

What Happened to Ukraine's General Valerii Zaluzhny?

Description

by [STEPHEN BRYEN](#) via

[weapons](#)



General Valerii Zaluzhnyi. Photo: Twitter

General Valerii Zaluzhnyi, appointed in July 2021 to be Ukraine's chief of the armed forces, also became a member of Ukraine's National Security Council. Zaluzhnyi mysteriously went missing some weeks ago. Now, apparently, he has reappeared, if you believe a brief video released by the Ukrainian

government.

There were many rumors about Zaluzhny. The earliest one was that he was killed, along with a number of other senior Ukrainian officers, in a meeting at a command post somewhere in eastern Ukraine. That rumor soon was followed by another – that in fact he was badly wounded at the same command center when it was hit by a Russian Iskander missile. Some elaborating rumors followed saying that Zaluzhny had survived the blast but required multiple operations and, while he would recover, he would never again be available to command Ukraine's army.

Ukraine is planning a major offensive to be launched "soon." Undersecretary of State Victoria Nuland says that the US collaborated with Ukraine on the plans and operations for the coming offensive. That puts additional pressure on Zelensky to carry it out.

He has been hesitating – even though 12 brigades have been organized, nine of them equipped with American and European weapons, including Leopard tanks.

Many analysts think that the Russians significantly outnumber the Ukrainian forces and have good equipment and many advantages. The most optimistic assessment is that the Ukrainians may make some modest gains, but at heavy cost.

These assessments help explain Zelensky's nervousness.

There are other rumors pointing to an ongoing struggle in Ukraine between military and civilian leaders. That struggle is said to have emerged from the heavy losses recently experienced by Ukraine's army, the almost complete depletion of Ukraine's air force and the degradation of Ukraine's air defenses.

If an offensive is launched, Ukraine will have to go mostly without air cover for any advance and will face a heavily electronically jammed battlefield where Western smart weapons may not work as advertised.

Perhaps most divisive of all is what happened in Bakhmut. Despite all the self-serving propaganda, Bakhmut was a major defeat for Ukraine the country poured so many soldiers into the battle and suffered huge casualties.

Ukraine's military was against trying to hold Bakhmut, the place both sides called a "meat grinder." Zelensky was the main proponent of the Bakhmut battle (he even visited Chasiv Yar, a small town close to Bakhmut that was used as a staging and supply area) and of the rotation of troops in and out of the city. Reports say that Ukraine rotated its troops six or seven times, and units sent there took heavy casualties.

Many of the Ukrainian soldiers in Bakhmut wore green armbands (some wore green on their helmets, too) indicating they were new recruits. Many of them were poorly trained. The 12 brigades that will be used in the upcoming offensive also has a lot of green-armband guys, not a good way to launch a big operation. Ukraine is low on trained manpower.

This brings us to Zaluzhny. He is regarded as a first rate commander, admired by his troops and extremely smart and capable. But where is he?

The Military Summary Channel (found on YouTube) is a generally reliable and objective source for war

news. The Channel [reviewed the new Zaluzhny video](#) and found a major discrepancy, questioning its authenticity.



Judge for yourself. Is it the same person? Photos: Government of Ukraine

The Ukrainian-released video clip, which is only a few seconds long, shows Zaluzhny sitting at his desk.

The video shows him waving to the cameraman and chatting, but there is no sound.

The waving motion also is rather strange. It is hard to recall a military or civilian leader waving at a cameraman.

As you can see, the above photo is a screenshot from the video with two insets: on the right is an inset of a known photo of Zaluzhny. On the left is an inset taken from the screen shot.

In the authentic photo Zaluzhny has blue eyes. In the latest video, he has brown eyes.

There also are some facial differences if you look carefully, especially the nose.

Is the video Zaluzhny a double? We live in a time of deep fakes where AI tech can emulate almost any video image.

With questions arising like those proposed by the Military Summary Channel, we will have to wait for convincing evidence about the general.

Another mystery: the Ivan Khurs case

The same sort of problem has arisen about the fate of the Ivan Khurs, the Russian spy ship that was attacked by three Ukrainian sea drones stuffed with explosives. The [Ukrainians have produced a video](#) that alleges that the Ivan Khurs was hit by one of the drones and sunk.

The Russians have produced a video showing the Ivan Khurs arriving back into Sevastopol harbor, without any evidence of damage.

The Russian ship Ivan Khurs is pictured entering Sevastopol .It appears undamaged and operating on its own power (no tugs). Photo: Russian government / Twitter

Which is true?

My own point of view is that if a Russian ship were broadsided by a drone at sea, the Russians would send rescue crews and aircraft immediately. None have been seen. I also wonder how the Russians got their video if the ship was sunk. Not possible.

The ship's gun was an automatic naval version of the 14.5 mm Vladimirov KPVT (SARP model) that can fire armor piercing and incendiary shells at a rate of 70 to 80 rounds per minute. That gun on the Ivan Khurs was remotely controlled, stabilized and linked to the ship's radar.

Unlike the case with Ukraine's sinking On April 14, 2022, of the Russian cruiser Moskva – where either the crew was sleeping or the radar was subjected to electronic countermeasures supplied by a US P-8 aircraft – the attack on the Ivan Khurs obviously was spotted by the ship's lookouts and radar.

So I think that the Ukrainian version of the Ivan Khurs story is fake. So is the Zaluzhny video.

[Stephen Bryen](#) is a senior fellow at the [Center for Security Policy](#) and the [Yorktown Institute](#). This article was [originally published](#) on his Substack, *Weapons and Strategy*.