After protests about Fedorov dismissal & Syrskyi's comments, Zelenskyy replaces Syrskyi & offers Fedorov a new position.

Former Defence Minister Fedorov, President Zelenskyy, and General Syrskyi, former Commander-in-Chief of the Ukrainian Armed Forces.

Last Wednesday, President Zelenskyy announced he had dismissed Mykhailo Fedorov from his position as Defense Minister. Zelenskyy cited as the reason the apparent behind-the-scenes friction between Fedorov and Gen. Oleksandr Syrskyi, the Commander-in-Chief of the Ukrainian Armed Forces. And indeed, in a news conference following his dismissal, Fedorov accused Syrskyi of blocking the reforms he believes are needed in order to take full advantage of the continuing developments in drone technology and other types of military equipment. (Fedorov had previously been responsible for overseeing the continuing development of drones as offensive and defensive weapons.) Indeed, Fedorov went so far as to say that "under this arrangement [i.e., with Syrskyi as Commander-in-Chief], I personally do not know how the war can be won."

Zelenskyy subsequently asked Gen. Yevhenii Khmara, the acting head of the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU), to take over as Acting Minister of Defense, pending his confirmation by the Rada. Fedorov's criticisms of Syrskyi clearly resonated with many Ukrainians – especially younger Ukrainians – who attribute the high numbers of Ukrainian casualties in the battles for Bakhmut and other cities in the Donbas to Syrskyi's leadership of the Armed Forces. In part because Fedorov had been replaced and Syrskyi continued as Commander-in-Chief, the protests continued both among those supporting Fedorov and those opposed to Syrskyi.

In a late-night television address on Tuesday, President Zelenskyy announced he had fired Syrskyi and had appointed Gen. Mykhailo Drapatyi, the commander of Ukraine's joint forces group, to replace him as Commander-in-Chief. He said Gen. Drapatyi will oversee a reorganization of the army's command structure, update the country's defense strategy, and reform the military's structure. Zelenskyy also

announced that Fedorov would return to the government in a "prominent position" that “would enable him to unify the technological sector of our state and ensure its development."

Subsequently, Zelenskyy said he had offered Fedorov, who he appointed as Defense Minister in January, the position of Deputy Prime Minister for Military Innovation. Surprisingly, Fedorov rejected the offer. He said that he wanted to complete his reforms in the Ministry of Defense that he had begun and that he would not accept any position other than Defense Minister: “I’m grateful to the president for all the options offered. However, today there are only three positions in the country that, alongside the troops on the battlefield, actually shape the course of the war: the president, the defense minister, and the commander-in-chief of the Armed Services of Ukraine. That is why I will not accept any position other than defense minister. No other role carries the actual authority to combat procurement corruption, complete the army’s transformation, plan and execute asymmetric operations against the enemy, root out a culture of lies and unaccountability within the system, or finish the initiatives our team has already started at the defense ministry.” He said he had taken the position of Defense Minister in January with a plan to end the war by improving air defenses and holding firm on the front line while damaging Russia’s economy with long-range strikes: “Our collective results created something unprecedented: a window of opportunity to force Russia into peace through strength. And we cannot afford to lose it.”

Speaking at a press conference in Kyiv yesterday, Zelenskyy said that Fedorov is still part of the government. He said, “Mykhailo is in the team. I offered him several positions, without going into the details of all our meetings: the latest position is Deputy Prime Minister of Ukraine for Military Innovation, and this is very important, because there must be coordination of innovations with the leadership of the Ministry of Defense, with the leadership, with the Commander-in-Chief of our army, with the President.”

It’s no doubt quite astounding to most observers that, in the midst of the war, Fedorov would reject Zelenskyy’s offer. But it’s possible he’ll in fact refuse to accept the new appointment; after all, as important as the title may sound, for Fedorov it may seem to be a demotion to a lesser position similar to those he held in 2019-2025. After all, he served as a Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Digital Transformation from August 2019 until March 2023, then as a Deputy Prime Minister for Innovation, Education, Science & Technology and Minister for Digital Transformation from March 2023 to July 2025, and then as First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Digital Transformation from July 2025 until January, when he was appointed Minister of Defense.

David R. Cameron
July 24, 2026