

Zelensky's chief of staff and closest ally forced to resign amid massive corruption scandal

Jason Melanovski
30 November 2025

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's chief of staff Andriy Yermak was forced to resign on Friday just hours after investigators from Ukraine's National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine (NABU) raided Yermak's apartment as part of a \$100 million scheme case known as "Operation Midas" that has shaken the crisis-ridden Zelensky government.

Yermak, Ukraine's most powerful political figure next to Zelensky, served as both Zelensky's top aide and lead negotiator in the ongoing United States-backed plan to end the ongoing NATO-backed proxy war against Russia.

In a joint statement, the NABU and the Specialised Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office stated the raids were officially "authorised" and linked to an unspecified investigation, which was certainly related to the \$100 million embezzlement scandal first exposed by NABU earlier in November.

According to the allegations, several leading members of the Ukrainian government and a close business associate of both Zelensky and Yermak were involved in an embezzlement scheme around Energoatom, the state nuclear company.

Energy Minister Svitlana Hrynychuk and Justice Minister Herman Halushchenko were already forced to resign after it was revealed they had allegedly received kickback payments worth 10 to 15 percent of contract values from contractors building fortifications on Ukraine's energy infrastructure.

Other alleged accomplices in the scheme included former Deputy Prime Minister Oleksiy Chernyshov and Timur Mindich—a close Zelensky and Yermak associate who is a co-owner of Zelensky's own former TV studio Kvartal95. Mindich was reportedly tipped off about the raid and had already fled for Israel by the time investigators raided his apartment.

In the following weeks rumors circulated that Yermak and even Zelensky may be next, as their well-known close association with Mindich rendered their claims of innocence in the kickback scheme both logically and politically untenable. Yermak's voice also allegedly appears on recorded conversations with Mindich released by NABU.

Mindich and his other close business associate Ukrainian oligarch Igor Kolomoysky were instrumental in bringing the former comedian Zelensky to power in the 2019 presidential elections and Zelensky even traveled in Mindich's personal armored car during the campaign. Zelensky also owned a high end apartment in the same building as Mindich, where NABU investigators discovered a gold plated bathroom that Mindich had built for himself. That Yermak and Zelensky himself were completely unaware of Mindich's massive embezzlement scheme involving ministers in their own government is highly improbable.

Zelensky, clearly aware that his own fate is up in the air, announced Yermak's resignation on Friday in a video.

The resignation of Yermak is the temporary culmination of a ferocious battle within the Ukrainian state and ruling class. On the surface, this struggle has been centered on a war between the Zelensky regime and NABU, which has in the past been strongly backed by both the EU and the United States as means to intervene directly in Ukraine's turbulent and clannish oligarchical politics.

Earlier in July, Zelensky—likely aware of the massive embezzlement and robbery endemic to his government—had moved to limit the power of NABU and SAPO, leading to the largest protests across the country since the beginning of the NATO-backed proxy war in February 2022.

According to Zelensky, stripping the agency of its

independence was necessary to combat “Russian influence.” At the same time, Ukraine’s security services (SBU), which is closely aligned with Zelensky, had carried out raids of NABU to supposedly arrest Russian spies.

As a result of both domestic outrage and intervention from the EU and the US, Zelensky ultimately was forced to backtrack and withdraw his attempt to take over NABU.

NABU was set up in the wake of the US and EU-backed coup of elected President Viktor Yanukovich in February 2014, which triggered an eight-year-long civil war in East Ukraine, leading up to Russia’s full-scale invasion in February 2022. Founded in 2015 by the right-wing nationalist government of Petro Poroshenko, NABU is almost entirely created and directed by the US. Its staff is trained directly by the FBI and European Union.

In 2020, the former Prosecutor General of Ukraine, Viktor Shokin, complained that NABU was created by order of then US Vice President Joe Biden in order to undermine Ukraine’s own State Bureau of Investigation and “put there emissaries who listen to the United States.”

In the days leading up to his resignation *Ukrainska Pravda* reported that Yermak was attempting to undercut the ongoing NABU corruption investigation by ordering Zelensky’s loyal security forces in the SBU to prepare charges against Oleksandr Klymenko, Head of the Specialised Anti-Corruption Prosecutor’s Office (SAPO).

The popular Ukrainian news outlet also reported that Zelensky had attempted but failed to call a truce with NABU and SAPO officials in a meeting following the scandal’s outbreak. Prior to his resignation, NABU officials had publicly hinted that Yermak was under investigation and that he was openly attempting to undermine it.

It has been no secret that Washington and EU officials have long been extremely skeptical, if not hostile, to Yermak and his immense influence in Ukrainian politics. In July, the *Financial Times* ran an extensive essay about Yermak as the “grey cardinal” of Ukrainian politics, citing numerous officials complaining about his influence on Zelensky.

In recent months, the Trump administration, in particular, has viewed Yermak as an obstacle to a negotiated deal—strongly opposed by its EU rivals—with Russia that would maximize US profit from the end of the proxy war that has already killed hundreds of thousands while at the same time striking a long term agreement

with the oligarchic Putin regime. In an interview with the *Atlantic* just days ago, Yermak as the chief negotiator outright refused to even consider conceding Ukrainian territory—one of the main stipulations of the Trump peace plan—in order to end the war.

With Yermak gone, the position of Zelensky has been dramatically weakened.

In the population, there is immense anger and disgust over the corruption scandal, which reveals the shameless theft of money by the same oligarchs and government officials who have been sending hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians into their death, falsely promising them “democracy” and “freedom”. Zelensky’s approval has plunged nearly 40 percentage points and is now below 20 percent—the lowest mark since his election in 2019. For the first time since the beginning of the war, more Ukrainians now distrust than trust him.

At the same time, the growing popular dissatisfaction with Zelensky is exploited by sections of the ruling class and the imperialist powers in an embittered struggle over the country’s foreign policy and division of the spoils of the war. Shortly after the announcement of Yermak’s resignation, Zelensky’s arch-rival, ex-commander-in-chief Valery Zaluzhny, issued a de facto endorsement of Trump’s efforts to broker a deal. Now the ambassador to the UK, Zaluzhny stated that “the overwhelming majority of wars end either with mutual defeat or with both sides convinced, that they won, or in other variants [of these scenarios].” Zaluzhny, who maintains extensive ties to the country’s far-right, was ousted by Zelensky in 2024 but still enjoys substantial support within sections of the Ukrainian state and the imperialist powers, and has been widely discussed as Zelensky’s possible successor.



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