

Ukraine's Volodymyr Zelensky cancels elections as US expands conflict with Russia in Middle East

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On Monday, Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky, whose government has been touted by the NATO powers and their press as the spearhead of Western democracy, announced that the country's presidential elections, due to be held next year, are canceled.

Zelensky was elected in 2019 in a vote that was shaped above all by opposition to the Poroshenko government that had been brought to power by the NATO-backed coup of February 2014. At the time, Zelensky ran on a platform of mending ties with Russia. However, he quickly reneged on all of these promises and his government played a central role in provoking the invasion by Russia in February 2022, including by announcing plans to "retake" Crimea in March 2021.

Since the beginning of the war, Ukraine has been in a state of martial law. All major opposition parties are banned, and opponents of the war and the government are routinely persecuted, arrested and "disappeared."

Now, the Zelensky regime is dropping any remaining pretenses of "democracy." In a video address on Monday, Zelensky stated that "now is not the right time for elections." He said, "We must realize that now is the time of defense, the time of the battle that determines the fate of the state and people, not the time of manipulations."

In an open endorsement of dictatorial forms of rule, he stated, "And if we need to put an end to a political dispute and continue to work in unity, there are structures in the state that are capable of putting an end to it and giving society all the necessary answers."

Zelensky's announcement is another nail in the coffin of NATO's war propaganda against Russia over Ukraine which the media has portrayed as a war in defense of "democracy" and the rights of the Ukrainian people. It comes almost exactly a month after Israel began its genocide of the Palestinian people in Gaza, which is

carried out with US bombs and military intelligence, and has claimed the lives of over 10,000 people, roughly half of them children. Just like the imperialist powers' backing for Ukrainian neo-Nazis and the authoritarian Zelensky regime, the openly genocidal policies in Gaza make a mockery of NATO's war propaganda claims of a supposed fight for "democracy" in Ukraine.

The canceling of the elections comes amid a profound military and political crisis of the Zelensky regime. The "counteroffensive" of the summer, which had been prepared for by NATO over months, with tens of billions of dollars of weapons deliveries, including heavy tanks, and the training of tens of thousands of Ukrainian troops, has ended in a military fiasco and thousands of lives lost. In a sign of growing popular discontent and opposition to the war, the first protests against the war have taken place in cities across Ukraine in late October, demanding that men be sent home from the front.

Even the *New York Times*, in its state-vetted coverage, acknowledged recently that fatigue with the war is spreading among the troops. The paper cited the mayor of a West Ukrainian village, Andriy Tkachyk, who said, "The boys who are at the front are physically and psychologically tired. Very tired. This war will last a long time."

Last week, Valery Zaluzhnyi, the head of the Ukrainian army and an avowed admirer of Ukrainian fascist Stepan Bandera, painted an extraordinarily bleak assessment of the state of the war in an interview with the *Economist*. He stated, "Just like in the first world war we have reached the level of technology that puts us into a stalemate." According to a recent report by NBC, the term "stalemate" is now also used privately by some US military officials. Given Russia's much larger population and industrial capabilities in weapons production, Russia

is widely believed to have a growing military advantage as the war drags on.

Speaking to the *Economist*, Zaluzhnyi warned, “The biggest risk of an attritional trench war is that it can drag on for years and wear down the Ukrainian state.” He drew a parallel to the First World War, which ended in the East with the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks in Russia in 1917 and the establishment of Soviet power in large parts of what is now Ukraine, and implicitly warned of the revolutionary consequences of a defeat of NATO’s proxy army in this war.

Zaluzhnyi elaborated on this assessment in a longer essay in which he stated that both a very prolonged conflict and the deployment of even more advanced and deadly weaponry was now inevitable. He noted that even with a dramatic increase in weapons and ammunition production by NATO, “given the increased intensity of average daily missiles and ammunition consumption, it is not possible to accumulate these funds in the required volumes.” He also pointed out that in many cases, the type of weapons, missiles, and ammunition they need take many months, and even years, to produce.

Zaluzhnyi acknowledged that it was unlikely that the army could achieve a “breakthrough” in the near future, effectively stating that the hundreds of billions of dollars that NATO has already pumped into the Ukrainian army have been completely insufficient. He warned that the situation carried “significant risks for both the Armed Forces of Ukraine and the state as a whole.” Suggesting that the war, precisely because of the military crisis, would require the deployment of ever more deadly weapons and a further escalation, he wrote that the situation “necessitates searching for new and non-trivial approaches to break military parity with the enemy.”

Clearly unnerved both by Zaluzhnyi’s public statements and reports about NATO diplomats raising potential negotiations with Russia, Zelensky in an interview with NBC’s *Meet the Press* on Sunday lost self-control and insisted that he was not ready to negotiate with the “f*** terrorist Putin.” He also explicitly rejected Zaluzhnyi’s assessment that the war had reached a “stalemate.”

The conflict between Zaluzhnyi and Zelensky has been smoldering for a long time, with Zaluzhnyi repeatedly attacking Zelensky publicly. The head of the army is one of the most prominent and influential figures in the country and was considered the most likely main rival of Zelensky in the next presidential elections.

Then, one day after his interview with *Meet the Press*, Zelensky announced that the presidential elections will

be canceled. Also on Monday, news broke that Zaluzhnyi’s assistant and close friend Hennadii Chastiakov was killed by an explosive device in his home. According to the Russian press, Chestiakov opened birthday presents, one of which included a package with Western hand grenades. When showing it to his son, Chestiakov activated one of the grenades. His 13-year old son was severely injured. In Ukraine, many speculate that Zelensky or layers close to him were behind the “birthday present.” Ukraine’s minister of internal affairs later stated that the box had been given to Chestiakov by one of his colleagues in the army.

Chestiakov joins a rapidly growing list of leading state and military officials who have died this year outside the battlefield and under questionable circumstances. At the beginning of 2023, a dozen high-ranking officials of the interior ministry, several of whom played a central role in the army leadership, were killed in a helicopter crash. Zelensky has also engaged in repeated and ever more sweeping purges of the defense ministry, sacking most recently Oleksii Reznikov.

The escalating warfare inside the Ukrainian state apparatus and ruling class is unfolding as the war against Russia by US imperialism is expanding in both scope and intensity. In backing Israel’s genocide of the Palestinians in Gaza and provoking a wider war in the Middle East, and above all with Iran, the US is also opening up a new front in the war against Russia. The US invasion of Iraq in 2003 and NATO bombing of Libya in 2011, as well as the US military involvement in the ongoing civil war in Syria since 2011, were already aimed, at least in part, at undermining Russian influence in the Middle East and North Africa. Now, all of these wars are increasingly metastasizing into a full-blown global conflict and whatever has remained of the “democratic” mask of all the capitalist governments is falling off.



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