

Ukrainian Military Leadership Changes

July 30, 2026

On July 15, 2026, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky dismissed Ukraine's minister of defense, Mykhailo Fedorov, after six months in office and amid a wider government [overhaul](#). Zelensky then [appointed](#) Evgeniy Khmara, head of the Security Service of Ukraine, as acting defense minister. Changes in Ukraine's military leadership present several political and military issues that may have implications for U.S. policy toward Ukraine and be of interest to some Members of Congress.

Fedorov's dismissal was widely seen as [unexpected](#). Fedorov was generally [seen by observers](#) as a tech-savvy [reformer](#) who had [undertaken](#) several popular [changes](#), including in recruitment, training, and defense procurement. Some observers had assessed that the Ukrainian Armed Forces (UAF) battlefield situation in the war against Russia was stabilizing and [improving](#), for which they partly credited Fedorov. Various domestic political issues and strategic considerations regarding the conduct of the war may have factored into Fedorov's dismissal (see below).

Fedorov's removal was met with [public protests](#) and concerns from some in the UAF, including some officers who [resigned](#) in protest. Fedorov [accused](#) General Oleksandr Syrskiy, commander in chief of the UAF, of stalling reforms and undermining the defense ministry. In response, President Zelensky held a series of [meetings](#) with the UAF's [top leadership](#), and General Syrskiy wrote a [public letter](#) apologizing to Fedorov and expressing his surprise at Fedorov's accusations. These actions failed to quell the criticism. On July 21, President Zelensky relieved General Syrskiy of his position and replaced him with Major General Mykhailo Drapaty. President Zelensky also replaced Lieutenant General Andriy Hnatov, chief of the general staff, with Major General Ihor Skybyuk. President Zelensky has [offered](#) Fedorov a new [position](#) in the government, but Fedorov reportedly has [refused](#) any [appointment](#) other than defense minister.

Changes in Ukraine's military leadership have potentially wide-ranging implications for Ukraine's war strategy and management. The UAF has undertaken multiple [reforms](#) regarding [mobilization and recruitment](#), troop rotation, weapon system procurement, long-range strikes against Russian infrastructure, and the role of technology. The UAF faces continued [challenges](#) in recruitment, organization and management (e.g., troop rotation and the creation of new units), and procurement. It remains unclear whether and to what extent Drapaty can continue changes started under Syrskiy's leadership.

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Potential Factors for Military Leadership Changes and Ukrainian Domestic Politics

The changes in Ukraine's military leadership have raised [questions](#) for some about their [timing](#) and [rationale](#), as well as their potential [implications](#) for Ukrainian politics and governance.

President Zelensky tasked Fedorov, when he appointed him in January 2026, with a [series](#) of ambitious [reforms](#) that Fedorov was seen to be largely [implementing](#). Some observers also viewed Fedorov's ouster as curious as he appeared to be acting with Zelensky's support and mandate for reform in the defense ministry. Some observers [speculate](#) that at least part of the rationale for Fedorov's ouster was that he was perceived as too [independent](#) or popular, potentially undermining President Zelensky's own control of the defense ministry.

Another potential factor was a reported [conflict](#) between Fedorov and General Syrskiy over strategy, reforms, and management of the war. Some observers [assess](#) that General Syrskiy resisted Fedorov's reforms as interfering with and undermining UAF leadership. Some [reports](#) suggest Fedorov and Syrskiy may have disagreed over the UAF's management and structure, including the establishment of new brigades despite a shortage of personnel. Such disagreements could reflect contrasting [views](#) of the appropriate nature of civilian control over the military and the extent to which the UAF can operate independently of civilian intervention. Given Fedorov's removal, it is possible that Zelensky initially [agreed](#) with Syrskiy and viewed Fedorov's involvement in military and force structure decisions as too broad or invasive.

Possible Implications for Ukrainian Military Strategy

Some observers highlight that the replacement of General Syrskiy by Major General Drapaty reflects a generational [change](#) and [differing](#) approaches to warfighting. At 61 years of age, General Syrskiy was regarded as a noted tactical commander but was criticized as [emblematic](#) of a traditional Soviet-style military model defined by centralization and a rigid command structure. Some observers and UAF officers accused General Syrskiy of [favoritism](#), such as [directing](#) more recruits and support to the Assault Troops at the expense of other units, as well as of micromanagement and a callous approach to Ukrainian [casualties](#). General Syrskiy's strategic approach focused on holding territory and imposing as many casualties as possible on Russian forces.

In contrast, the 43-year-old Drapaty is part of a younger generation of Ukrainian officers and has a [reputation](#) for initiative and for delegating autonomy and responsibility to lower-level commanders. He also has been [critical](#) of the UAF leadership and is seen by some observers as more flexible and better suited to [adapting](#) the UAF to a more [modern style of combat](#). [Fedorov](#) congratulated Drapaty on his appointment, and Drapaty is reportedly [popular](#) among the UAF rank and file.

Issues for Congress

Members of Congress may monitor the changes in Ukraine's military leadership as they evaluate potential legislative options or conduct oversight of executive branch activities toward Ukraine. Issues for congressional consideration may include the following:

- With the removal of General Syrskiy, what are the implications for Ukraine's military strategy? Given Major General Drapaty's background and previous criticism of UAF leadership, might he alter or reform UAF military strategy? Would it affect congressional considerations for security assistance moving forward?

- What effects, if any, might Fedorov's removal have on the nature of domestic political competition in Ukraine? Would it affect the office of the president's power in Ukraine going forward? Are there implications for stability and democracy in Ukraine?
- Will these military leadership changes affect civilian control over the military? Will reforms that Fedorov started to combat corruption in the military and defense procurement continue? Will recruitment and mobilization reforms continue, and are there implications for the conduct of the war?

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