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Why Has Ukraine's Zelensky Agreed to Hold Elections in 2024?

28 minutes ago

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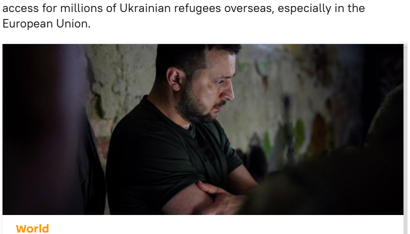
The Ukrainian president has signaled his willingness to hold democratic elections amid the conflict if Western partners provide financial assistance. He had earlier ruled the possibility out. What's behind the president's apparent "change of heart"?

In an interview with a Ukrainian broadcaster aired on August 27, President Volodymyr Zelensky announced that the country may hold elections despite the ongoing martial law.

> "I would not like to fantasize that we would live without elections for three, five, seven years," Zelensky said. "I don't want the perception that the government clings to power. I don't cling to anything. I would like to hold elections. Elections are possible if the US and the EU are ready to provide us with 5 billion hryvnia [$135 million] we need to organize presidential elections in the country. I will not take this money from the defense budget."

The Ukrainian president added that Western observers would have to go to the trenches, "so that we have legitimate elections for us and for the whole world", and that the West should help Kiev set up additional voting access for millions of Ukrainian refugees overseas, especially in the European Union.



World

From Stage to Presidential Palace: How Did Zelensky Rise to Power and How Did it Change Him?

20 May, 06:00 GMT

Zelensky's words differ greatly from the stance he voiced in May and later, in June, that elections would be possible only when hostilities are over. In mid-August, the Ukrainian president extended martial law for 90 days, until November 15. Normally, the Ukrainian parliamentary elections should have taken place no later than October 29, 2023, and presidential elections early next year.

West Pushing for New Elections in Ukraine

Zelensky's apparent "change of heart" came after the visit of a bipartisan delegation of American lawmakers led by influential **Republican Senator Lindsey Graham** on August 23. Graham and his Democratic counterparts, **Senators Richard Blumenthal and Elizabeth Warren**, met Zelensky in Kiev and made it clear to him that he should hold presidential elections in 2024.

> "We need an election in Ukraine next year. I want to see this country have a free and fair election even while it is under assault," Graham told reporters during a briefing in Kiev. The GOP senator claimed that Ukraine "has changed" because "in the past it was a very corrupt country," but now "Ukrainians are not profiting" from US aid.

"And I believe that it is time for Ukraine to take the next step in the development of democracy, namely to hold elections in 2024," Graham reiterated.

World

Russian Interior Ministry Puts US Senator Graham on Wanted List Over Russophobic Remarks

29 May, 09:16 GMT

It's not the first time Western leaders have urged the Kiev regime to hold elections: in mid-May, Tiny Kox, the president of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) stated that Ukraine must hold parliamentary and presidential elections despite martial law being in effect.

In response, Oleksii Danilov, the secretary of Ukraine's National Security and Defense Council (NSDC), told the European body at the time: "I want to stress that the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) has to realize that we have our own Constitution and our own laws, which we must observe." Speaking to the Washington Post at the time, Zelensky summed up: "If we have martial law, we cannot have elections. ... If there is no martial law, then there will be [elections]."

> "Zelensky and his inner circle - Oleksii Danilov, the secretary of the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine and Coordinator of the Presidential Staff, firmly rejected any request to hold elections," Dr. Marco Marsili, associate fellow at the Centre for Strategic Research and Analysis and former public official and election observer for the OSCE/ODIHR, told Sputnik.

"These people, they do not want to lose power under any circumstances. The World Bank's recently estimated reconstruction and recovery costs in Ukraine up to US $411 billion (equivalent of €383 billion), 2.6 times the country's estimated 2022 GDP. An opportunity too good to miss."

> "Tiny Kox, the president of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe of which Ukraine is a member, hopes that Ukraine will hold presidential and parliamentary elections, as nothing prevents for organizing them, except the Constitution and the government that, by renewing the martial law, creates the legal conditions for suspending the popular vote, according to the fundamental law. The Verkhovna Rada may simply amend the Constitution or introduce an exception in the martial law in order to carry out elections," the researcher emphasized.

Does Washington Want to Get Rid of Zelensky?

