state of crisis. Ukraine has suffered immense casualties during the war with US chief of staff Mark Milley indicating that 200,000 soldiers have either died or been wounded on both sides last November. Russia's population is more than three times larger than that of Ukraine.

News reports suggest that Ukrainian forces are losing ground to Russia in Bakhmut, where the main fighting is now taking place. On Tuesday, Zelensky signed a bill into law that imposes draconian penalties on soldiers for deserting and disobeying military orders, and significantly undermines their right to legal defense.

The government reshuffle comes just one week after several top officials of the country's Interior Ministry were killed in a helicopter crash. Among them was Interior Minister Denis Monastyrsky, a close ally of Zelensky and key figure in the wartime leadership. Also last week, Zelensky's former adviser Oleksiy Arestovych, one of the most prominent faces of the war, was forced to resign. Arestovych had been publicly attacked by the military and the far right, as well as Zelensky himself, after he suggested on live television the destruction of a residential building in the city of Dnipro that killed 46 people was caused by Ukrainian air defense and not a Russian missile, contradicting the official line of the Ukrainian government.

Following his dismissal, Arestovych stated publicly that, in his view, Ukraine was unlikely to win the war and acknowledged that as a government official he had purposely misrepresented the real state of the war as

going in Ukraine's favor. Arestovych also suggested that the very existence of the Ukrainian state was in real jeopardy, again contradicting official propaganda.

The crisis of the Zelensky government has been unfolding as top US and NATO officials were touring Kiev and the major European powers involved in the war, in order to prepare the most reckless and significant escalation of the war with Russia to date.

In an indication that the ouster of the officials was motivated at least in part by Ukraine's ongoing efforts to get more heavy weaponry from NATO, the *New York Times*, acting as the semi-official mouthpiece for the Pentagon and CIA, wrote that "the removal of the officials, coming amid almost daily pleas from Ukraine for more Western support, suggested an effort by Mr. Zelensky to clean house and to try to reassure Ukraine's allies that his government would show zero tolerance for graft."

Over the past weeks, the Zelensky government has been pushing to obtain Leopard 2 tanks from the German government and the *Times* acknowledged this has played into the mass dismissals. Later on Tuesday, the German government announced that it would send the Leopard 2 tanks and allow other countries to do the same. Reuters also reported that the US government is considering to send Abrams tanks to Ukraine.

Coming on Ukraine's war plans that are worked out directly with NATO, Zelensky's adviser Andriy Yermak declared that Ukraine was preparing for a war that would last several more years and require hundreds of tanks and billions—if not trillions—more in foreign aid. "We need tanks—not 10-20, but several hundred," Yermak wrote on the Telegram app. "Our goal is [restoring] the borders of 1991 and punishing the enemy, who will pay for their crimes."



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