

Zelensky government in turmoil amidst reports of impending Russian offensive

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The Zelensky government is in turmoil amid indications that Russia is preparing a new offensive with the hundreds of thousands of recruits who were drafted in the partial mobilization drive since September 2022.

On Sunday, the head of the parliamentary faction of the ruling Servant of the People Party, Davyd Arakhamia, announced that Oleksandr Reznikov, Ukraine's defense minister, would step down and be replaced by Maj. General Kyrylo Budanov, currently the head of Ukraine's military intelligence. Writing on Telegram, Arakhamia stated "war dictates changes in personnel policy" and announced that Reznikov would be transferred to head the Ministry of Strategic Industries, whose head Pavlo Riabikin would in turn also be dismissed.

Reznikov has been implicated in a major corruption scandal in which high-ranking officials were reported to have gone on vacation, accepted massive bribes or made use of vehicles that were sent to Ukraine by NATO to help evacuate refugees from the war. Defense Ministry officials have been accused of procuring food for the military at massively inflated prices. Reznikov's deputy, Viacheslav Shapovalov, was already forced to resign.

Reznikov has been a central figure in negotiating the tens of billions of dollars in weapons that are being funneled by NATO into Ukraine. A few weeks ago, he bluntly declared that "Ukraine is a member of NATO de facto."

As of this writing, the official removal of Reznikov has not occurred with some outlets reporting that the Ukrainian parliament will be voting on it. Reznikov has publicly denied Arakhamia's announcement that he would be transferred to head the Ministry of Strategic Industries, declaring that he would not take the position, even if it was offered to him. Ukrainian media have reported that, as a military general, Budanov is legally not allowed to assume the position of the head of the defense ministry, which is reserved to civilian leaders.

However, in a meeting on Monday by Zelensky with the military high command, which included the chief of the Ukrainian army, Valery Zaluzhny, the head of the National Security Council, Alexei Danilov, and military commanders, Budanov was reported as a participant, whereas Reznikov was not. According to the Ukrainian press, the meeting focused on preparing for a potential Russian offensive in the very near future. Following the meeting, Zelensky announced that he would replace a series of regional officials with figures who have a military background.

As part of the corruption scandal, there have also been raids by the Ukrainian Secret Service (SBU) on the homes of the oligarch Ihor Kolomoisky and the former Interior Minister Arsen Avakov, who is notorious for his ties to the neo-Nazi Azov Battalion.

The corruption scandal involving some of the country's best known politicians and oligarchs has no doubt highlighted the callous criminality of Ukraine's oligarchy, which has shamelessly used the war as yet another opportunity to engage in plunder, while the population is suffering extraordinary deprivation and mass death. However, the claim that what is involved in the shake-up of the Ukrainian state and ruling class is a fight against "corruption" cannot be taken at face value.

Within the Ukrainian state apparatus and oligarchy that have emerged out of the restoration of capitalism by the Soviet bureaucracy—itsself one of the largest orgies of organized plunder in history—the alleged fight against "corruption" has long been a preferred method of settling political scores and conflicts within the ruling class and cover up the intervention of the imperialist powers in these conflicts.

The purge of the state apparatus now unfolding is the largest since the beginning of the war, surpassing that of last summer when the head of Ukraine's Secret Service and long-time ally of Zelensky was dismissed and 651

state employees were investigated for treason. As the WSWS noted at the time, there were clear indications of a direct intervention by Washington in this purge.

This time too, the Western press has openly welcomed Zelensky's crackdown on high-ranking officials as an effort to prove to NATO that Ukraine would not tolerate the misuse of the tens of billions of dollars in military aid that have been flooding the country.

There are also reports of significant tensions within the Zelensky administration and the ruling Servant of the People Party as well as between Zelensky and the army's Chief of Staff Valery Zaluzhnyi.

Zaluzhnyi, who is being touted as a potential rival to Zelensky in the 2024 presidential election, is an open admirer of the Ukrainian Nazi collaborator and fascist mass murderer Stepan Bandera and has been repeatedly photographed with far-right paraphernalia. Shortly after celebrating Bandera's 104th birthday on January 2, Zaluzhnyi had his first in-person meeting with US Chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Mark Milley earlier this year.

Now, he is engaged in a public conflict with Zelensky, as Zaluzhnyi has angrily opposed what amounts to a significant cut in pay for military employees and employees of the interior ministry that took effect with new salary regulations set by the government on February 1.

The current purge of the Ukrainian state was preceded by the high-profile resignation of one of Zelensky's top advisors, Oleksyi Arestovych, in mid-January, who was attacked by the military and the far right after he had publicly suggested that Ukrainian air defense was responsible for a missile that hit a residential building and killed dozens of people. Since his resignation, Arestovych has repeatedly gone public with warnings that Ukraine could lose the war and cease to exist as a state.

Days after Arestovych's resignation, a helicopter carrying the entire leadership of the Ukrainian interior ministry crashed, leaving five of its officials dead, including the Interior Minister Denys Monastyrsky, a close ally of Zelensky and central figure in the wartime leadership. No successors for their positions have been named in the two weeks since.

The crisis of the Zelensky government is unfolding as NATO is dramatically escalating the war against Russia. The US and Germany have promised Kiev the delivery of hundreds of Leopard 2 and Abrams tanks, and several NATO members are now openly discussing the deployment of F-16 fighter jets.

The escalation has been accompanied by a flurry of

meetings by high-ranking officials of the Biden Administration and the Pentagon in Kiev since mid-January. It was later also reported that the director of the CIA, William Burns, also traveled to Kiev to meet with Zelensky. Also in January, the US Chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Milley has toured Europe to prepare troops, in his words, "to go on the offensive to liberate Russian-occupied Ukraine."

Amidst this escalation by NATO and reports of a planned offensive by Russia, the Zelensky government has begun to publicly acknowledge that it finds itself in a highly precarious military situation. Russian forces are making advances in the fight over Bakhmut, the focus of the fighting in East Ukraine over the past months.

This weekend, Zelensky publicly complained that the "fighting spirit" in the population had markedly declined. He later acknowledged that the fighting near Bakhmut "is getting tougher." His government has stepped up efforts to crack down on "deserters" and the WSWS has received reports that men across the country are now being forcibly drafted into the military off the streets.

Three months ago, in November, Joint Chiefs Chair Milley declared that both Ukraine and Russia had each suffered about 100,000 casualties in the war so far. This figure has no doubt increased dramatically since. While catastrophic for both sides, proportionally these figures mean far higher losses for Ukraine, which had a prewar population of 40 million as opposed to Russia's 140 million.

Over 8 million people have fled the country since the beginning of the war and several million of those remaining are living in territories controlled by Russia. The vast majority of the working population, already the poorest in Europe before the war, is now completely impoverished. According to the latest figures of the World Food Program, over almost one in four children (22.4 percent) are suffering from chronic malnourishment and 12.8 million Ukrainians who still live in the country have only "insufficient food consumption."



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