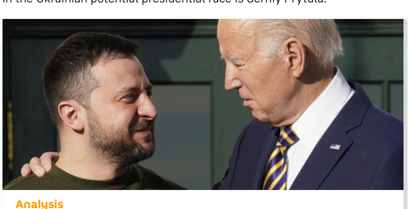
It appears that Zelensky was forced to bow down to US congressmen's insistence on holding the elections even though the timing does not look perfect: the botched Ukrainian counteroffensive and gargantuan losses on the battlefield don't play into the hands of the Ukrainian incumbent and his entourage. International military observers doubt that the Kiev regime has any chance of tipping the balance in its favor. But that is not all.

> "Despite the ban of 11 pro-Russian parties, including OPZZh (Opposition Platform-For Life), once the second largest party in the nation and the largest pro-Russian party in the country, Zelensky faces the growing support that Serhiy Prytula is gaining," said Marsili. "Obviously, in a democratic election there shouldn't be any parties that are not allowed to participate, like pro-Russian parties. The majority of the population may want a negotiated solution to the conflict - war is never popular, and a travel ban was introduced in Ukraine to avoid the fleeing of conscripts."

The question then arises as to why the US lawmakers as well as PACE politicians are pushing for elections in Kiev. Some Russian and Ukrainian observers believe that it's not actually the democratic values that are at play in Ukraine but theearthly and vested interests of Kiev's Western patrons.

Per Russian political observers, the US foreign policy establishment has some sort of "Zelensky fatigue." The Zelensky cabinet is not easy to deal with; the Ukrainian president is trying to twist Washington's hand into providing more weapons and money which Team Zelensky is reportedly routinely embezzling. In April, Pulitzer Prize-winning investigative journalist Seymour Hersh cited the CIA's estimates that Zelensky and his entourage embezzled at least $400 million From US aid in 2022 alone.

In addition, Russian observers suggest that London's influence on Kiev is still stronger than that of Washington. That's why US policymakers are seeking to either make Zelensky "more agreeable" given that the elections pose a certain challenge to him or replace him with another political figure altogether. According to the observers, a likely US favorite in the Ukrainian potential presidential race is Serhiy Prytula.



Analysis

Alexander Mercouris: How Zelensky 'Blackmails' the US

11 August, 11:30 GMT

Prytula is a Ukrainian actor and stand-up comedian who switched to politics after 2019. He is named as an initiator of the "People's Bayraktar" project and campaigns to gather money for the Ukrainian Armed Forces. The Ukrainian press earlier reported that Prytula's political campaign is a brainchild of Victor Pinchuk, an influential Ukrainian oligarch famous for his longstanding ties to the Clinton political dynasty.

Between 2008 and 2021, Prytula worked for Ukrainian TV channel "Novy Kanal", the ultimate beneficiary of which is Victor Pinchuk and his wife Olena Franchuk, daughter of the second president of Ukraine, Leonid Kuchma. Some observers suggest that the way Prytula is still being "advertised" by Pinchuk replicates Ukrainian oligarch Igor Kolomoisky's project of bringing comedian Zelensky to power in Ukraine.

Is the US Establishment Interested in Keeping Zelensky in Power?

Some Ukrainian observers, most notably Tatyana Montyan, a Ukrainian lawyer and former politician, appear to hold a different stance: she presumed on her Telegram account that the US foreign policy establishment does not want to get rid of Zelensky in whom they have already invested a lot.

What Graham and his peers are seeking is to further legitimize Zelensky through the new presidential elections and continue to push ahead with their perpetual war in Ukraine till the last Ukrainian, as per the Ukrainian lawyer. She doesn't believe that elections pose a challenge to the Ukrainian incumbent after he subjected the nation's political arena to nothing short of cleansing and got rid of opposition politicians and journalists.

> "Americans are well aware that war is the perfect time to hold a controlled presidential election," Montyan wrote in her latest op-ed. She believes that Zelensky may hold presidential and parliamentary elections at one and the same time in 2024. According to her, it would be "very difficult to call these elections 'fair and free' in the conditions of the omnipotent influence of the SBU [Ukrainian Security Service], total control over the press and in an environment where any criticism of the authorities is equated with treason and 'justification of Russian aggression'."

Once Zelensky wins another five-year term, the US foreign policy establishment will be free to continue its proxy war against Russia while trying to reinvigorate support for arming Kiev among US voters, who have been increasingly losing appetite for Biden's Ukraine adventure.

The elections also offer an additional opportunity for Team Zelensky to cash in.

> "Ukraine is among the most corrupt countries in Europe and toward the bottom globally, and financial aid from the West is definitely an opportunity for Ukrainian political and military leaders to put money in their pockets, as demonstrated by two major corruption scandals on government procurement of military catering services and electrical generators that were revealed last January," Marsili remarked.

