

Zelensky appoints new prime minister in major government shakeup

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22 July 2025

Last week, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky undertook the largest shakeup of top government officials since the NATO-backed proxy war between Ukraine and Russia began in February 2022. Zelensky has officially appointed a new prime minister along with reshuffling several other top cabinet positions. The primary aim of the government shakeup is to solidify Kiev's ties with the US administration of Donald Trump. US imperialism is still Ukraine's most important military backer.

Yulia Svyrydenko, 39, was confirmed as the country's new prime minister on Thursday and will replace former Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal, who has served as prime minister since 2020. Shmyhal will remain part of the Zelensky government as the newly appointed defense minister.

Svyrydenko previously served as first deputy prime minister and minister of economic development and trade. She played the leading role in negotiating the "critical minerals deal" this past spring between Ukraine and the Trump administration that saw Ukraine hand over vast sections of its economy to US imperialism in exchange for continued military aid in the war against Russia.

"She was the key and the only person leading these negotiations. She managed to prevent them from unraveling," said Tymofiy Mylovanov, a former economy minister who previously worked with Svyrydenko.

The eventual signing of the agreement came at a critical time for the Zelensky administration, less than two months after a disastrous public White House meeting between Zelensky and Trump. While initially intended for the signing of an earlier version of the minerals deal agreement, the meeting ended in a shouting match between the Ukrainian and US

presidents.

Plans to sign the deal were scrapped, and Zelensky was ejected from the White House following a public dressing down by both Trump and US Vice President JD Vance for failing to be sufficiently indebted to his US backers.

Apart from her experience with the Trump administration, Svyrydenko is reported to be a Zelensky loyalist and friendly with Zelensky's closest aide Andriy Yermak. She has also earned praise from the American Chamber of Commerce in Ukraine for her management of the Ukrainian economy.

In addition to a new prime minister and switching Shmyhal to defense minister, Zelensky removed Oksana Markarova as Ukraine's ambassador to the US. She had been criticized by Republican leaders due to her ties to the Biden administration and in particular Victoria Nuland, Biden's undersecretary of state for political affairs.

Underlining the commanding role of the US over the Zelensky regime, Zelensky had previously announced his intentions to appoint outgoing Defense Minister Rustem Umerov as the US ambassador, but that move was reportedly nixed by Washington, according to opposition MP Yaroslav Zheleznyak.

Instead, Olha Stefanishyna, Ukraine's former deputy prime minister for European integration, will become the country's ambassador to the US, Zelensky announced last Thursday.

Despite a concerted effort to remake a cabinet dedicated to pleasing the Trump government, Zelensky's political standing in Washington is still very much in question, according to recent reports.

On Friday, investigative journalist Seymour Hersh reported that US officials have tired of Zelensky and could move to have him replaced within a "few

months” by former top General Valery Zaluzhny. Now ambassador to the UK, Zaluzhny has long had extensive ties to the far right. Nearly a year and a half following his dismissal in February 2024, he remains one of the most popular figures in Ukraine and well connected within NATO.

As Hersh reported on Substack:

Zaluzhnyi is now seen as the most credible successor to Zelensky. I have been told by knowledgeable officials in Washington that that job could be his within a few months. Zelensky is on a short list for exile, if President Donald Trump decides to make the call. If Zelensky refuses to leave his office, as is most likely, an involved US official told me: “He’s going to go by force. The ball is in his court.” There are many in Washington and in Ukraine who believe that the escalating air war with Russia must end soon, while there’s still a chance to make a settlement with its president, Vladimir Putin.

Hersh’s article echoes a recent report in the *Financial Times* that despite renewing arms shipments to Ukraine, Ukraine’s European backers are “still assuming Trump was predisposed to seeing Putin as his main negotiating partner in any settlement and Zelensky as the primary obstacle to a workable peace deal.”

Apart from his shaky relationship with Trump, there are also indications that Zelensky has alienated sections of the Ukrainian ruling class. Amid mounting social discontent and fatigue with the war, they view Zelensky’s continued rule as a threat to their own interests.

One recent article by the British *Spectator* titled “Ukrainians have lost faith in Zelensky” noted that a recent “spate of arrests and searches against Zelensky loyalists suggest serious political infighting at the heart of the Kyiv government.” The article continued to quote a former senior official in Zelensky’s administration as saying, “If the war continues soon there will be no Ukraine left to fight for,” and stated that Zelensky was “prolonging the war to hold on to

power.”

A recent poll showed that 70 percent of Ukrainians believe that their leaders use the war to enrich themselves. Hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians have been killed in the war so far, with many more maimed and wounded.

Amid the cabinet reshuffle last week, Zelensky once again submitted to parliament to continue martial law and military mobilization for another 90 days, which was first implemented in February 2022. Under these measures, tens of thousands of Ukrainian citizens such as the Trotskyist youth leader Bogdan Syrotiuk have been imprisoned, thousands of Ukrainian men have been dragged to the front by press gangs and over 6.8 million people have fled the country, the majority of whom will never return. Should the measure pass, it will mark the 16th extension of martial law and mobilization under Zelensky, whose presidential term was originally scheduled to end in May 2024.



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