Ukrainian parliament approves new SBU-linked defense minister

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In a repudiation of widespread protests that followed the dismissal of former Ukrainian Defense Minister Mykhailo Fedorov, the Ukrainian parliament unanimously approved Yevhen Khmara to replace the former Western-backed Fedorov as defense minister on Wednesday.

The dismissal of Fedorov, who is widely associated with a dramatic escalation of Ukrainian-NATO drone attacks on Russia, had provoked protests from aggressively pro-war layers, drawing tens of thousands of people. At the protests in Kiev in support of Fedorov, one of many reactionary placards read, "Fedorov = more Russian deaths, Syrsky [the former Army chief] = more Ukrainian deaths." Fedorov's removal had also been criticized by leading Ukrainian politicians and EU officials who, according to *The Guardian*, had been "startled" by the move.

Shortly after dismissing Fedorov, Zelensky appointed Khmara, then head of the Ukrainian Secret Service (SBU) as acting defense minister. Only in January 2026, Khmara had been appointed acting director of the SBU, the agency principally in charge of overseeing a domestic campaign of terror against opponents of the war and the Zelensky regime.

Infamous for its infestation with neo-Nazis, the SBU initiated and oversaw the persecution of Ukrainian socialist Bogdan Syrotiuk, who was recently sentenced to 15 years in prison for his internationalist opposition to the war and exposure of Ukrainian fascism. Khmara's appointment as head of the SBU was endorsed by white supremacist Andriy Biletsky, founder and former commander of the neo-Nazi Azov Battalion and current commander of Ukraine's fascist 3rd Assault Brigade.

Just prior to the parliamentary vote on his appointment as defense minister, Khmara participated in the reinterment ceremony of Yevhen Konovalets, founder of the fascist Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN). Zelensky and Khmara were photographed happily shaking hands at the fascist celebration, demonstrating Khmara's and the entire Ukrainian state's full commitment to both the escalation of the war and the promotion of fascist forces.

Khmara's appointment is aimed at further consolidating the role of the SBU in Ukraine amidst ever wider opposition to the war and the brutal campaign to forcibly mobilize men for the slaughter. In recent weeks, public discontent over the war has significantly escalated. On an almost daily basis, videos showing people being kidnapped off the streets, people attacking recruitment officers and others pleading with them to spare their spouses are going viral in Ukraine and internationally.

The seizure of physically and mentally ill people, who are legally exempt from mobilization, has provoked particular outrage. In one case, a 46-year-old man with severe mental and health problems, who weighed some 400 pounds (200 kilograms), was declared "fit for service." According to his mother, who was also his caretaker, he did not even realize that a war was going on. He died shortly thereafter at the recruitment center.

There have also been numerous cases of people dying under unclarified circumstances at the Territorial Recruitment Centers (TRC) after having been kidnapped. In one case, Mykola Mishchenko, 34, died two days after having been forcibly mobilized. His mother said that his body was covered in bruises and one arm had been broken. In this as in many other deaths, the police simply claimed he had fallen from a window at the TRC.

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A recent report by the German weekly *Die Zeit* admitted that hundreds of Ukrainian soldiers, who are sent to Germany for military training, seize upon the earliest opportunity to flee the army. And even the pro-war *Nation* magazine recently ran a lengthy story on the growing number of draft dodgers who chose to effectively go underground to avoid being sent to the front and killed. Last week, the famous Ukrainian pop star Olya Polyakova, who was reportedly friends with Zelensky, described the country as a "concentration camp" in a widely publicized interview. A blogger who criticized the violent mobilization drive, Marian Chava, was sentenced recently to five and a half years in prison for "endangering national security."

Under these conditions, the appointment of Khmara is both a threat and a provocation against a population that, increasingly, demonstrates its refusal to be used as cannon fodder in the war against Russia.

It is also tied to the escalating infighting within the ruling class. Khmara's appointment allows Zelensky to further use the SBU to consolidate his increasingly embattled position within the state against the Western-backed National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine (NABU), which has brought a myriad of high-level corruption charges against Zelensky's associates both inside and outside of the government. NABU was set up in the wake of the 2014 Western-backed coup that deposed elected President Viktor Yanukovych. 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 the European Union.

On the same day that Khmara was approved, NABU coordinated the dismissal of state-owned Sense Bank's supervisory board head and the suspension of its CEO amid a major corruption probe involving the bank, directly tied to the massive $100 million Energoatom scandal that erupted in November of last year. The accusations led to the resignation or dismissal of Energy Minister Svitlana Hrynchuk and Justice Minister Herman Halushchenko, and then later Zelensky's chief of staff Andriy Yermak and Defense Minister Rustem Umerov.

According to the latest accusations, the suspects in the investigation are accused of laundering $3.4 million through Sense Bank to post bail for former Justice and Energy Minister Halushchenko. The most high-ranking suspect is Zelensky's Deputy Chief of Staff Iryna Mudra, who was subsequently fired following the announcement of the newest NABU investigation into the Zelensky regime.

The corruption scandal, while clearly part of an effort to settle accounts within the ruling class, has socially explosive implications. In a desperately poor country, where thousands, including the mentally and physically ill, are kidnapped to be sent to almost certain death at the front, it exposes the true class character of the war. After over four years and hundreds of thousands of dead, the corruption scandal leaves no doubt that, to Zelensky and the oligarchy he represents, the war is first and foremost an opportunity to enrich themselves.

Zelensky's decision to fire the Western-backed Fedorov and then replace him with an SBU veteran exposes the deep crisis of the entire war effort and ruling class. Under these conditions, former acting Defense Minister Khmara is positioning himself as someone who can be trusted both to escalate the war against Russia and to better manage the growing domestic discontent.

In a video address on Tuesday night, Fedorov railed against corruption within the government and called for presidential elections, which have been undemocratically canceled by the Zelensky regime since the declaration of martial law in February 2022. "It is dangerous when society develops the feeling that the main criterion for an appointment is not professionalism, results, or the ability to transform the country, but personal loyalty to the system," Fedorov stated, implicitly acknowledging the profound crisis engulfing the Ukrainian ruling class.

For workers and youth in Ukraine and beyond, the path forward lies not in siding with one faction of the oligarchy or another. Rather, the turn must be toward the political program for which socialist Bogdan Syrotiuk was imprisoned and sentenced to 15 years: the mobilization and unification of the working class in Russia, Ukraine and internationally, to put an end to this war and the capitalist system as a whole.

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