

# Zelensky officially dismisses Commander-in-Chief Zaluzhny

Jason Melanovski  
9 February 2024

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has officially dismissed General Valery Zaluzhny as Commander-in-Chief of Ukraine's armed forces, marking a significant turning point in the nearly two-year long NATO proxy war that has claimed the lives of at least 400,000 Ukrainian soldiers.

Ending speculation about Zaluzhny's imminent dismissal that first began over 10 days ago, Zelensky announced the move on his X/Twitter and Telegram channels on Thursday night.

"I met with General Valery Zaluzhny. I thanked him for the two years of defending Ukraine. We discussed the renewal that the Armed Forces of Ukraine require. We also discussed who could be part of the renewed leadership of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. The time for such a renewal is now. I proposed to General Zaluzhny to remain part of the team. We will definitely win! Glory to Ukraine!," Zelensky wrote.

Zelensky's announcement was accompanied by a photo of both Zaluzhny and Zelensky shaking hands and smiling, clearly intending to signal a friendly exchange between the two despite a well-documented, extremely strained relationship.

As Seymour Hersh reported last week, Zelensky feared having "mutiny on his hands" from both the armed forces and the country's far-right political groups who are the most vociferous backers of the war and play a vital role, most notably in Ukraine's special operations. One American official cited by Hersh called Zelensky "a dead man walking" should he fire Zaluzhny. Hersh also reported that Zaluzhny had been meeting with American and Western officials on negotiating a ceasefire with Russia, angering Zelensky.

Zaluzhny will be replaced by General Oleksandr Syrsky, who previously served as head of the Ukrainian Ground Forces since 2019.

Prior to Zaluzhny's firing, both Ukrainian and Western outlets had reported that Zelensky often purposely communicated his orders directly with Syrsky, bypassing Zaluzhny. Syrsky is also notorious for leading the defense of Bakhmut, which cost the lives of tens of thousands of Ukrainian soldiers in a battle that became known as a "meat grinder" due to high casualties on both sides.

Similar tactics are now being employed in the eastern city of Avdiivka, which Zelensky has reportedly ordered to be held despite the high-risk of encirclement of Ukrainian forces and heavy casualties as earlier in Bakhmut. Syrsky's appointment will thus likely result in continued high casualties and growing resentment from the frontlines towards Zelensky.

Reporting on the initial reaction to the move, the *Financial Times* wrote, "Ukrainian troops and western officials speaking on condition of anonymity told the FT that Syrsky's appointment as top commander bodes ill for the war. Soldiers who have criticized him in interviews say that he has callously thrown away troops. Some have dubbed him 'the butcher.'"

The *Financial Times* also quoted a Ukrainian soldier on X/Twitter as saying "We are all screwed". He added that this was the sentiment among troops in a private chat group "who went through all stages of the defense of Bakhmut with Syrsky."

Illia Ponomarenko, a right-wing war reporter for the pro-NATO *Kyiv Independent* who was previously embedded with the neo-Nazi Azov Battalion, signaled his resentment with the switch to Syrsky from the standpoint of Ukrainian nationalism, stating on X/Twitter: "Yes, Ukraine's new top commanding general in its war against Russian invasion is an ethnic Russian born and raised in Russia. He studied military affairs to be commissioned as an officer in Moscow. He

moved to Ukraine as a teen in 1980.”

Ponomarenko also reported that he believed Zaluzhny would soon retire from the military to start his “political career,” which served as the alleged initial source of tensions between Zelensky and Zaluzhny.

Despite the failed counteroffensive that cost the lives of over a reported 125,000 Ukrainian soldiers this past spring and summer, Zaluzhny remains a popular figure as a “war hero” in Ukraine and was rumored to be Zelensky’s main rival in presidential elections originally scheduled for 2024. Zelensky canceled the elections as tensions with Zaluzhny escalated last fall.

Zaluzhny has been polling higher than Zelensky in almost every major poll. Above all, he has established a close relationship with the country’s far-right. He has publicly expressed admiration for the Ukrainian fascist leader Stepan Bandera and has been photographed repeatedly with far-right paraphernalia.

Last week, following rumors of impending dismissal, a picture of Zaluzhny meeting with the commander of the neo-Nazi Right Sector Andriy Stempitsky was posted to Facebook with a portrait of Bandera in the background. Such photos are clearly meant to send a menacing political message to anyone opposing Zaluzhny within Ukrainian politics, and especially Zelensky.

Organizations like the Right Sector have been armed for over a decade by the imperialist powers and had played a central role first in the US- and EU-backed far-right coup in Kiev in February 2014, and, since 2022, in the NATO proxy war against Russia.

In an attempt likely intended to keep Zaluzhny under Zelensky’s control, he was reportedly first offered several different lesser positions within the Ukrainian government, including ambassador to the United Kingdom and head of the National Security and Defense Council, both of which he apparently refused. According to Ponomarenko, Zaluzhny’s refusal to accept these positions under the Zelensky government could signal his turn toward direct involvement in Ukrainian politics in opposition to Zelensky.

Despite the crisis within the Zelensky government, National Security Council spokesman John Kirby signaled that Washington would continue to back Kiev stating “we’re not concerned about Ukraine stability” as a result of the move.

On the same day that Zaluzhny’s firing became

official, the US Senate voted to advance a \$95 billion foreign aid package for both Ukraine and Israel, signaling that it views both states as essential outposts from the viewpoint of American imperialism. According to the initial version of the bill, Ukraine would receive \$60 billion of the \$95 billion in aid.



To contact the WSW and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**