



By: TA | AP Insight

Is Zelenskyy shaken by the resignation of his closest associate and chief negotiator with the US?



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy announced Friday the resignation of his powerful chief of staff, Andrii Yermak, who was also the country's lead negotiator in talks with the U.S, after Yermak's residence was searched by **anti-corruption investigators**.

The **unprecedented search** at the heart of Ukraine's government was a blow for the **Ukrainian leader** that risked disrupting his negotiating strategy at a time when Kyiv is under intense **U.S. pressure** to sign a peace deal nearly four years after Russia's full-scale invasion.

Yermak has long been a trusted confidant of Zelenskyy, who has resisted persistent pressure to replace him.

In a nod to the controversy over Yermak's long stay at his side, Zelenskyy said Russia was waiting for Ukraine to make missteps and upset the delicate and tense peace negotiations.

"We don't have a right to retreat or argue between ourselves. If we lose unity, we risk losing everything – ourselves, Ukraine, our future," Zelenskyy said. "We must unite, we must hold on. We have no other choice. We won't have another Ukraine."

"To preserve our internal strength, there must be no reasons to be distracted at anything else except for defense of Ukraine," he added. "I don't want anybody to be questioning Ukraine, and that's why we have today's decisions."

In his nightly address, Zelenskyy announced that he was "resetting" the presidential office.

He said Yermak had submitted his resignation and that he would begin consultations Saturday to appoint a new chief of staff.

The investigators are facing no obstacles

Yermak's name did not appear on a list of officials that Zelenskyy said would make up the

Ukrainian delegation for the next round of negotiations with the United States.

The delegation will now be jointly lead by Andrii Hnatov, the head of Ukraine's armed forces; Andrii Sybiha, Ukraine's foreign minister; and Rustem Umerov, head of Ukraine's security council, Zelenskyy said. He said negotiations would happen "soon."

Two national agencies fighting corruption in Ukraine said their search targeted Yermak.

Oleksii Tkachuk, a spokesperson for Yermak, said the anti-graft agencies had not served Yermak a notice of suspicion, meaning he was not a suspect in an investigation. Yermak was not told what the searches related to, Tkachuk said.

Yermak confirmed the search of his apartment inside the presidential compound in downtown Kyiv, where checkpoints limit public access.

It was not clear where Zelenskyy or Yermak were at the time of the morning raid

Media reports said Yermak's office was also searched, but investigators declined to comment on that.

It was not clear where Zelenskyy or Yermak were at the time of the morning raid.

"The investigators are facing no obstacles," Yermak wrote on the messaging app Telegram. He said he was cooperating fully with them and that his lawyers were present.

In an interview Thursday with The Atlantic, Yermak said that as long as Zelenskyy is president, "no one should count on us giving up territory. He will not sign away territory."

Ukraine, he said, is prepared to discuss only the question of what land each side controls, as indicated by the location of the front lines.

"All we can realistically talk about right now is

really to define the line of contact,” Yermak said.

Energy sector scandal

The National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine and the Specialized Anti-Corruption Prosecutor’s Office are leading a major investigation into a \$100 million energy sector scandal involving top Ukrainian officials that has dominated domestic headlines in recent weeks.

It was not clear if the searches were connected to the case, and a spokesperson for the NABU, Anton Tatarnikov, declined to comment, citing legal restrictions on revealing details on an ongoing probe.

The head of Ukraine’s parliamentary anti-corruption committee, Anastasiia Radina, said on social media that Yermak’s resignation was “better late than never.”

Mykyta Porturaev, a lawmaker with Zelenskyy’s party who last week called for Yermak’s resignation and for a cross-party government to be established, said the anti-corruption raid deepened Ukraine’s political crisis.

Yermak “definitely had political responsibility,” Porturaev told The Associated Press. “Of course he had to go.”

Two of Yermak’s former deputies left the government in 2024 after watchdogs investigated them for financial wrongdoing

A spokesperson for the European Commission, Guillaume Mercier, told Ukrainian news outlet Radio Svoboda on Friday that they were following developments closely and that the searches showed that Ukraine’s anti-corruption agencies were working. He said fighting corruption was central to the country’s European Union accession.

Investigators suspect that **Tymur Mindich**, a one-time business partner of Zelenskyy, was the plot’s mastermind. Mindich has fled the country, with any criminal proceedings against him likely to be carried out in absentia. Two top government ministers have resigned in the scandal.

Two of Yermak’s former deputies – Oleh Tatarov and Rostyslav Shurma – left the government in 2024 after watchdogs investigated them for financial wrongdoing. A third deputy, Andrii Smyrnov, was investigated for bribes and other wrongdoing but still works for Yermak.

Political turmoil for Zelenskyy

The scandal has heaped more problems on **Zelenskyy** as he seeks continued **Western support** for Ukraine’s war effort and tries to ensure continued foreign funding.

The European Union, which Ukraine wants to join, has told Zelenskyy he must crack down on graft.



Zelenskyy faced an unprecedented rebellion from his own lawmakers earlier this month after investigators published details of their energy sector investigation

Zelenskyy faced an unprecedented rebellion from his own lawmakers earlier this month after investigators published details of their energy sector investigation.

Although Yermak was not accused of any wrongdoing, several senior lawmakers in Zelenskyy’s party said Yermak should take

responsibility for the debacle in order to restore public trust.

Some said that if Zelenskyy didn't fire him, the party could split, threatening the president's parliamentary majority. But Zelenskyy defied them.

Zelenskyy urged Ukrainians to unite and "stop the political games" in light of the U.S. pressure to reach a settlement with Russia.

Yermak met Zelenskyy over 15 years ago when he was a lawyer venturing into the TV production business and Zelenskyy was a famous Ukrainian comedian and actor.

He oversaw foreign affairs as part of Zelenskyy's first presidential team and was promoted to chief of staff in February 2020.

Yermak has accompanied Zelenskyy on every trip abroad since Russia's invasion in February 2022, and the president's trust in him has made Yermak's power appear almost untouchable.

Domestically, officials describe Yermak as Zelenskyy's gatekeeper, and he is widely believed to have chosen all top government appointees, including prime ministers and ministers.