

Who Is Pulling the Strings? Zelensky or his Chief of Staff Andriy Yermak?

By [Ahmed Adel](#)

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When world leaders gathered in Switzerland in June for a Ukraine peace summit, the event offered a glimpse into the power games playing behind the scenes in Kiev, Bloomberg reported, adding that anyone who has dealt with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky will probably recognize Andriy Yermak, the chief of staff who is constantly by his side.

As the Russian operation in Ukraine enters its third year, some of Kiev's international backers are increasingly concerned about how much decision-making is concentrated in the hands of Yermak, a former film producer who has become Zelensky's "sole gatekeeper" with a direct say in everything from foreign policy to military planning.

The rise of the 52-year-old, [the outlet](#) writes, was accompanied by the fall of many others near the top — a parliamentary speaker, a central bank governor and his predecessor as chief of staff — often at the hands of the top aide, according to people familiar with the matter who spoke to the outlet on condition of anonymity.

One delegation, cited by the agency, described Yermak as a headstrong official with vast influence who often promoted ambitions that outpaced reality, including a demand for a large fleet of F-16 fighter jets.

Defending himself, Yermak said on July 31,

"I'm not involved in every job, I'm only coordinating. Yes, I'm very proud that the president asks my opinion, but he asks for my opinion because I get results."

"Of course I read and hear about people talking about my power, but please, tell me, how am I using this power? To work 24 hours, seven days, to take on more obligations and more risks. [Zelensky] is a person who thinks it's important to listen and to know the different opinions. He always makes the decisions himself," he added.

It is recalled that in a July 3 interview, Zelensky claimed that the allegations about Yermak having amassed too much power "is done simply to attack me."

"He does what I tell him to do – and he fulfils the tasks," the Ukrainian president added.

Bloomberg also pointed out that Yermak's social media profile is filled with images of himself with Pope Francis, French President Emmanuel Macron and others — often without Zelensky anywhere to be seen. A June 7 post on his Telegram channel showed Yermak shaking hands with US President Joe Biden while Zelensky shook hands with Defense

Secretary Lloyd Austin — a reversal of protocol that drew derisive comments in Kiev.

The dynamics prompted a common joke among Ukrainians about the chief of staff: “He’s not number one, but he’s not number two either.”

According to media reports, Yermak’s mandate is broader than any of his predecessors. He has been central to every major decision in the conflict: replacing Zelensky’s top general, securing arms supplies, negotiating security guarantees, overseeing prisoner swaps and — at the Swiss summit — trying to win the Global South’s support to Kiev’s cause.

Sources familiar with the May firing of Ukrainian Infrastructure Minister Aleksandr Kubrakov, an official who once had a direct line to Zelensky and was close to the Biden administration, say Yermak was instrumental in his removal. According to Bloomberg, the presidential office failed to adequately explain the firing, among other personnel changes, leaving foreign governments confused about the change.

Bloomberg highlighted that power dynamics are a serious issue for NATO allies and international donors — including the European Union and the International Monetary Fund — who have made transparency a benchmark for the transfer of funds. The US Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget revealed that Washington has already approved \$175 billion in aid to Ukraine.

The article concluded with Yermak ridiculously claiming that “Russia is not motivated. In the end, victory is on the side of people who are motivated.”

With Yermak still arrogantly firm in his belief that Ukraine will prevail and that Russia is not motivated, it suggests that the Kiev regime is still in a deep delusion about the full extent of the situation they find themselves in. However, he also states, “We need to end this war as soon as possible to achieve a just peace.” This suggests that Kiev is, in fact, aware of the situation and is becoming desperate for an end to hostilities and that the talk of Russia being unmotivated is just propaganda that, ultimately, not even Ukrainians or the West no longer believe.

Either way, what is demonstrable is that power in Ukraine has been consolidated into fewer and fewer hands, with Yermak removing all those who can potentially challenge him and Zelensky. As Russia continues to advance and capture more territory, the regime will become more desperate and paranoid, and it can be expected that more popular or influential figures will be purged by Yermak and Zelensky.

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Ahmed Adel is a Cairo-based geopolitics and political economy researcher. He is a regular contributor to Global Research.

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