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Zelensky Purges Military While Most Ukrainians Blame Him for Government Corruption

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has fired all of the regional military officials in charge of the country's conscription campaign after a series of corruption scandals. Those officials who did not participate in corruption schemes can retain their military rank if they proceed to the front line.

On August 11, after a meeting of the National Security and Defense Council focusing on the findings of a probe into Ukraine's military recruitment offices, Zelensky announced his plans to purge the military.



AP Images
Volodymyr Zelensky

"Our decisions are the following: We are dismissing all regional 'military commissars'. This system should be run by people who know exactly what war is and why cynicism and bribery in times of war constitute treason," he said.

Zelensky divulged that Ukrainian authorities had launched 112 criminal investigations against officials working in territorial recruitment centers, with a total of 33 suspects including commissars, medical commissions employees, and other officials across six regions.

"Some took cash, some took cryptocurrency — that's the only difference. The cynicism is the same everywhere," Zelensky declared, pledging that those found guilty would be held accountable.

He added that if innocent officials "want to keep their shoulder marks and prove their dignity, they should go to the war front."

Furthermore, Zelensky said combat veterans or those unfit for military action due to crippling injuries, but who have still "retained their dignity," would replace the sacked officials.

The Ukrainian leader's announcement came after authorities unearthed a widespread scheme that allegedly permitted Ukrainian recruits to buy fraudulent medical certificates to dodge conscription. Evgeny Borisov, a former senior conscription officer in Odessa Region, was arrested on similar corruption grounds.

According to Ukrainian media outlets, following Kyiv's declaration of a general mobilization of troops in February last year, members of Borisov's family purchased a villa in Spain apart from other luxuries, paying amounts equivalent to several million dollars.

On 12 August, *The New York Times* also reported that ex-Ukrainian lawmaker Sergey Pashinsky had made millions in weapons sales since the onset of the Russo-Ukrainian crisis in February 2022.

The *Times* report claimed that Ukrainian military officials were desperate to obtain as much Soviet-era ammunition as possible, using the help of the former MP who had informal connections in the arms business.



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Pashinsky had hitherto overseen military expenditure for years, the *Times* pointed out, adding that Ukrainian Armored Technology, a company believed to be associated with Pashinsky, has since become the “biggest private arms supplier in Ukraine.”

The firm allegedly purchases and resells grenades, artillery shells, and rockets to the Ukrainian military via a trans-European network of middlemen. In 2022, Ukrainian Armored Technology reported sales amounting to over \$350 million, having risen from just \$2.8 million in the previous year.

The paper, quoting unnamed Ukrainian officials, alleged that authorities are investigating the company’s pricing as well as Pashinsky’s reported ties with procurement officials and companies abroad.

One of Pashinsky’s alleged schemes entailed Bulgaria — a key producer of Soviet-type ammunition that has refused to provide it directly to Ukraine.

The former Ukrainian MP reportedly informed his local contacts to place orders and label them as priorities. The shipments were falsely listed as headed toward Poland via middleman Andrzej Kowalczyk, the *Times* claimed.

The same article claimed that prices would increase at each stage as the intermediaries took their cuts, with the Ukrainian military footing the bill.

Nonetheless, European aid mainly picked up the tab, the paper reported. While Western officials are privately upset about Pashinsky, they have kept mum for fear of being accused of following a Russian narrative about Ukrainian corruption, the *Times* article claimed.

The former MP has dismissed such allegations, labeling himself as a “responsible citizen of my country.”

In 2019, Zelensky lambasted Pashinsky as a “criminal,” with the country’s anti-corruption bureau conducting an investigation into the former lawmaker. Authorities raided his house and office in 2020.

According to a recent study by two Ukrainian institutions, more than 75 percent of Ukrainian citizens think that Zelensky is directly to blame for the widespread corruption in the government and military administrations.

The joint sociological study, conducted by the Democratic Initiatives Foundation and the Kyiv International Sociological Institute (KIIS) with aid from the Prague Civil Society Center, disclosed that 77.6 percent of Ukrainians surveyed blamed the country’s corruption on the Ukrainian leader as Zelensky has consolidated his power since February 2022, according to [reports](#) from the portal NEWS UA.

Alluding to the study’s results, sociologist Petro Burkovsky, who serves as the director of the Democratic Initiatives Foundation, [said](#):

The delay in solving the problems, which undermined people’s faith in victory, also affects the president’s reputation. The survey showed that 77.6% of citizens believe that the president is directly responsible for corruption in the government and military administration.

Burkovsky added that “the widespread argument that the government does not have time for everything” simply no longer works. After 16 months of war, there is no longer a valid excuse for those



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who fail to take action to eliminate abuses and do nothing to combat negligence and incompetence. Citizens increasingly believe that the state, with Zelensky at the helm, “have had time to do everything, to do everything to combat [corruption], using the powers that were extended during the state of war.”

He continued,

In other words, officials who fail in their duties are no less dangerous as enemies at this time than Russia. And the citizens expect Volodymyr Zelensky to be determined to remove such persons from the leadership, to listen to, and appoint executives who will honestly point out the problems and competently propose solutions.... Therefore, the purging of territorial recruitment centers of “invaluable personnel” should be the start of a countdown, not a point in the process of reforming the defense sector. In this case, the path of easy solutions should not be followed. It is assumed that the majority of citizens could support a “simple idea” of directing offending military commanders to the front line. However, can we trust the weapons and the lives of soldiers to men who have cynically traded in their exemption cards? Such a decision is unlikely to be supported in combat units. But the replacement of corrupt officials with veterans will find a response in society.



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