



By: TA | AP Insight

Why does Zelenskyy believe holding an election during the war could split Ukraine apart?



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said that he believes actions taken by dismissed Defense Minister **Mykhailo Fedorov**, including his involvement in mass protests and calls for an election, were misguided, as he publicly detailed their dispute for the first time.

Zelenskyy also alluded to problematic decisions over defense spending and said that inaccurate information provided by the Defense Ministry contributed to an awkward encounter with U.S. President Donald Trump over the use of **Starlink** in Russia.

Zelenskyy disclosed figures showing Ukraine's growing shortage of **Patriot air-defense missiles** needed to counter Russian ballistic attacks, with deliveries from Western allies declining in the past three years even as Russian missile strikes intensified.

He highlighted battlefield gains, however, saying Ukrainian forces have almost completely recaptured the Dnipropetrovsk region, with only about 10 square kilometers (around 4 square miles) remaining under Russian control.

The Ukrainian president made the remarks during a two-hour off-the-record meeting with reporters on Saturday, with a transcript released publicly on Sunday.

Zelenskyy's first public comments on Fedorov dismissal

His comments ranged widely, covering the latest battlefield developments, efforts to counter **Russian ballistic attacks**, the state of peace negotiations, Ukraine's budgetary challenges and the political turmoil surrounding Fedorov's dismissal.

"I really had and still have a very positive attitude toward Mykhailo. We have been through a lot together. But I believe that he himself goes, or is pushed, into the wrong things," he said.

Fedorov, a popular minister credited with

modernizing Ukraine's armed forces and accelerating the military's embrace of technology and drone warfare, was dismissed last month after reportedly falling out with the country's top military commander.

His removal triggered mass protests that lasted for weeks, but ultimately failed to force a reversal of the decision. Fedorov later called for an election.

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Zelenskyy said that he had offered Fedorov four different options to continue working in the government. Fedorov, he said, rejected all of them.

The Ukrainian leader told journalists that he believes holding an election during the war would be a huge risk with the potential to "split Ukraine apart."

"I believe elections during a war like this would generally pose enormous risks. Holding elections right now would be a tsunami for the state that would split Ukraine apart," he said.

Zelenskyy said he had previously faced pressure to hold an election during the war, but no partners had come up with a plan for how a poll could be held safely, legitimately and democratically.

Inaccurate information led to uncomfortable White House encounter

Zelenskyy appeared to link Fedorov to an awkward episode involving Starlink and Elon Musk.

Zelenskyy said that earlier this year, the Defense Ministry had told him that SpaceX had agreed to allow Ukraine to use Starlink over

Russian territory to carry out deep strike operations, subject to political approval.

Acting on that, Zelenskyy said, he raised the issue directly with U.S. President Donald Trump. He told Trump that Musk had confirmed the proposed use.

Zelenskyy said the two sides subsequently sought Musk's confirmation and discussed financing for the project.

But at a later meeting, Zelenskyy said that Trump told him that Musk had rejected the proposal and accused him of having misled the U.S. president.

Musk considered the move a dangerous escalation, according to Zelenskyy.

"He said that I had supposedly deceived him, because Musk had denied Ukraine the use of Starlink on Russian territory. I went back to our Ministry of Defense and they said that maybe it was so," he said.

Zelenskyy pushed back against protesters' vilification of former army chief, Gen. Oleksandr Syrskyi

Zelenskyy didn't explicitly accuse Fedorov of lying. He said that the situation was among the reasons behind "some of the steps."

Zelenskyy also pushed back against protesters' vilification of former army chief, **Gen. Oleksandr Syrskyi**, who he dismissed, and current Defense Minister Maj. Gen. Yevhen Khmara, saying they had gone too far.

"Maybe someone doesn't like Syrskyi for one reason or another. But the slogans 'Syrskyi is the devil, Khmara is the devil,'" he said. "Listen, this is too much. Do you understand? In principle, you can't treat the military like this and tolerate it, especially when it was the military that made it possible for any peaceful protests to take place in the Ukrainian capital at all."

Pressure on defense budget but military successes

Zelenskyy also described severe financial pressure on Ukraine's defense effort.

He said that the Defense Ministry faced a \$27 billion budget shortfall after spending decisions earlier in the year brought forward funds originally intended for the second half of this year.

Touching on a **corruption inquiry** that led Zelenskyy to fire one of his most senior officials this week, he said that anti-corruption investigators don't believe that the president was involved.

The investigators had named a deputy head of the presidential office among the suspects in a money-laundering case.

The heads of anti-corruption agencies have zero questions for me - Volodymyr Zelenskyy

"The heads of anti-corruption agencies have zero questions for me. They understand perfectly well that I am not involved in anything like that. And this is important to me," he said.

On the battlefield, Zelenskyy was optimistic. In addition to Ukraine almost completely regaining control of the Dnipropetrovsk region, he said that another operation was underway elsewhere and that its results were expected by the end of August.

He also predicted that by the end of the year, Ukraine could reach parity between the territory occupied by Russia since the beginning of the year and the territory retaken by Ukrainian forces.

Zelenskyy said that Russia had occupied about 990 square kilometers (380 square miles) since the start of the year, while Ukraine had restored control over roughly 820 square kilometers (315 square miles).

The president said that Russia's principal objective remained the Konstantynivka-Sloviansk-Kramatorsk axis, and that Moscow was still demanding that Ukraine withdraw from the Donbas region as a condition for a settlement.

He said that Ukraine was also preparing alternatives to Starlink, including a European communications project, as Russia and China work on their own competing system.

Still struggling for access to Patriot missiles

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He said that Ukraine received 675 Patriot missiles in 2023, compared with 364 in 2025 and an expected 264 this year.



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Zelenskyy said that he wanted to secure 300 additional Patriot missiles for the coming winter, while Ukraine's air force had requested 360.

The shortfall is particularly serious, because the United States and European partners are struggling to expand production.

Zelenskyy said that he hoped Ukraine could obtain even 5% or 10% of U.S. reserves and was able to pay for them.

Zelenskyy said that Russia could eventually produce up to 1,300 ballistic missiles a year, compared with an estimated current capacity of 600.