

Zelensky begins mass dismissal of cabinet ministers

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On Wednesday, Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky began the largest shake-up of the country's cabinet since the beginning of the war. So far, seven ministers have resigned and one presidential aide was fired.

Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba is thus far the most prominent of Zelensky's ministers to offer his resignation in a mass exodus that is expected to continue in the coming days.

Other exiting staff include Justice Minister Denys Maliuska, Ecology Minister Ruslan Strilets, Deputy Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration Olha Stefanishyna, and Deputy Prime Minister Reintegration Minister Iryna Vereshchuk, and Strategic Industries Minister Alexander Kamyshin, who was in charge of weapons production.

According to the head of Zelensky's Servant of the People party in parliament, David Arakhamia, the changes could end up involving more than half of Zelensky's staff. It is the largest government shake-up since 2020, when Zelensky dismissed much of his early government in favor of ministers closely tied to Western imperialism and the former administration of President Petro Poroshenko.

On Thursday, Ukraine's parliament voted to accept Kuleba's resignation. He will be replaced by Andrii Sybiha, who previously served as deputy foreign minister. Kuleba, who began his political career under Poroshenko, has served as Ukraine's Foreign Minister since March 2020 following the dismissal of then Prime Minister Oleksiy Honcharuk and his entire cabinet. During his brief six-month tenure as prime minister, Honcharuk was best known for attending a neo-Nazi rock concert in Kiev.

Kuleba was involved in the elaboration of a new national security strategy to "recover" Crimea in early

2021, which is widely seen as a major factor in provoking the Russian invasion a year later. Since 2022, he has continually prodded the Western imperialist powers to remove any limitations on Ukraine's use of long-range weapons inside of Russia. He developed particularly close ties with the Biden administration and played a leading role in finalizing the ten-year bilateral security agreement between the United States and Ukraine in June.

On Tuesday, just one day before his resignation, Kuleba gave an interview to CNN, calling upon Ukraine's NATO backers to send more long-range weapons and lift restrictions on striking airfields deep inside Russia, as well as permit the use of NATO air defense systems to shoot down Russian missiles over Ukrainian territory. Dismissing any concerns over the escalation of war with a nuclear-armed Russia, Kuleba stated, "What else has to happen for everyone in the world to understand that the escalation argument is flawed? It never worked in the last two and a half years." He added that fear of escalation "simply serves as an excuse not to do something."

Zelensky, who is ruling the country without a legal mandate after suspending presidential elections, has yet to offer any details on the reasons for the mass resignation of his ministers. He only stated on Wednesday that Ukraine needs "new energy, and that includes in diplomacy." His own party appears to be divided about the government shake-up. According to Russia's Gazeta.ru, Zelensky had to overcome opposition within his own Servant of the People party to complete the sweeping changes especially in regards to Kuleba's dismissal and was looking to trade votes for "personal, financial or other bonuses." Because of the opposition in the ruling party, Zelensky has still not been able to dismiss as many ministers and officials as

he wants to.

The shake-up is an indication of the intense military, political and economic crisis gripping the country.

In East Ukraine, the Ukrainian army is faced with the prospect of collapse. Russia moved only a limited number of troops to counter the Kursk invasion and nearly a month later, Russian forces are now reportedly advancing at a daily rate of 500 meters to one kilometer on several axes in the Donetsk region near the strategically important city of Pokrovsk, which serves as a road and rail hub for the Ukrainian army.

Just 26,000 residents remain in the city formerly of over 40,000 as Russian forces are now reportedly just 10 km east of the city. Its capture is regarded as imminent by military analysts and the Ukrainian government, which ordered its evacuation earlier in August. With further advances into Donetsk, Russia will likely be able to strike Ukrainian forces throughout the neighboring Zaporizhia region.

Meanwhile, after over two years of war and half a million dead, opposition to the war in the population and among the soldiers is growing. Almost every day, new videos circulate showing Ukrainians confronting military recruiters to prevent them from kidnapping men off the street even in the country's western regions where nationalism has historically had the most support.

At the front lines, three companies of a battalion of the Ukrainian National Guard, including their commanders, refused to execute the orders of the military high command because of a "huge personnel shortage," according to Strana.ua. Ukrainian troops are outnumbered by Russian troops by a ratio of one to three. Ukrainian soldiers are reportedly also deserting in large numbers, in what are growing indications of the unfolding disintegration of the Ukrainian armed forces.

In addition to successive military setbacks in East Ukraine, the country is facing a severe energy crisis caused by the war. One of the principal components of Russia's military strategy has consisted of targeted attacks on energy infrastructure, which have led to rolling blackouts throughout the country and contributed to masses of Ukrainians fleeing the country or refusing to return from abroad. It is widely feared that the country will be unable to provide enough energy for heat and electricity this winter, and it was

the energy minister who was first forced to leave earlier this week.

There are also indications that the government crisis and conflicts in the ruling class are propelled by the US presidential elections. As the *Financial Times* reported, "Uncertainty surrounding the upcoming US presidential election and internal pressures in the EU are also of concern to Kyiv, which fears the long-term security and financial commitments it relies on could soon wane." In an interview with podcaster Lex Fridman on Tuesday, Donald Trump reiterated his promise of ending the war declaring, "If I win, as president-elect, I'll have a deal made, guaranteed. That's a war that shouldn't have happened." For many years, the war against Russia in Ukraine has been central to the factional infighting between the Democratic Party and the Republicans. In 2019, the Democrats made the arming of Ukraine for war against Russia a central issue in their effort to impeach Donald Trump.

Given the intense political crisis in the US, one aspect of the frenzied government reshuffle in Kiev may well be an effort by Zelensky to create as many "facts on the ground" as possible before a potential shift in power in the White House. Zelensky is expected to attend the United Nations' General Assembly and meet with outgoing US President Joe Biden later this month. Several reports in Western media speculated that he hoped to have a new cabinet to present to his NATO backers, who have no doubt been consulted beforehand. Last week, Zelensky also announced that he planned to present Biden with a four-part "victory plan" but declined to give any details.

In an interview with NBC on Tuesday, Zelensky claimed that his adventurist invasion of the Kursk region is part of his "victory plan" and that Ukraine plans to hold onto the reported 1,000 square kilometers of occupied Russian territory indefinitely.



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