

# [***Zelensky's Territorial Defense Chief Appointment Fuels Controversy***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6B9V-36Y1-JBR6-9002-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Highlight:** Social media users have noted how Ihor Plakhuta played a role in dispersing pro-European protests in 2013.

**Body**

Ukrainian President [*Volodymyr Zelensky*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/volodymyr-zelensky?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) has faced further criticism over the shake-up of his military top brass by appointing as top commander a figure linked to the dispersal of pro-European protests over a decade ago.

One expert told *Newsweek* that Zelensky's decision to appoint Ihor Plakhuta as commander of Ukraine's Territorial Defense Forces demonstrated that the president had a "lack of human resources" at his disposal.

"Since the reserve is small, people with a bad political background have to be appointed," said Konstantin Skorkin, a journalist and researcher who specializes in Ukrainian ***politics***.

Zelensky announced last week the replacement of his popular commander-in-chief Valerii Zaluzhnhy with [*Oleksandr Syrsky*](https://www.newsweek.com/who-oleksandr-syrsky-zelensky-names-new-commander-ukraines-forces-1868317?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships), who had commanded Ukrainian Land Forces since 2019.

Zelensky framed the firing as part of a wider reform of his military leadership, which included appointing Plakhuta to replace Anatoly Bargilevich, now the new head of the General Staff of Ukraine.

Ukrainian media outlets Ukrainska Pravda and Hromadske noted that Plakhuta had led the internal troops of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine in their dispersal of the Euromaidan.

The protests in Kyiv erupted in December 2013 when the then-president, Kremlin-backed [*Viktor Yanukovich*](https://www.newsweek.com/vladimir-putin-us-ukraine-coup-organizing-russia-1602840?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships), bowed to pressure from Moscow and rejected a deal that would have brought closer integration with the [*European Union*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/european-union?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships).

At the time, Plakhuta was head of the department of the Southern Territorial Command of the Internal Troops of the interior ministry and said that "the men in black who dismantled the barricades were utility workers," independent Russian news outlet Meduza reported.

But the X (formerly [*Twitter*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/twitter?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships)) account Ukrainians First described Plakhuta as the "faithful dog" of Yanukovych and former interior minister Vitaliy Zakharchenko.

This was next to a video the account said was of Plakhuta in 2013 describing how force will not be used, despite police violently dispersing crowds in Kyiv's Independence Square.

"What merits does he have besides dispersal of Euromaidan? Besides throwing common guys against their own people?" posted Ukrainian blogger Myroslav Oleshko on X, according to a translation.

However, Skorkin, said that the appointment showed that "the problem is the lack of human resources in Zelensky's team."

"I don't think there is any malicious intent in the appointment of a general involved in the fight against the Maidan, there just aren't enough experienced people," he said. "Since the reserve is small, people with a bad political background have to be appointed.

"The Ukrainian president is constantly trying to replace people rather than change the system. There were similar problems during the formation of the government at the beginning of his term.

"Therefore, I consider the dismissal of Zaluzhny and his team a mistake, removing professionals for political reasons is not the best solution during war.

"I think that this appointment will become a reason for criticism of Zelensky from the opposition primarily associated with ex-President (Petro) Poroshenko and civil activists."

"But I don't think that this criticism will force the president to change his decision," said Skorkin, who noted that Oleg Tatarov—who was also linked to a number of violent events during the Maidan protests when he was deputy head of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Yanukovich's government— is also in Zelensky's administration.

"The opposition and activists have long demanded his dismissal, but he still holds office," Skorkin added.

Ukrainian journalist Olga Khudetska wrote on [*Facebook*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/facebook?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) on Sunday that Plakhuta's appointment was "not bad" for the territorial army, noting how during Maidan he negotiated with the protesters and "was the only one who did not abandon his military," as he "tried to gather them together and prevent further escalation."

*Newsweek* has contacted the Ukrainian presidential office for comment.

[*Link to Image*](https://d.newsweek.com/en/full/2347932/ukrainian-president-volodymyr-zelensky.jpg)

**Graphic**

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky

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Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky looks on during the assembly at the World Economic Forum (WEF) annual meeting in Davos, on January 16, 2024. His shakeup of military top brass has been criticized.

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