As the Kiev regime's counteroffensive has stalled and its army has bogged down, the narrative of the "victory of democracy" is aimed at breathing new life in the Western Ukraine narrative which is currently falling out at the seams.

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Russia's Special Operation in Ukraine

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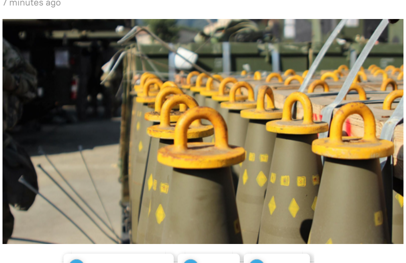

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The Ukrainian soldiers are sawing up Western cluster munitions, extracting defeat elements from them and using them as shells for drones, an American news website columnist Joseph Trevithick reported.

"Ukrainians are disassembling some of the recently obtained US cluster munitions in order to convert the defeat elements into improvised projectiles that can be dropped from small drones," wrote the author.

This is evidenced by a video that appeared on the web. It is believed that the footage was filmed by the Ukrainian unit Achilles, which specialises in working with drones.

The journalist noted that cutting the warhead of the shell with a bolt cutter raises "safety concerns". He said the process of disassembling the projectile by hand on the ground could cause enormous damage. He added that the DPICM fuzes shown in the video are extremely "finicky" and can easily detonate if mishandled.

Ukraine has received cluster munitions from the US as part of another package of military supplies. Their use is banned by the Convention on Cluster Munitions that 123 countries have ratified, but the US and Ukraine are not among them.

When exploding, cluster bombs eject smaller munitions, some of which fail to detonate for technical reasons, thus leaving civilians in danger: unexploded shells become mines that can kill or maim people long after the fighting is over.

Russia's Special Operation in Ukraine

Ukrainian Civilians, Kids to Face Future Death from US Cluster Bombs, Warns Activist

18 July, 06:17 GMT

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Macron: France to Support ECOWAS Military Effort Against Niger

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MOSCOW (Sputnik) - Paris condemns the attempts by the US and several other countries to contact the Nigerien military authorities who had displaced President Mohamed Bazoum, French President Emmanuel Macron said on Monday.

"I often hear from other capitals that France is too much involved in supporting [ousted Nigerien President Mohamed] Bazoum. But what would we do if such a coup took place in Romania or Bulgaria? Would it be right if we just say, 'We were offered a prime minister so we will work with him? We shouldn't dig our heels in, it's not our country.' This is unacceptable," Macron said at the annual conference of France's ambassadors in Paris.

Paris will continue to support Bazoum and will not recognize the rebels' government, the French leader said. Neither will the French ambassador leave Niger as was demanded by the military leaders, he said.

> "I hear it from Washington and other capitals, 'Don't get too involved, it is getting dangerous.' No, our position must be clear and consistent. Otherwise, what African capital would ever listen to us when we say that we support the policy of partnership?" Macron said, adding "France will not allow either paternalism or weakness in the Sahel region, otherwise we will have to pull out from it completely."

Africa

Niger Military Leaders Give French Ambassador 48 Hours to Leave Country

25 August, 22:23 GMT

The French leader reiterated Paris' support for the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in all its decisions on restoring the constitutional order in Niger.

> "We support ECOWAS' diplomatic as well as military efforts once such a decision in taken," he said.

On August 7, acting US Deputy Secretary of State Victoria Nuland traveled to Niger and met with the rebel-appointed chief of staff, Moussa Salaou Barmou, and three of his colonels in Niamey. She described the talks with them as "frank and difficult." On August 19, new US Ambassador Kathleen FitzGibbon arrived in Niger, but the US Department of State said she would not formally present her credentials due to "the current political crisis" in the country.

The takeover occurred in Niger on July 26 during which President Bazoum was ousted and detained by his own guard, led by Gen. Abdourahamane Tchiani. Following the power shift, the ECOWAS suspended all financial aid to Niger, froze rebels' assets and imposed a ban on commercial flights to and from the country. In early August, during a summit in the Nigerian capital of Abuja, ECOWAS leaders agreed to activate a standby force to potentially compel the Nigerien military to reinstate Bazoum. On Friday, ECOWAS Commissioner for Political Affairs Abdel-Fatau Musah said that ECOWAS general staff chiefs had agreed on a date for the beginning of military intervention, but would not make it public.

World | Niger | France | Paris | Emmanuel Macron | Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)

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