

Hell has frozen over: Head of the Office of the President of Ukraine Andriy Yermak resigns

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On 28 November, Volodymyr Zelensky announced that the Head of the Office of the President of Ukraine (OPU), Andriy Yermak, had tendered his resignation. Earlier that day, agents from the National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine (NABU) conducted searches at his residence and office. The operation was linked to Operation Midas (see '[Operation Midas: the largest corruption scandal within Zelensky's inner circle](#)'). No successor to Yermak has yet been appointed. He himself stated that he was 'heading to the front'.

In recent weeks, NABU and the Specialised Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office (SAP) reported that recordings in their possession featured an individual using the pseudonym Ali Baba – believed to be Yermak – instructing law enforcement agencies to obstruct the work of anti-corruption bodies. It was also revealed that individuals implicated in the case had used services controlled by the OPU to collect compromising materials on NABU and SAP officials, civil society activists, and opposition politicians.

Yermak's resignation brings to an end a tenure of more than five years during which he effectively served as the second most powerful figure in the country. His likely presence on NABU's recordings had become a liability for Zelensky, damaging the president's public image. The power vacuum created by Yermak's departure could mark the beginning of a significant political shift in Ukraine.

Commentary

- **Yermak's resignation ran counter to Zelensky's intentions**, as the president had long resisted mounting social and political pressure. Civil society activists and a significant part of the political establishment – including MPs from the pro-presidential Servant of the People party, led by Davyd Arakhamia – had demanded the dismissal of the head of the Office of the President, who had concentrated unprecedented power in his hands (see '[Zelensky, Yermak and Ukraine's wartime governance](#)') and was the longest-serving head of the presidential administration since 1991. The dissenting deputies threatened to resign and thereby break the parliamentary majority. On 20 November, during a meeting with party members, Zelensky firmly sided with Yermak, making it clear that he did not want him to resign. Moreover, Yermak had been appointed head of the delegation for peace talks in Washington on 29–30 November.

- **The decision to accept the resignation was driven by the fact that the head of the Office of the President had become too great a liability for Zelensky, directly affecting his reputation.** According to Ukrainian media, the searches of Yermak's residence were linked to the construction of a residential complex near Kyiv, allegedly financed through a corruption scheme coordinated by former Deputy Prime Minister Oleksiy Chernyshov, who has been detained in connection with the case. Yermak's departure, ahead of any public disclosure of evidence or formal charges, was likely a pre-emptive move intended to minimise reputational damage to Zelensky, particularly in the context of ongoing peace talks and the challenging situation at the front. The resignation suggests that the anti-corruption authorities possess credible evidence implicating him in the case.
- **There are strong indications that the searches conducted at the residence of the head of the Office of the President may have been a pre-emptive move by NABU and SAP.** According to media reports, at Yermak's initiative, the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) had been collecting compromising materials intended to force the resignation of the head of SAP, Oleksandr Klymenko, among other officials. Since July, one of the detectives investigating the scandal, Ruslan Mahamedrasulov, has also been in custody. The SBU has accused him of alleged ties to Russia. His detention was part of a broader struggle between agencies over control of the country's anti-corruption process (see '[Rivalry between state services: the fight for control over combating corruption in Ukraine](#)'). The decision to initiate operational measures against Yermak was likely intended to send a clear and compelling message to the president regarding the anti-corruption bodies' determination to defend their independence.
- **The president will now have to contend with challenges on multiple fronts as a consequence of Yermak's resignation.** Zelensky shared not only a close working relationship with this key associate – sometimes referred to as the 'Vice President of Ukraine' or 'not the first, but not the second person in the state' – but also personal ties dating back to their time in the entertainment industry. Yermak wielded considerable influence over personnel policy, participated in peace negotiations, and was instrumental in sidelining potential political rivals to Zelensky, such as General Valerii Zaluzhnyi and former Deputy Prime Minister Oleksandr Kubrakov. He also served as a focal point for public dissatisfaction, deflecting criticism away from the president himself. It remains unclear what his new role will be – it is possible that he will indeed go to the front, where his brother, who is implicated in a separate corruption case, has been fighting since the beginning of the full-scale war.
- **The resignation of Yermak, together with the earlier flight from the country of Timur Mindich – a friend of Zelensky and one of the main suspects in the corruption case involving the Energoatom conglomerate – has created a political vacuum in Ukraine.** The traditionally strong position of the head of the Office of the President has lacked any legal foundation and has stemmed from the president's preference for informal networks over operating within established institutions. The appointment of a new chief does not guarantee that the system of power will become less centralised, nor that the parliament and the Cabinet of Ministers will regain their autonomy. The potential candidates include Colonel Pavlo Palisa (Yermak's deputy), former Prime Minister, Denys Shmyhal, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Digital Transformation, Mykhailo Fedorov, and the head of

military intelligence Kyrylo Budanov. These names highlight a personnel crisis within the ruling camp and a reluctance among capable figures outside the president's circle to assume the role, fearing reputational damage from association with Zelensky's team. In the coming weeks, factional infighting cannot be ruled out, particularly in connection with ongoing work on the state budget, as well as the possible return of politicians previously sidelined by Yermak. The position of Prime Minister Yuliia Svrydenko – closely linked to Yermak – may weaken, potentially triggering further personnel reshuffles.