

Whither Ukraine's Counteroffensive?

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The month of May has arrived but without the long-awaited Ukrainian "counteroffensive". The western media is speculating that it may come by late May. There is also the spin that Kiev is judicious to "buy time."

The chances of Ukraine making some sort of "breakthrough" in the 950-km long Russian frontline cannot be ruled out but a Russian counteroffensive is all but certain to follow. An open-ended war will not suit Western powers.

Last week, NATO's top commander, US Army General Christopher Cavoli stated that the Russian army operating in Ukraine is larger than when the Kremlin launched its special military operation and the Ukrainians "have to be better than the Russian force they will face" and decide when and where they will strike.

Cavoli said Russia has strategic depth in manpower and has only lost one warship and about 80 fighters and tactical bombers in an air fleet numbering about 1,000 so far. The general gently contradicted Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin and Chief of General Staff Gen. Mark Milley who have been propagating that Russia is on the brink of defeat.

Speaking at the House panel on Wednesday, Gen. Cavoli said, "This war is far from over." On Thursday, he went further to tell the Senate, "I think [the Russians] can fight another year." At the House hearing, Cavoli also said Russian submarine activity has only picked up in the North Atlantic since the beginning of the war and none of the Kremlin's strategic nuclear forces have been affected by operations in Ukraine.

He said at one point in his [written testimony](#),

"Russian air, maritime, space, cyber, and strategic forces have not suffered significant degradation in the current war. Moreover, Russia will likely rebuild its future Army into a sizeable and more capable land force... Russia retains a vast stockpile of deployed and non-deployed nuclear weapons, which present an existential threat to the US."

Clearly, the entire narrative of lies and obfuscation created by the neocons in the Biden Administration through the past year has unravelled. The balance sheet shows there is nothing to justify the massive amount of aid to Ukraine through the past one-year period — in excess of \$100 billion dollars, which is pro rata vastly more than what the US had spent in the twenty years of war in Afghanistan.

Gen. Cavoli's testimony came soon after the leaked Pentagon documents recently, which has presented a grim picture of the state of Kiev's military preparedness and the Biden Administration's lack of confidence in the Zelensky regime.

The Pentagon documents echoed, in effect, a January study titled [Avoiding a Long War](#) by the RAND Corporation, which recommended that "the paramount US interest in minimising escalation risks should increase the US interest in avoiding a long war (in Ukraine). In short, the consequences of a long war — ranging from persistent elevated risks to economic damage — far outweigh the possible benefits."

Indeed, it appears that there is a significant stream of dissenting opinion within the US security and defence establishment, which estimates that President Biden has taken the US on a disastrous policy trajectory that is fated to have a calamitous outcome — a humiliating defeat in Ukraine that may damage the NATO alliance, weaken the transatlantic system and erode the US' credibility as a global power.

Well-informed veterans of the US intelligence community regard the leaking of Pentagon documents itself as a mini-mutiny. The former CIA analyst Ray McGovern told China's CGTN,

"I believe it could be that some senior policymakers in the Pentagon at the highest reaches of the Department of Defence have decided, 'You know, it's a fool's errand in Ukraine. Maybe, we got to get out the truth. Maybe, we got to expose people like Joint Chief of Staff Milley and Secretary Austin for the lies they have told about Ukrainian progress and Russians being just pulverised. And, maybe, that will stop this widening of the war.' "

The well-known former CIA analyst Larry Johnson shares the same view. He [wrote](#):

"This looks like a controlled, directed leak... the leaked material is not random intelligence material. It is designed to tell several stories. The most prominent is the deterioration of Ukrainian capabilities and the major obstacles confronting the United States and the rest of NATO in supplying badly needed air defence, artillery shells, artillery pieces and tanks. In other words, Ukraine is going to crash and burn."

Johnson [added](#),

"Let me suggest one possibility for this leak — create a predicate for forcing Joe Biden from office. The revelations in the classified documents are not fabrications designed to deceive the Russians. Nor are they the kind of material to rally more U.S. support for pouring more resources into the black hole of Ukraine. These leaks feed the meme that the Biden team is incompetent and endangering American interests overseas."

Make no mistake, such coup attempts by the Deep State are nothing new in US presidential history — Eisenhower was undercut when he sought détente with the Soviet Union; a whole corpus of materials available today suggests that [CIA framed Nixon](#) in the Watergate affair.

Today, all this is happening against the backdrop of President Biden seeking a second term in the 2024 election.

As for Zelensky himself, he is acutely conscious that success or failure of his “counteroffensive” will be critical for continued western support. All things taken into account, a messy diplomatic scenario is looming ahead, one that would also open up divisions between western countries, and in which China could play a more important role.

There is no guarantee that public support for Biden’s proxy war would hold through the 2024 election. Suffice to say, it is increasingly doubtful whether Biden will sacrifice his presidency over the Ukraine war. These are of course early days. A large ship needs a big arc for turnaround.

The Russians are taking their decisions on the basis of own assessments. There has been a perceptible scaling up of Russian strikes against Ukrainian military facilities. Massive strikes deep into Ukrainian military’s rear areas have been [reported](#).

An attack on Sunday on railroad infrastructure and depots for ammunition and fuel in Pavlograd, a major communication hub near Ukraine’s fourth-largest city of Dnepropetrovsk, was [particularly devastating](#). The Ukrainian troops had been accumulating in Pavlograd for an offensive toward Zaporozhye. Two S-300 missile divisions were destroyed.

In the weekend, former president Dmitry Medvedev wrote in Telegram channel that Russia should seek “mass destruction” of Ukrainian personnel and military equipment and deal a “maximum military defeat” on the Armed Forces of Ukraine; strive for “the complete defeat of the enemy and the final overthrow of the Nazi regime in Kiev with the complete demilitarisation of the entire territory of the former Ukraine”; and press ahead with reprisals against key figures of the Zelensky government, “regardless of their location, and without limits.”

Medvedev added, “Otherwise, they will not calm down... and the war will drag on for a long time. Our country doesn’t need that.” The mood has turned ugly and the conflict is set to take a vicious turn, as diplomacy has run aground completely.

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