



By: *Sergei Stepancev, TA Moscow*

Presidential elections in Ukraine - a chance that Moscow wants to use to shift the parameters of the war



Russia is very pleased about a discussion regarding whether Ukraine should hold presidential elections next March, as mandated by the Constitution.

Contradictory positions on this matter in Ukraine and globally are creating cracks in the political and military leadership of Ukraine, particularly in the bloc of Western allies who support its fight against Russian aggression.

The debate about whether or not to hold elections is particularly suitable for the Kremlin in combination with ongoing disinformation campaigns about sales of American arms to Hamas by some Ukrainian high stakeholders.

Even better news for the Kremlin would be if the presidential elections were to take place, and the best thing would be for Ukraine to get a new president - by any means.

Russia needs a new head of the Ukrainian state, either democratically elected or the one who removes Volodymyr Zelensky - "corrupt and incompetent", according to the Kremlin's narrative.

Any alternative to Zelensky is good

As far as Moscow is concerned, any Ukrainian provocateur, a proxy planted by the Russian intelligence, a Ukrainian oligarch from the 1990s, a career politician or military commander - any of these alternatives is better and more convenient for Russia's narrative and plan.

Russia needs a new Ukrainian head of state who will either start proposing a peace deal on terms acceptable to Moscow or an illegitimate junta, which will automatically exclude any legitimate possibility of military and financial assistance to Ukraine by the global community.

A coup or a new Ukrainian president from the ranks of Ukrainian politicians and operatives

with whom Moscow has already established ties is a better solution for Moscow than Volodymyr Zelensky.

The current Ukrainian president is just too perfect for Moscow to compromise using Russia's usual and traditional fake news and kompromat.

Over the years, Moscow has tried hard to flip and bend some of Zelensky's past and discredit him in the eyes of the Ukrainian public, but it has not worked. It turned out that Ukrainians are very resilient to Russian propaganda, so according to polls, Zelensky now has up to 70% support.

However, some Ukrainian and even Russian political activists, many of whom were geared up by the Kremlin and/or Russian intelligence, spent the previous year and a half trying to accuse Zelensky of blowing up preparations for the war.

A light at the end of the tunnel

In a possible presidential change in Kyiv, with or without elections, Moscow sees a light at the end of the tunnel it entered when it invaded.

Russia knows well how to use fake news operations and the so-called active measures of Russian intelligence. Volodymyr Zelensky is just too perfect in the eyes of the Western public and, thus, the Western decision-makers.

Possible elections represent an opportunity for Moscow to influence their outcome, just as it has done in many countries, particularly in the West.

Ukraine is in a more vulnerable situation in comparison to 2016 America. Ukrainian people are tired of war. They do not understand why the West has been assisting Ukraine so slowly. They do not even understand why Israel is currently more significant than Ukraine to numerous American politicians.

Additionally, there are too many populist activists and politicians in Ukraine, similar to American Lt. Gen. Mike Flynn, who have been sending goodwill messages to Moscow and misleading the public regarding Volodymyr Zelensky's administration and the war which Russia has been waging against Ukraine.

Moscow wants someone similar to Donald Trump or his National Security advisor, Lt. Gen. Flynn, to win in a very probable forthcoming Ukrainian election.

One of the generals would be most desirable

Moscow would love to see, and will try to, facilitate and use any chance to oust Volodymyr Zelensky. Some Ukrainian army generals could indeed be subverted, compromised or recruited by Russia.

The tensions in Ukraine are high. Ukraine has the means to stop and block the Russian army from advancing further but has no required hardware and ammunition to kick Russia out.

On the other hand, Russia is satisfied with the current circumstances. It could stop and wait a few more years and then attack again. During that time, it could try and create cracks in Kyiv's leadership and among its allies in the West.

Russia has a lot of experience in this, and the possible elections in Ukraine appear to be a good opportunity for it to demonstrate, once again, its devastating influence on democratic processes in other countries. This time, in the country it has been trying to occupy, which makes the stakes for the Kremlin even higher.